

A BGES Civil War Field University Program:

“Shiloh, Bloody April”:

A Walking Tactical Study of Shiloh

With Greg Mertz

May 12-15, 2021, from Pickwick Landing State Park, Tennessee

No battle in American history more shocked the senses than the two days of struggle on the banks of the Tennessee River near the Mississippi and Tennessee border. At Shiloh, more soldiers were killed than in all the American wars to date combined! Here the forces of two Federal commanders, U.S. Grant and William T. Sherman, were absolutely and totally surprised and nearly destroyed. The ramifications could have deprived the Union of the two soldiers who were the ultimate architects of Union victory three years later. Visit and walk the grounds of this remote and most pristine battlefield and the antebellum community surrounding it. Even 159 years later, the name Shiloh, which means “Place of Peace,” is emblematic of savage warfare.

THIS TOUR WILL INCLUDE A LOT OF WALKING TO VARIOUS SITES ON ALL THREE FIELD DAYS. IF YOU CANNOT KEEP UP, YOU MAY WANT TO SELECT A LESS PHYSICAL PROGRAM.

Greg Mertz worked as a historian and tour guide with the National Park Service for 40 years and he retired on April 1, 2021. This is his first tour as a “civilian.” [Click here](#) to see an interview he did in January for this tour.

Wednesday, May 12, 2021

7:00 PM: Meet at the Pickwick Dam State Park hotel, where we will receive Greg’s opening talk on Command Leadership of the Opposing Armies. Ironically, despite Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant having achieved the most significant Union success thus far in the war with the capture of Fort Donelson less than two months earlier, and Confederate Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston being regarded as the most talented officer in the South, the capabilities of each officer was questioned over the weeks preceding the battle.

Have dinner on your own before the opening lecture.

Please note that we have some mandatory restrictions in place at this time to participate in our program. You can read them at the introduction to the BGES’ 2021–2022 Seminar Schedule. You will also be reminded before your registration is

accepted. Compliance is required without exception. When national restrictions loosen, then ours will loosen in consequence; however, these are necessary to secure permission and approval to do these programs while the pandemic plays out. Thank you for your cooperation.

Thursday, May 13, 2021

7:45 AM: Temperature checks before load up. Only vaccinated registrants will be permitted to ride in the BGES van. Unvaccinated registrants must follow in their own transportation. Depart the hotel at 0815 en route to Shiloh NMP Visitor's Center.

During our first of three full days on the battlefield, we will examine key terrain features, significant pre-battle decisions, and the fighting on the western portion of the battlefield on April 6, 1862—the first day of the battle.

We will go to the visitor center and see the movie *Shiloh: Fiery Trial*. By visiting the Union base at Pittsburg Landing, and significant terrain features such as Dill Branch, General Sherman's HQ, and General Johnston's HQ, we will gain a good understanding of the factors setting up the battle and the Union camps that would soon be transformed into a battlefield. We will delve into the reasons why the Union army would be caught off guard. We will also see how the Confederate plans for initiating the battle and pinning the Union army against rain-swollen Owl Creek northwest of the Union camps were influenced by the terrain, and also explore the reasons for the belief by some high-ranking Rebel officers that the Union army must have become aware of the presence of the Confederate army on the outskirts of their bivouac and would, indeed must, be prepared for the Rebels' attack.

Next, we will see how the Union divisions commanded by Sherman, Benjamin Prentiss, and John McClernand were able to meet the Confederate onslaught and slowly withdraw toward Pittsburg Landing. Battlefield sites include Fraley Field, where a Union reconnoitering party made contact with the Rebels and provided confirmation that the enemy was lurking close by—that warning gave Union soldiers just enough time to form a line as the Confederate assault poured into their camps. You will also see the mortuary monuments to Brigade commanders Everett Peabody, Adley Gladden, and Julius Raith. We will detail the fighting at Spain Field and through the grounds at Shiloh Church including various new lines formed after original positions collapsed. We will cover the Union counterattack at the "Crossroads" and across Jones Field, ending at the Union position along the Savannah–Hamburg Road.

