REMARKS ON SHILOH

Adam Badeau wrote the following comments concerning the Battle of Shiloh in his Military History of U. S. Grant:

It has been repeatedly asserted that Grant was surprised at Shiloh, but the evidence to the contrary is incontrovertible. The preliminary fighting of the 3rd and 4th of April, necessarily put division and army commanders on the alert. The movements reported by Lewis Wallace, on the 4th, had a similar effect: Sherman had been skirmishing for several days; Prentiss had doubled his pickets the day before, and had a reconnaissance of a regiment out, at three o'clock on the morning of the 6th; he received the earliest assault outside of his camps. W.H.L. Wallace also breakfasted early and had his horses saddled, "to be ready in case of an attack." These are not the indications of a camp that is surprised. Yet Prentiss, who fought till four o'clock in the afternoon, is said to have been captured at daylight and in his bed. Grant's dispatches of March 28th, 30th and 31st, as well as those of the 4th and 5th of April, all furnish proof that he was intently watching the enemy. The fall that lamed him on the 4th, was got in returning from the front, whether he had gone to investigate the rumor of an attack, after Sherman's fight. On the 5th, he sent three dispatches to Halleck, reporting the skirmish of the day before, and with one of them enclosed the following note to himself from Sherman: "April 5th. I have no doubt that nothing will occur today more than some picket firing. The enemy is saucy, but got the worst of it yesterday, and will not press our pickets far. I will not be drawn out far unless with certainty of advantage, and I do not apprehend anything like an attack upon our position." Grant remarked to Halleck on the same date: "Our outposts had been attacked by the enemy, apparently in considerable force. I immediately went up, but found all quiet ... I have scarcely the faintest idea of an attack (general one) being made upon us, but will be prepared should such a thing take place."

Private soldiers and inferior officers, very probably, could not read the signs that told so plainly to their commanders the necessity of readiness; such may, very likely, have been surprised at what occurred; but Grant and his division generals, although of course they could not know at what hour or place the rebels might choose to assault, nor indeed that they certainly would assault at all, although they did not really expect an attack, yet knew the propinquity of a great army, and, so far as could be, were prepared to receive it — except in the matter of defensive entrenchments. Up to this time the Western troops had not availed themselves of the spade in war; but after Shiloh, both generals and men, severely taught, resorted to the old Roman tactics, and never failed to entrench themselves after every day's march. Some, indeed, already over-cautious, were schooled into absolute timidity; and in their anxiety to become secure against the enemy, forgot that the first object in war is not safety to one's self, but destruction to the foe. Those who wish to be entirely safe, should stay at home.

In connection with this question of surprise, it is curious to note that Beauregard not only does not claim to have surprised Grant, but says in his official report: "At five A.M., on the 6th inst., a reconnoitering party of the enemy having become engaged with the advanced pickets, the commander of the forces" (A. S. Johnston) "gave orders to begin the movement." Bragg, also, thought the rebels were attacked on Sunday, for speaking of
Shiloh—Morning of April 6, 1862
the first day's fight, he says: "The enemy did not give us time to discuss the question of
attack, for soon after dawn he commenced a rapid musketry fire on our pickets."

Again: "The enemy was encountered in force at the encampments of his advanced
positions." And still again: "In about one mile, we encountered him in strong force along
almost the entire line. His batteries were posted on eminences, with strong infantry
supports." Now, Bragg was in front of Sherman and McClelland, and it is Sherman who
is said to have been surprised.

*******************************

General Sherman wrote the following letter to Prof. Henry Coppee, editor of the United
States Service Magazine, in response to an article about Shiloh, which appeared in that
publication. The letter was published in January 1865.

