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LETTER  
OF THE  
HON. THOMAS EWING  
TO  
HIS EXCELLENCY BENJ. STANTON, ⸏  
LIEUT. GOVERNOR OF OHIO,

*In Answer to his letter of Nov. 4, Relative to Charges Against our Generals  
who fought the Battle of Shiloh, on the 6th of April 1862.*



E. NEVINS, PRINTER, COLUMBUS, O.





LANCASTER, O., Nov. 1, 1862.

*His Excellency* BENJ. STANTON, *Lieut. Governor of Ohio*:

SIR:—I have just received, in the Mac-a-cheek Press of the 14th inst., your letter of the 4th, and will reply to it through the same paper. You express surprise that you should be singled out and replied to, when so many others joined in giving currency to the same charges. In this you underrate the value of your name and official position. *You* were worthy of a reply—the anonymous correspondents of newspapers were not. In one other instance, and one only, I met with the name of a respectable mortal man appended to the charges. I addressed a letter to him, (he was an editor,) giving such facts as I then had in contradiction, which he published with comments, referring to your report and letter as unquestionable authority. As far as I know, all the published accusations, which appeared in the papers for months after the battle, were founded on the letters of anonymous correspondents of the press, and on your report and letter. You intimate that you gave up the question of *surprise* in your letter to General Sherman. I do not so understand it. You *waive*, but do not *disavow*. It was, in fact, the whole original charge, “*that the disasters of that day were the result of surprise, which is justly chargeable to the commanding officer.*” “*That our lines were so carelessly and negligently guarded that the enemy were absolutely on us, in our very tents, before the officers in command were aware of their approach.*” If you had disavowed this distinctly, instead of half admitting its false-

*hood*, and at the same time parading your proofs to establish its *truth*, I certainly would not have troubled you or the public with the matter. But you asserted it on what you pronounced sufficient evidence. You say the public mind is so possessed with the belief, that I (with such powers as you kindly impute to me) cannot remove it; and in that state of things you propose not to *yield* but to *wave* the question, and go on to discuss the generalship in the encampment and on the field of battle. On this new issue you call in a new witness, Col. Thos. Worthington. As I decline the *new issue* until the first is settled, I need say little of the witness. You say, in substance, that, under certain conditions, you are in the habit of departing from the issue pending, and following out such new ones as may be tendered; and present your example as worthy of imitation. My habit is different, and I cannot change it. I choose, if possible, to settle the question under discussion before I take up new ones. I may be wrong; but, in my opinion, sound and definite conclusions are better arrived at in that way, and confusion more certainly avoided.

You charge me with garbling Col. D. Stewart's report. This is not so. You are misled by a typographical blunder in punctuation in the official document, such as often occurs when the proof is not revised by the writer, and you would have corrected the error at a glance if you had remembered the rules on the subject, laid down by the fathers of the law.

There are two sentences out of which the sense is to be elicited—written together they are:

“The disposition of my pickets was reported to and approved by Gen. Sherman at 7½ o'clock on Sunday morning I received a verbal message from Gen. Prentiss that the enemy were in his front in force.”

Now this must be divided into two sentences. The typesetter at Washington, the writer being a thousand miles off,

has done it by placing the period after the word "morning." No one who reads or copies the paper should regard *that* if it involves an absurdity. You doubtless know, for you have had more experience in printing speeches than in planting pickets and marshaling armies, how much a writer or speaker sometimes suffers when he finds himself in print, not having had an opportunity to revise the proof; and that, most especially, in the article of punctuation. The rule on the subject is well, though somewhat quaintly, expressed by the Supreme Court of the U. S. in the case of *Ewing vs Burnet*, 11 Peters, 54. They say:

"Punctuation is a most fallible standard by which to interpret a writing; it may be resorted to when all other means fail; but the court will first take the instrument by its four corners in order to ascertain its true meaning; if that is apparent on judicially inspecting the whole, the punctuation will not be suffered to change it."

