

## VERANDAH HOUSE DURING THE CIVIL WAR

In 1860 Hamilton Mask and his family moved to Memphis, leaving behind both the house they had built in 1857 and the town and railroad lines he had surveyed. Those lines--the Memphis & Charleston and Mobile & Ohio [the latter completed nine days after the firing on Fort Sumter ]--intersected at Corinth, thus guaranteeing the town's strategic location to both sides in the looming war. By 1861, Corinth had indeed become the "chief center of troop induction, organization and supply" in the western part of the Confederacy.<sup>45</sup> Within a year, it would also be the site of military occupations first by Confederate and later by Federal troops.

While the citizens of Corinth and Tishomingo County (like neighboring counties in northwest Alabama and Tennessee) opposed secession, when the War came, they fought in defense of their homes. Many Corinth men served in distant parts of the Confederacy such as Florida, leaving women and children in a town occupied by increasing numbers of unknown young soldiers whose general boredom led to unruly behavior including drinking, fighting, and accidental deaths, plus a high rate of disease including measles and dysentery.<sup>46</sup>

The effect of occupation was experienced both generally and personally. Books recount military tactics, historic sites commemorate battles, cemeteries honor the fallen, but the civilian side of war is little recognized nor is it honored by any monument. Judge Walter A. Overton, who had voted to send anti-secession delegates to the Mississippi

state convention, was dismayed to learn there was a regiment of Confederate troops camped on his property outside of Cornith and complained to Brigadier General Adley Gladden that the troops were "cutting all the timber off of it and burning all the rails." Aides were sent to survey the damage but reported they found none. Overton recorded in his diary, "If that is the way our friends treat us, Lord deliver me from our friends." When he later found out the same troops had filled up his well, he declared, "I would give a good deal to know who did it."<sup>47</sup>

While the troops lived in tents, the Confederate officers lived in homes.<sup>48</sup> Major William M. Inge, who was home on leave in March, 1862, invited his fellow West Point trained officer, General Albert Sidney Johnston, supreme commander in the West, and his staff to share his home as their headquarters. About midnight on April 2, 1862, Johnston received a telegram forwarded from Beauregard that the Army of Tennessee under the command of Major General Ulysses S. Grant was approaching Pittsburg Landing and would soon meet up with Don Carlos Buell's Army of the Ohio for a march on Corinth. Beauregard had written on the bottom of the telegram, "'Now is the moment to advance, and strike the enemy at Pittsburg Landing.' Johnston read it, then crossed the street to confer with [Major General Braxton] Bragg ... who had [recently] been made chief of staff" and who was quartered in Verandah House.<sup>49</sup> One historian has described Bragg as "a quick-tempered martinet whose arrival injected some discipline into an army dispirited by defeat" in Tennessee.<sup>50</sup> "Johnston wanted more time for drilling his army and awaiting the arrival of Van Dom, but Bragg was insistent in support of Beauregard's endorsement. ... It had to be now or never, he said, and Johnston at last agreed."<sup>51</sup> At one o'clock in the morning, the order went out to prepare to march at six a.m. in an attempt to engage Grant's troops before they could be reinforced by Buell's men. Thus Verandah House and its residents were witness to a moment that would decide the fate of the War in the West.

The Confederate march north began early on April 3<sup>rd</sup>. As Johnston prepared to move to the front, Mrs. August Inge secreted two sandwiches and a piece of cake in his coat pocket. Her husband, surely similarly provisioned, marched off as an aide to another general. Heavy rain made the roads nearly impassable and delayed the attack until Sunday, April 6<sup>th</sup>, about four miles from Pittsburg Landing, near Shiloh Church.

Although twenty miles from Corinth, the citizens could hear the artillery as the battle commenced. To Mrs. Inge, "It seemed that the ground was vibrating with the shock [and] the agony of that day can never be written." Susan Gaston at Corona College remembered, "The sound of the guns first reached us on Sunday morning; we hurried from the breakfast table to the yard and listened to the continued roar. It was like far away sea waves when they strike the shore."<sup>52</sup>

The Confederate and Union forces fought to a standstill by mid Sunday afternoon when General Johnston was hit in the leg by a bullet and bled to death, leaving General Piere Gustave Tontart Beamegard in command of the Confederate Army.<sup>53</sup> That night, Buell's Army of the Ohio arrived to reinforce Grant. Johnston's body was carried back to Corinth where, on Monday morning the 7<sup>th</sup> of April, "a shocked Mrs. Inge was sent word to have Johnston's room ready to receive his remains. His staff had temporarily taken his body to Shiloh Church and injected his veins with whiskey for preservation. Mrs. Inge watched as the staff brought Johnston's lifeless body into his room wrapped in army blankets. 'It was lifted tenderly and carried to his room in Corinth and placed on an improvised bier amid silence and tears,' she recalled." Nineteenth-century Americans were more familiar with the practical demands of death than their descendants today. "Mrs. Inge and several other ladies cleaned the body and uniform, wrapped Johnston in a Confederate flag, cut locks of his hair, and laid him in a simple white pine coffin, as no better one could be found. While cleaning the uniform, Mrs. Inge found one of the sandwiches and half the cake she had secretly deposited in Johnston's pocket."<sup>54</sup> Immediately after the battle Bragg wrote to his wife, "How to begin a letter confounds me. So much has been crowded in a small space of time."<sup>55</sup>

Many citizens left Corinth, fearing that Union forces might arrive at any time. The Inges traveled to Enterprise, Mississippi. Judge Overton moved his family to Holly Springs but he returned to Corinth to protect his property from further predation from the troops of either side.<sup>56</sup> Whether the owners of Vemdah House stayed or decamped is unknown; Bragg certainly remained and his engineers began to construct earthworks northeast of town to hold siege guns.<sup>57</sup>

Corinth's population was also swelled by the thousand of troops arriving from the trans-Mississippi West including Texas, Missouri, and Arkansas. By late April,

Beauregard had 70,000 troops, nearly 20,000 of whom were invalids or incapacitated.