The battlefield at Shiloh is massive, and while we will not have finished the fighting on the first day, our first day will finish and we will return to the hotel where you can get dinner on your own. We will provide you with a list of eating establishments

close by, but one must is Hagy's Catfish Hotel on the banks of the Tennessee. Lunch in the field will be included.

Friday May 14, 2021

7:45 AM: Temperature checks. Departing at 8:15, our mission is to cover the remainder of the fighting on April 6. Today we focus on the battlefield's eastern side. Just after the Confederates had driven Prentiss out of his camps, it appeared that the Confederate plan to turn the Federals left had been achieved. But then Johnston was informed that the Federals had even more troops farther east, and he determined to alter his plans to deal with them. Indeed, the crux of Johnston's plan was to drive the Federals away from the river where succor might be achieved and push them away from the river into Owl Creek before relief troops under the command of Gen. Don Carlos Buell could merge with Grant's forces.

We will visit David Stuart's brigade—the true left of the Federal line, the Peach Orchard, Wicker Field, and the Johnston mortuary monument where many feel the Confederates lost their advantage. We will then shift to the Union Center and its stronghold along a shallow "Sunken" road in the undergrowth known to history as the "Hornet's Nest." The fighting for control of this real estate produced some of the most memorable fighting of the day, and you will be stunned at the Confederates' dogged determination to overrun this point and the concentration of artillery (Ruggle's Battery") used to obliterate the stubborn Union position. You will see where Union Gen. WHL Wallace was mortally wounded (he would die after the battle at the Cherry Mansion—Grant's HQ in Savannah, Tennessee) and the surrender convention for the 2,200 Federal troops who held the line so that disordered Federals elsewhere could be cobbled together for a last-stand line.

A key moment of the battle occurs with Johnston's death and, as we finish with the fighting for the Hornet's Nest, we will look at the assumption of command by Gen. PGT Beauregard and the decisions he makes that deprive the Confederates of potential and almost assured victory on April 6 and set up the disaster of April 7.

We will finish the day walking Grant's last line and examining the role of Federal gunboats in the security of the Federal army the night of the sixth.

The layout of the park is soberingly educational. Monuments with tremendous meaning pock the landscape, and you will visit and learn about many of them and their allegorical meanings during the day. But it is now time to return to the hotel and dinner again on your own—not because we are anti-social but because of COVID considerations that let you determine your own social moments. Lunch will again be provided at the battlefield picnic area.

Saturday, May 15, 2021

7:45 AM: Temperature checks and depart at 8:15 AM. Throughout the first day of fighting, Grant assured his troops that help was on the way, and he had every reason to believe it was so. He had ordered a division under the command of Gen. Lew Wallace (of *Ben Hur* fame) to the battlefield and expected it in the afternoon of the sixth. They didn't make it! We will explore the breakdown in communications that held Wallace back but positioned them to open the second day's fighting strongly.

We start today in Savannah on the banks of the Tennessee near Cherry mansion, Grant's HQ, we will then head to Wallace's encampment at Crump's Landing before heading to follow those portions of Wallace's March that are easily accessible. Once we arrive at the battlefield, we will advance into fighting initiated by Wallace and the pushback from Grant's reestablished line. The ineptness of Beauregard and the lackluster battlefield management by Braxton Bragg will be clear as we fight back across Jones Field, Water Oak Pond, and the Crossroads.

The poor Confederate dispositions of the night of April 6/7 will be further demonstrated as we move toward the east and see the fighting defenses of men under the command of Leonidas Polk as they face a Division of Buell's fresh troop under the command of Gen. Alexander McCook. Here the fighting will move from Duncan Field to Woolf Field and back across Shiloh Church and ground vacated by Sherman's men just 24 hours earlier.

The reversal of Confederate fortunes continues as we follow Buell's other two divisions under John Crittenden and Bull Nelson as they push away Confederate remnants under John C. Breckinridge and William Hardee. Other battlefield landmarks such as Davis Wheatfield, Sarah Bell's Old Cotton Field, Putnam's Stump Monument, and the Bloody Pond all get the full treatment. By now, Beauregard has taken the advice that his army is like a lump of sugar—about to dissolve—and he calls off the fighting.