Dear Sir,

In the June number of the United States' Service Magazine, I find a brief sketch of
Lieutenant General U.S. Grant, in which I see you are likely to perpetuate an error, which
General Grant may not deem of sufficient importance to correct. To General Buell's
noble, able, and gallant conduct you attribute the fact that the disaster of April 6th, at
Pittsburg Landing was retrieved, and made the victory of the following day. As General
Taylor is said in his later days to have doubted whether he was at the battle of Buena
Vista at all, on account of the many things having transpired there, according to the
historians, which he did not see, so I begin to doubt whether I was at the battle of
Pittsburg Landing, of modern description. But I was at the battles of April 6th and 7th,
1862. General Grant visited my division in person about ten A.M., when the battle raged
fiercest. I was then on the right. After some general conversation, he remarked that I was
doing right in stubbornly opposing the progress of the enemy; and, in answer to my
inquiry as to cartridges, told me he had anticipated their want, and given orders
accordingly; he then said his presence was more needed over at the left. About two P.M.
of the 6th, the enemy materially slackened his attack on me, and about four P.M. I
deliberately made a new line behind McArthur’s drill-field, placing batteries on chosen
ground, repelled easily a cavalry attack, and watched the cautious approach of the
enemy's infantry, that never dislodged me there. I selected that line in advance of a
bridge across Snake creek, by which we had all day been expecting the approach of
Lewis Wallace's division from Crump's Landing. About five P.M., before the sun set,
General Grant came again to me, and after hearing my report of matters, explained to me
the situation of affairs on the left, which were not as favorable; still, the enemy had failed
to reach the landing of the boats. We agreed that the enemy had expended the furore of
his attack, and we estimated our loss, and approximated our then strength, including
Lewis Wallace's fresh division, expected each minute. He then ordered me to get all
things ready, and at daylight the next day to assume the offensive. That was before
General Buell had arrived, but he was known to be near at hand. General Buell's troops
took no essential part in the first day's fight, and Grant's army, though collected together
hastily, green as militia, some regiments arriving without cartridges even, and nearly all
hearing the dread sound of battle for the first time, had successfully withstood and
repelled the first day’s terrific onset of a superior enemy, well commanded and well handled. I know I had orders from General Grant to assume the offensive before I knew Generalel Buell was on the west side of the Tennessee. I think General Buell, Colonel Fry, and others of General Buell’s staff rode up to where I was about sunset, about the time General Grant was leaving me. General Buell asked me many questions, and got of me a small map, which I had made for my own use, and told me that by daylight he could have eighteen thousand fresh men, which I knew would settle the matter.

I understood Grant’s forces were to advance on the right of the Corinth road, and Buell’s on the left; and accordingly, at daylight, I advanced my division by the flank, the resistance being trivial, up to the very spot where the day before the battle had been most severe, and then waited till near noon for Buell’s troops to get up abreast, when the entire line advanced and recovered all the ground we had ever held. I know that, with the exception of one or two severe struggles, the fighting of April 7th was easy as compared with that of April 6th.

I never was disposed, nor am I now, to question anything done by General Buell and his army, and know that approaching our field of battle from the rear, he encountered that sickening crowd of laggards and fugitives that excited his contempt, and that of his army, who never gave full credit to those in the front line, who did fight hard, and who had, at four P. M. checked the enemy, and were preparing the next day to assume the offensive. I remember the fact the better from General Grant’s anecdote of his Donelson battle, which he told me then for the first time — that, at a certain period of the battle he saw that either side was ready to give way, if the other showed a bold front, and he determined to do that very thing, to advance on the enemy, when, as he prognosticated, the enemy surrendered. At four P. M. of April 6th, he thought the appearances the same, and he judged, with Lewis Wallace’s fresh division and such of our startled troops as had recovered their equilibrium, he would be justified in dropping the defensive and assuming the offensive in the morning. And, I repeat, I received such orders before I knew General Buell’s troops were at the river. I admit that I was glad Buell was there, because I knew his troops were older than ours, and better systematized and drilled, and his arrival made that certain, which before was uncertain. I have heard this question much discussed, and must say, that the officers of Buell’s army dwelt too much on the stampede of some of our raw troops, and gave us too little credit for the fact that for one whole day, weakened as we were by the absence of Buell’s army, long expected, of Lewis Wallace’s division, only four miles off, and of the fugitives from our ranks, we had beaten off our assailants for the time. At the same time, our Army of the Tennessee have indulged in severe criticisms at the slow approach of that army which knew the danger that threatened us from the concentrated armies of Johnston, Beauregard, and Bragg, that lay at Corinth. In a war like this, where opportunities for personal prowess are as plenty as blackberries, to those who seek them at the front, all such criminations should be frowned down; and were it not for the military character of your journal, I would not venture to offer a correction to a very popular error.

I will also avail myself of this occasion to correct another very common mistake, in attributing to General Grant the selection of that battlefield. It was chosen by that veteran soldier, Major-General Charles F. Smith, who ordered my division to disembark there,
and strike for the Charleston railroad. This order was subsequently modified, by his ordering Hurlbut's division to disembark there, and mine higher up the Tennessee, to the mouth of Yellow Creek, to strike the railroad at Burnsville. But floods prevented our reaching the railroad, when General Smith ordered me in person also to disembark at Pittsburg Landing, and take post well out, so as to make plenty of room, with Snake and Lick creeks the flanks of a camp for the grand army of invasion.