One historian wrote of the scene,

Corinth was one vast groaning camp of sick and injured. Hotels and private residences, stables and churches, stores and even the railroad station were jammed, not only with the wounded back from Shiloh - eight out of ten amputees died, victims of erysipelas, tetanus, and shock - but also with a far greater number incapacitated by a variety of ailments. For lack of sanitary precautions, unknown or at any rate unpracticed, the inadequate water supply was soon contaminated. While dysentery claimed its toll, measles and typhoid fever both reached epidemic proportions.<sup>58</sup>

Major General Henry W. Halleck had slightly over 100,000 men with the arrival of Major General John Pope's Army of the Mississippi. Halleck began the march on Corinth on April 29, 1862, hoping to complete the twenty-two mile passage by May 5<sup>th</sup>. However, he encountered heavy rains and the same impassable situations as Johnston had on the trip north to Shiloh, with additional delays such as bridges destroyed in the Confederate retreat to Corinth and the fortified earthworks Bragg's divisions had erected. When Halleck's combined forces entered Corinth on May 30, 1862, they found the Confederate army had evacuated; their places soon taken by the Union troops.<sup>59</sup>

Many of the Union soldiers commented that the town was in flames and appeared deserted. The Confederate troops had set several warehouses afire near the railroad depot and the Tishomingo hotel had been badly damaged by Union artillery. However, despite difficult conditions, not every civilian had fled. Mr. Harrington, the clerk to the mayor of Corinth, approached some of the soldiers and "asked protection for private property, and for such of the citizens as had determined to remain." One of those citizens was the indomitable Mrs. Susan Gaston of Corona College who had never left the town. When General Davies of the 39<sup>th</sup> Ohio determined his troops should remove the Confederate flag flying over the school building and replace it with the Stars and Stripes, she verbally abused the young colonel in charge of the operation much to the merriment of General Davies who finally agreed to her demand that "the Union flag should not be placed on a private residence" and removed it.<sup>60</sup>

It is sometimes assumed that while Confederate officers boarded in private homes in Corinth, Federal officers did not. According to one (not unbiased) observer, Confederate officers "generally occup[ied] the finest residences in the place [while] our commanders are all quartered in tents." Apparently not all were in tents as "one Federal soldier even sent his wife roses 'plucked from the garden at [Beauregard's] Quarters'" just a few blocks from Verandah House.<sup>61</sup> Verandah House itself was occupied by General Halleck.

On October 2, 1862, the Army of Western Tennessee under the command of Major General Earl Van Dorn approached Corinth. The battle waged for two days until the Confederate troops withdrew. Many civilians, including Federal family members visiting their soldier relatives, were taken by surprise and could not leave. Mrs. Gift, a resident of Corinth, reflected the fear of many women and children who wondered where they might be safe as the fighting entered Corinth itself. She recalled, "The only place that presented itself was a refuge under the house which stood on brick pillars [pillars] several feet from the ground." With her were several other women including the wife of a Union soldier.<sup>62</sup> Mrs. Gift also reported that "a chaplain of an Illinois regiment ... who was kind enough to be thinking of the non-combatants, rode up and announced that the worst had passed, and we might come out of our hiding place." She added, "a few skirmishers had taken refuge in the kitchen, [and] he also ordered them out and back to the ranks."<sup>63</sup> With the battle over, the task of caring for the wounded fell to the women of Corinth just as it had after Shiloh.

By November, only a single Union division remained in the area of Corinth and troop levels remained at ten to fifteen thousand throughout 1863 under the command of Brigadier General Grenville Dodge who as "headquaiiered in two fine houses."<sup>64</sup> In May, Major General Lorenzo Thomas, Adjutant General of the Union Army, addressed Federal troops from an improvised stand on the grounds of Verandah House on the subject of recruiting "Colored Troops" from the Contraband Camp.<sup>65</sup>

On January 25, 1864, the remaining Unions troops, their ruillery, and their stores had left Corinth; the 600 wives and children of Union soldiers had left on trains; and and the Contraband Camp closed, its residents send north to Memphis. In a final act, government buildings and barracks as well as railroad property were burned.<sup>66</sup>

Confederate troops returned to Corinth in the fall, 1864. General John Bell Hood stayed at the house in January, 1865, before moving on to Middle Tennessee and the debacle of the Battle of Franklin.<sup>67</sup> After four years of occupation by troops of both sides, the war was over for Corinth. As one historian summarized it,

Corinth had served as one of the significant focal points of the war. The small town played host to roughly 400,000 soldiers, as well as more than 200 general officers, from both National and Confederate armies. More than 100 battles, engagements, skirmishes, and raids occurred within 50 miles of the strategic crossroads of the community. These combats inflicted great carnage on the armies and destroyed resources.<sup>68</sup>

Verandah House had been central to many of the events that unfolded in those four years.