Our last stops include a hospital site and the Confederate Rear Guard action at Fallen Timbers under the command of a young, up-and-coming cavalry officer—Nathan Bedford Forrest.

Lunch is included and we will have you back to the hotel by 5 PM where you can depart or spend one more night.

About the Faculty:

Greg Mertz was one of the NPS's hidden jewels and a superb historian. While not a flamboyant personality, his presentations are comprehensive, insightful, and complete. He commands attention and you are rewarded for the discipline. Though perhaps not known in the West, he's a preservationist of the first order, and his experience in scouting and a Western pedigree (he is from Missouri) led the

Emerging Civil War group to invite him to publish a guidebook on Shiloh—it is first rate. Greg asked to do this program, and I am delighted to turn the field over to him. This will be a singular treat!

Hotel Information:

The headquarters hotel is Pickwick Landing Lodge at Pickwick Landing State Park, 120 Playground Loop, Counce, TN 38326 (731-689-3135). Ask for the BGES block. The rate is \$149.25 per night inclusive of all taxes. This is a resort area and the rates are fixed by the state of Tennessee for their park. There is a restaurant onsite. A Hampton Inn in Counce has similar rates. Savannah has cheaper hotel rooms but is 15 miles away, and it takes 25 minutes to get to the lodge. Rooms in Savannah are less than \$100 per night.

Transportation:

The servicing airport is Memphis (111 miles, 2 hours). You can also fly into Nashville and drive down from there (150 miles, 2 ½ hours). If you fly, you will need a rental car. Priceline.com works very well for bargain hunters. There is no limo service or other transportation available to the battlefield vicinity.

Recommended Reading:

You will be provided with maps upon arrival. The following books are suggested to enhance your readiness for the program. Amazon.com has a program to support non-profits IF YOU SIGN UP to support Blue and Gray Education Society (EIN 54-1720582) at [AmazonSmile](#). When you sign up there rather than the normal Amazon site, one-half of one percent of your purchase price will be provided to BGES as a donation from Amazon. This will apply not only on this purchase but others you may make at other times. Thank you.

Stacy D. Allen: "[The Campaign and Battle of Shiloh](#)," Civil War Sesquicentennial Edition, *Blue & Gray Magazine*

Wiley Sword: [Shiloh, Bloody April](#)

O. Edward Cunningham: [Shiloh and the Western Campaign of 1862](#)

Larry Daniel: [Shiloh: The Battle that Changed the Civil War](#)

Gregory A. Mertz: [Attack at Daylight and Whip Them: The battle of Shiloh, April 6-7, 1862](#)

Timothy Smith: [Shiloh Conquer or Perish](#)

Registration Form

A BGES Civil War Field University Program:

“Shiloh, Bloody April”:

A Walking Tactical Study of Shiloh

With Greg Mertz

May 12-15, 2021, from Pickwick Landing State Park, Tennessee

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

By registering I agree to abide by all restrictions that are currently imposed by government agencies and the BGES during the pandemic. I understand that I must provide proof of vaccination at registration and that the last vaccination date must be no later than April 28, 2021. Failure to provide evidence of vaccination will require the registrant to comply with measures taken for the protection of both themselves and the other attendees. Your cooperation allows us to hold this program at this time.

Registration includes three lunches, a reading book with maps, the academic program, support of a professional historian, tour director and transportation for individuals who are vaccinated. We will also provide snacks, bottled water and a limited selection of sodas.

_____ Registration \$850

_____ Current BGES member \$795

_____ I am not a member but would like to join so that I can get the member's rate or I am a member who is past due to renew. Please accept my donation of

\$_____ (must be \$75 or more, which is tax-deductible).

_____ I am sending a deposit of \$250 per person. Total enclosed is \$_____.

_____ I will pay the balance due before the event.

_____ Check enclosed

Charge my (circle one) MC VISA AMEXP Discover \$_____

Exp: _____ CVV: _____

Signature: _____

Mail to BGES Seminars, PO Box 1176, Chatham, VA 24531, or fax credit cards to 434-432-0596. You may also register online at www.blueandgrayeducation.org.