It was General Smith who selected that field of battle, and it was well chosen. On any other we surely would have been overwhelmed, as both Lick and Snake creeks forced the enemy to confine his movement to a direct front attack, which new troops are better qualified to resist than where the flanks are exposed to a real or chimerical danger. Even the divisions of that army were arranged in that camp by General Smith's order, my division forming, as it were, the outlying picket, whilst McClernand and Prentiss's were the real line of battle, with W.H.L. Wallace in support of the right wing, and Hurlbut of the left; Lewis Wallace's division being detached. All these subordinate dispositions were made by the order of General Smith, before General Grant succeeded him to the command of all the forces up the Tennessee – headquarters Savannah. If there were any error in putting that army on the west side of the Tennessee, exposed to the superior force of the enemy also assembling at Corinth, the mistake was not General Grant's; but there was no mistake. It was necessary that a combat, fierce and bitter, to test the manhood of the two armies, should come off, and that was as good a place as any. It was not then a question of military skill and strategy, but of courage and pluck, and I am convinced that every life lost that day to us was necessary, for otherwise at Corinth, at Memphis, at Vicksburg, we would have found harder resistance, had we not shown our enemies that, rude and untutored as we then were, we could fight as well as they.

Excuse so long a letter, which is very unusual from me; but of course my life is liable to cease at any moment, and I happen to be a witness to certain truths which are now beginning to pass out of memory, and form what is called history.

I also take great pleasure in adding, that nearly all the new troops that at Shiloh drew from me official censure, have more than redeemed their good name; among them, that very regiment which first broke, the 53rd Ohio, Colonel Appen. Under another leader, Colonel Jones, it has shared every campaign and expedition of mine since, is with me now, and can march, and bivouac, and fight as well as the best regiment in this or any army. Its reputation now is equal to that of any from the state of Ohio.

I am, with respect, yours truly,
W. T. Sherman, Major-General

*******************************************************************

Bruce Catton offers a noteworthy assessment of the Battle of Shiloh in his book, Grant Moves South.
GRANT COTTAGE OPENS FOR THE 2004 SEASON

Ulysses S. Grant Cottage State Historic Site at Mt. McGregor, NY will open for the season on May 29. Special events are planned throughout the summer. An Independence Day Picnic will be held on July 4th, with games, lemonade, ice cream sundaeas and music. A tea and auction fundraiser will take place on July 24th. On August 8th Linda Russell, folksinger, will explore the lives of Ulysses and Julia Grant through the music of their times, accompanying herself with mountain and hammered dulcimer and guitar. The songs and ballads will be interspersed with a lively commentary on the history of the General and Mrs. Grant. There will also be a shorter program of readings commemorating Grant’s death and funeral in 1885.

Special events will also take place on the second Saturday of each month with the following “Saturday on the Porch” events:

June 12 – Linda Palmieri on Revolutionary War blockhouses
July 10 – Political campaign memorabilia
August 14 – Joe Peck on agriculture in the valley
September 11 – Civil War encampment
October 9 – Phil Jessen as Abraham Lincoln

The Cottage is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10:00 A.M. until 4:00 P.M. For further information and details about the programs call 518-587-8277.

NEW BOOKS

Grant and Twain: The Story of a Friendship That Changed America by Mark Perry is one of several new books about Ulysses S. Grant to be published this spring. According to Publishers Weekly, “Perry does an excellent job of narrating Grant’s and Twain’s parallel lives and showing how their intersection at the end of Grant’s life led to the creation of an American classic.” The 336-page book contains 16 pages of photos and is due to be published by Random House in May 2004.

A Victor, Not a Butcher: Ulysses S. Grant’s Overlooked Military Genius by Edward H. Bonekemper provides a potentially positive view of Grant. According to the inside flap of the book, author Bonekemper “ably silences Grant’s critics and restores Grant to the heroic reputation he so richly deserves.” The book is due to be published in April 2004 by Regnery Publishing.

GRANT VISITS NEW YORK CITY

In the fall of 1864 Grant made a visit to New York City, which Horace Porter described in his book, Campaigning with Grant.

Finding that there was no immediate need of his presence at the front, [General Grant] decided to run over to New York for a couple of days. He had promised Mrs. Grant to go there on a shopping expedition, and he also felt some curiosity to take a look at the city, as he had not seen it since he was graduated from the Military Academy, twenty-one years before. He went with Mrs. Grant to the Astor House, quietly and unannounced, being particularly desirous of avoiding any public demonstrations. He did not realize however, the sensation which his arrival in the metropolis would create. The news spread rapidly throughout the city, and the greatest eagerness was manifested on the part of the people to get a sight of the famous commander. The foremost citizens presented themselves at the hotel to pay their respects to him, and enthusiastic crowds filled the streets and stood for hours gazing at the windows of his rooms, in the hope of catching a glimpse of him. Entertainments of every kind were tendered him, and invitations poured in from every quarter. He received many prominent citizens in his rooms, and had a great many interesting talks with them; but the invitations to entertainments were declined, and all public demonstrations avoided as much as possible. The next morning after his arrival the general strolled out into the streets with a former staff-officer then living in New York, and being in plain citizen's clothes, was for some time unobserved; but finally his features, which had been made known by means of the portraits everywhere displayed, were recognized, and finding a crowd surrounding him, he stepped into a street-car. The gentleman with him, finding no vacant seat, asked the conductor to have the people sit closer together and make room for General Grant. The conductor put on a broad grin, and quietly winked one eye, as much as to say, "You can't fool me with such a cock-and-bull story as that;" and the general quietly took hold of a strap, and rode throughout the trip standing with a number of others who had crowded into the car.