You will therefore see that, according to the highest authority, I had a right to divide those two sentences according to my judgment of their true sense, and if I could do that without calling to my aid the printer's punctuation, I had a right to disregard it. And even if you think, according to your notions of military routine, that I mistook the sense, and that the officer, who planted the pickets at night, was regularly making his report in the morning *after the pickets were attacked and driven in*, and while the General to whom he made his report was mounted with his staff going to reconnoitre the advancing enemy, you will still, I think, admit that I might possibly differ from you; and I will rely on you to say to the "evil-minded person" of whom you have darkly hinted, that I had a right to believe that such report was not made at that time and place, and under those circumstances, and, therefore, that the date did not apply to the making of the

report, but to the message from General Prentiss. You will say to him also that in copying it was incumbent on me to divide the two sentences, so as to give what I understood to be the true meaning of the writer. I divided the sentences thus:

“The disposition of my pickets was reported to and approved by Gen. Sherman. At 7½ o'clock on Sunday morning I received a verbal message from Gen. Prentiss that the enemy were in his front in force.”

You also find an omission in my extract from General Sherman's report. In this you are correct, but as it does not affect the same in the slightest degree, it was hardly worthy of your notice. It being a pleonism, and the sense not at all changed by it, I had failed to discover it. The sentence in which it occurs is this:

“About 8 A. M. I saw the glistening bayonets of heavy masses of infantry to our left front, in the woods along the small stream alluded to, and became satisfied *for the first time*, that the enemy designed a determined attack on our whole camp.”

The above, italicised, are the words omitted. Every one acquainted with language knows that if General Sherman “became satisfied” at 8 o'clock of the design of the enemy, it was “*for the first time*,” for he could not then “become satisfied” of a thing of which he was satisfied just before. So if the evil-minded and suspicious person you refer to should suggest anything to my disadvantage because of this, say thus much to him, and add that the words being wholly immaterial, neither adding to nor taking from the sense, would probably cause their omission by one not an habitual copyist. Say to him also that there could be no possible motive for the omission, and that you, having discovered it, could make no use of it, except to point it out, and say that it was “*unfortunate*.”

To prove surprise, you quote from a book or pamphlet written by a Mr. Stevenson, who was in the rebel army. It was written for sale, as was also Scott's *Marmion*; but neither his account of the battle of Shiloh, nor Scott's of Flodden Field, imparts absolute verity. Neither could even be allowed to go in evidence in an ordinary civil action in a court of justice.

You say that the difference between your statement of the distance which the rebels encamped on the night of the 5th—“*not more than a mile or a mile and a half,*” and the actual distance—*a little more than three miles*—is immaterial. I think otherwise. The one is *true*, the other is *false*—the *truth* places his encampment *beyond* the distance to which, according to military usage, our pickets ought to have been extended—the falsehood *within* it. It is therefore of the utmost importance on the very point in issue.

To make good your assertion, you must not only show that the army was surprised and slaughtered in their tents, but that the Generals, whom you accused, did not use the means which were in their power to prevent surprise. The reconnoissance by the two parties sent by their Generals, the afternoon and night before the battle, you tacitly admit to have been sufficient. They stationed *six* companies as picket-guards. Was not this sufficient? The largest number that I remember to have met with, in casual reading, was seven companies; and that from an army of one hundred thousand men. The reconnoissance three miles beyond the camp, at 3 o'clock A. M., would seem to be all that could be devised for additional morning watch.

But Gen. Sherman did not know until 8 o'clock whether it was a mere demonstration or an attack in force. How could he know? He ordered his men in line of battle, as he would have done had he known there would be an attack in force,

gave word to the Generals of divisions in his rear, and then went himself to reconnoitre. A battery opened upon him when at the distance of 500 yards in front of his line, and his Orderly fell. The spot could not well be mistaken. Such was the preparation made to guard against a surprise; and I pronounce it sufficient. Indeed, how was it possible any one in the camp could be surprised in his tent, when a sharp battle of outposts had been going on for three hours?

