

The Greatest Civil War Battles: The Battle of Shiloh

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2026-08

Synopsis

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inLanguage	english

- Includes accounts of the fighting written by important generals like Grant, Sherman, Beauregard, and more.
- Explains the circumstances of Albert Sidney Johnston's death.

"The turning point of our fate." (Jefferson Davis on the death of Albert Sidney Johnston at Shiloh)

"Probably no single battle of the war gave rise to such wild and damaging reports." (William Tecumseh Sherman)

After Union General Ulysses S. Grant captured Fort Henry and Fort Donelson in early 1862, Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston, widely considered the Confederacy's best general, concentrated his forces in northern Georgia and prepared for a major offensive that culminated with the biggest battle of the war to that point, the Battle of Shiloh. On the morning of April 6, Johnston directed an all-out attack on Grant's army around Shiloh Church, and though Grant's men had been encamped there, they had failed to create defensive fortifications or earthworks. They were also badly caught by surprise. With nearly 45,000 Confederates attacking, Johnston's army began to steadily push Grant's men back, toward the river.

As fate would have it, the Confederates may have been undone by friendly fire at Shiloh. Johnston advanced out ahead of his men on horseback, while directing a charge near a peach orchard, when he was hit in the lower leg by a bullet that historians now widely believe was fired by his own men. Nobody thought the wound was serious, including Johnston, who continued to aggressively lead his men and even sent his personal physician to treat wounded Union soldiers taken captive. But the bullet had clipped an artery, and shortly after being wounded, Johnston began to feel faint in the saddle. With blood filling up his boot, Johnston unwittingly bled to death. The delay caused by his death, and the transfer of command to subordinate P.G.T. Beauregard, bought the Union defenders critical time on April 6.

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