GRANT'S WARTIME LETTERS TO HIS WIFE

"As usual on the eve of a battle, before the general retired he wrote a letter to Mrs. Grant. I did not know the nature of the contents of the letters to his wife until after the war, when Mrs. Grant in speaking of them, said that they always contained words of cheer and comfort, expressed an abiding faith in victory, and never failed to dwell upon the sad thought which always oppressed him when he realized that many human lives would have to be sacrificed, and great sufferings would have to be endured by the wounded. The general's letters to his wife were very frequent during a campaign, and no pressure of official duties was ever permitted to interrupt this correspondence."

Horace Porter, Campaigning with Grant
JULIA VISITS ULYS AT CITY POINT

Horace Porter gave some insight into the family life of the Grants when he related Julia’s visit to City Point in the late summer of 1864 in Campaigning with Grant.

Mrs. Grant had come east with the children, and Colonel Dent, her brother, was sent to meet them at Philadelphia, and bring them to City Point to pay a visit to the general. The children consisted of Frederick D., then fourteen years old; Ulysses S., Jr., twelve; Nellie, nine; and Jesse, six. ... The general was exceedingly fond of his family, and his meeting with them afforded him the happiest day he had seen since they parted. They were comfortably lodged aboard the headquarters steamboat, but spent most of their time in camp. The morning after their arrival, when I stepped into the general’s tent, I found him in his shirt-sleeves engaged in a rough-and-tumble wrestling-match with the two older boys. He had become red in the face, and seemed nearly out of breath from the exertion. The lads had just tripped him up, and he was on his knees on the floor grappling with the youngsters, and joining in their merry laughter, as if he were a boy again himself. I had several dispatches in my hand, and when he saw that I had come on business, he disentangled himself after some difficulty from the young combatants, rose to his feet, brushed the dust off his knees with his hand, and said in a sort of apologetic manner: “Ah, you know my weaknesses - my children and my horses.” The children often romped with him, and he joined in their frolics as if they were all playmates together. The younger ones would hang about his neck while he was writing, make a terrible mess of his papers, and turn everything in his tent into a toy; but they were never once reproved for any innocent sport; they were governed solely by an appeal to their affections. They were always respectful, and never failed to render strict obedience to their father when he told them seriously what he wanted them to do.

Mrs. Grant ... was noted for her amiability, her cheerful disposition, and her extreme cordiality of manner. She was soon upon terms of intimacy with all members of the staff, and was quick to win the respect and esteem of every one at headquarters. She visited any officers or soldiers who were sick, went to the cook and suggested delicacies for their comfort, took her meals with the mess, kept up a pleasant run of conversation at the table, and added greatly to the cheerfulness of headquarters. She had visited her husband several times at the front when he was winning his victories in the West, and had learned perfectly how to adapt herself to camp life.

She and the general ... would seek a quiet corner of his quarters of an evening, and sit with her hand in his, manifesting the most ardent devotion; and if a staff-officer came accidentally upon them, they would look as bashful as two young lovers spied upon in the scenes of their courtship. In speaking of the general to others, his wife usually referred to him as “Mr. Grant,” from force of habit formed before the war. In addressing him she said “Ulyss,” and when they were alone, or no one was present except an intimate friend of the family, she applied a pet name which she had adopted after the capture of Vicksburg, and called him “Victor.”
Sometimes the general would tease the children good-naturedly by examining them about their studies, putting to them all sorts of puzzling mathematical questions, and asking them to spell tongue-splitting words of half a dozen syllables. Mrs. Grant would at times put on an air of mock earnestness, and insist upon the general telling her all of the details of the next movement he intended to make. He would then proceed to give her a fanciful description of an imaginary campaign, in which he would name impossible figures as to the number of the troops, inextricably confuse the geography of the country, and trace out a plan of marvelously complicated movements in a manner that was often exceedingly droll. No family could have been happier in their relations; there was never a selfish act committed or an ill-natured word uttered by any member of the household, and their daily life was altogether beautiful in its charming simplicity and its deep affection.

Grant's cabin at City Point