You say the surprise took place in Col. Hildebrand's brigade, stationed near Shiloh Meeting-house, on the Corinth road. I am glad that you for once present a definite point, for all has heretofore been loose and floating; and here you make your case out of a vague statement in Col. Hildebrand's report, in which he does not intimate surprise, but shows that he formed and moved forward to find the enemy, and found him 300 yards in advance of his color line. Let us look at his report, connected with his surroundings.

The center of Gen. Sherman's command was the Shiloh Meeting-house, on the Corinth road; and just in the rear of this was his marquee or tent. Col. Buckland's brigade was on his right; Col. Hildebrand's on his left; the left wing of one and the right wing of the other resting on the road, equally advanced. Col. Buckland on his side of the road was not surprised. Between 6 and 7 o'clock he was informed that our pickets were fired upon. He immediately formed his brigade on color line (right up to Col. Hildebrand's right, at the road). Hearing that the pickets were being driven in, he ordered Col. Sullivan to advance in support of the pickets, which he did, but discovered that the enemy had advanced *in force* to the creek about 80 or 100 rods in front (where Gen. Sherman saw them on his reconnoissance at 8 o'clock); he then ordered the brigade to advance, marched thirty or forty rods, discovered the enemy, and opened fire upon him. This

took place on Col. Hildebrand's immediate right. Further on his right was McDowell, with the 1st brigade. At the first alarm in the morning, he formed; detached two companies to defend a bridge; at 8 o'clock his line was thrown forward to the brow of the hill; a residue of the mortar battery brought up and planted, and *fired several shots on the enemies masses not then in line.* On Col. Hildebrand's left was Col. Stewart, with the 2d brigade; he was not (as you read him) reporting to Gen. Sherman the planting of pickets, which had been driven in, but, at 7½ o'clock, in his place at the head of his brigade, received a verbal message from Gen. Prentiss that the enemy was in his front in force. Soon after, his pickets sent in word that a force with artillery was advancing on the back road; and in a very short time he discovered the Pelican flag advancing in the rear of Gen. Prentiss' headquarters. He arranged his men, went to a convenient point, and saw the enemy attempting to plant a battery; which having succeeded in doing, "they opened a fire of shell upon us," probably the same of which Col. Hildebrand speaks in his report.

Now where was Col. Hildebrand while the regiments on his right were forming and moving to the attack, and Col. Stewart's regiment, on his left, was formed, and maneuvering to meet the enemy to advantage? He tells us plainly enough. He formed and moved forward also, and met the enemy 300 yards from the color line. You make him say in his report what he never intended to say, and never in fact said, by confining his statement to the order of time, which it does not follow; but Gen. Sherman was on the Corinth road, between Col. Buckland and Col. Hildebrand, *as you say*, quietly receiving a report from Col. Stewart at 7½ o'clock; while you also say, the enemy was peppering Hildebrand with their grape and shells right by his side—neither Gen. Sherman nor Col. Buckland nor Col. McDowell knowing anything of it.

In truth, from that point between Buckland and Hildebrand, then drawn up in order of battle, Gen. Sherman and his staff, at 7½ o'clock, rode in front 500 yards to reconnoitre the enemy—perceived that they were advancing to attack—returned and gave orders along his line, which *advanced* to meet the enemy.

You say that the testimonials of the officers, who fought on the 7th and not on the 6th, which, in your letter to Gen. Sherman, you tauntingly invoked, are none of them, except that of Gen. Rosseau, to the point in issue. Surely you mistake. Every one, except Gen. Nelson, covers the whole ground; the conduct of Gen. Sherman on the day—the *whole* day of the battle. Gen. Halleck's last note, after he had received the accusations of Col. Worthington, which you introduce with so much circumstance, goes to Gen. Sherman's whole conduct while under his command. An "evil-minded and suspicious person," if this correspondence should be read by such, might possibly think that you never heard an expression of opinion from any of the officers referred to, but ventured the reference, relying on the jealousy which military men too often feel toward each other.

In your letter to Gen. Sherman you call attention to your taste and style, of which you are justly vain. Bold and original, you do not confine yourself to the dull matter of fact of common prozers, but indulge in flights which would do credit to an epic poet. To prove this, one example will suffice. You characterize as a veteran of undoubted courage, a cowardly scamp who was never in but the one battle, and who ran at the first fire. You say he *cut* his way through the enemy. A mere vulgar proser, without taste or style, would say *he cut and ran*. You call him "*scar-worn*." This is original—according to common thought and common speech *war wears* soldiers and they are *war-worn*; *care wears* men



and they are *care-worn*. Soldiers when their wounds have cicatrized *wear scars*, the *scars* do not *wear them*. But you are not, why should you be, bound by dull common usage, when by new phrase you could so happily enrich our language. But whence the *scar* that wore your veteran? Not from Shiloh, for the wounds inflicted there had not had time to cicatrize. But I feel that it is impertinent to criticise such a fine flight of fancy, especially when we find his clothes *riddled with grape and cannister*. You do not name your Hero—this was judicious—but you were unlucky in selecting the regiment, or *State* to which you assigned him, or in assigning him to any regiment, or *State* at all. *Scar-worn veteran* would have been designation enough, and its broad generality would have baffled impertinent inquiry.

Like Homer, who also excelled in taste and style, when you introduce your Heroes by name, you give their genealogy. You show, among others, that Col. Thos. Worthington is well descended. So he is, poor fellow, very well, and well connected; but this would not have justified Gen. Sherman, knowing him as he did, in giving him command of a Brigade—nor especially in surrendering to him the command of the Division to which in moments of high exaltation he considered himself entitled as Senior Graduate. You say that Gen. Sherman, by his oppressive conduct, compelled Col. Worthington to leave the service. You have shown no warrant for this accusation—none for the statement. Was it not a *court martial* and not Gen. Sherman, that prevailed on him to leave? You are fully advised, and I ask for information. I have no doubt Gen. Sherman was kind and patient and forbearing towards Col. Worthington, as far as he might be consistently with his public duty, surely no further.

You take great pains to impress the public with the belief that Gen. Sherman is rough and rude and churlish to officers

and men under his command. This cannot be so unless, as in the wild story of the German student, he has exchanged souls with some one very unlike himself. It cannot be so. The shout which arose from his old legion when they met him on the battle field of Shiloh, was a tribute coming from the heart, such as is never paid except to a leader who is kind and generous as well as brave. So much for his men. Now hear what the officers of the first Brigade under his command say of him. The remarks below were made on a sword presentation, reported in a late *Memphis Bulletin*:

“A MERITED TESTIMONIAL.—On Thursday evening last the field and staff officers of the first Brigade, General Morgan L. Smith its comander, being in the company, made a call upon General Sherman, when Colonel Stuart, in neat and suitable terms, expressed the esteem the General's brother officers felt for his character as a sterling gentleman, wanting nothing of the courtesies and high qualities that term includes—and of his conduct as an officer, brave in the face of the foe, affable in official intercourse, chivalrous and self sacrificing as a patriot, and abounding in those amenities and generous sentiments that dignify life, make intercourse agreeable, soften the asperities of the necessary routine, and throw a halo of kindly charity around a character never austere, but always ready to cultivate the graces that adorn, and the pure pleasures that ameliorate the toils of the soldier's career. Those who approached him on the present occasion had witnessed his deeds on the field, a observed his official action under circumstances of difficulty, where sound judgment and temperate councils were necessary, and have never found him wanting.”

I am unwilling to part with you, but fear you will again count my pages. We naturally tire of long papers, not written by ourselves.

I am very respectfully yours,

T. EWING.

















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