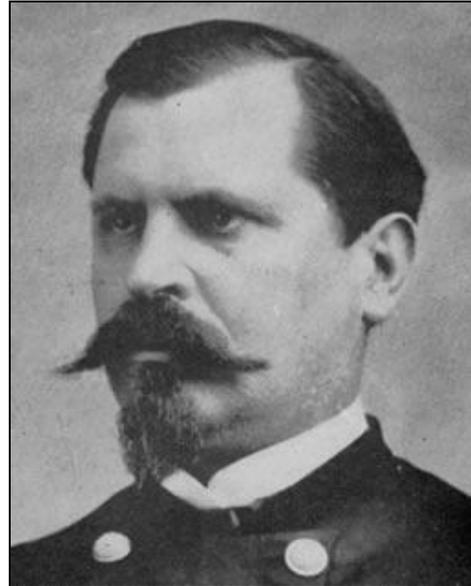


## What I Saw of Shiloh: In the Footsteps of Ambrose Bierce

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December 2007



Caricature of Ambrose Bierce (circa 1900)



William B. Hazen (pictured in 1865)

## What I Saw of Shiloh: In the Footsteps of Ambrose Bierce

### How to Use the Tour

This tour is designed to give visitors to the Shiloh National Military Park an impression of the life and experiences of a Civil War soldier in combat. It will take the reader through the battle in the footsteps of Sergeant Ambrose Bierce of the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry. Bierce, a celebrated author and journalist after the war, left a vivid account of the battle that describes not only his actions, but also his thoughts and observations of the battle.

The full length of the trail, beginning and ending at the Pittsburg Landing, is a little over five (5) miles. Since there are no opportunities to take rest or refreshment stops after leaving the visitor center area, the following preparations are strongly recommended:

1. Wear comfortable walking shoes or boots. Some lengths of the trail pass through woods, over small streams and through tall grass. After raining this environment will dirty footwear significantly.
2. Since portions of the trail pass through woods, the use of bug spray is recommended. Ticks are a particular nuisance in this region.
3. There are no restrooms on the battlefield. The closest restroom to the beginning of the trail is adjacent to the parking lot and just north of the bookstore. There are also public restrooms in the visitor center.
4. Tennessee is hot during the summer. It is highly recommended to take water on the trail. Likewise, hikers will find a small backpack or “fanny pack” useful. There are few trash cans on the battlefield.
5. The trail is designed for use with the Shiloh National Military Park tour pamphlet. However, the topographic map published by Trailhead Graphics, and available at the park book shop, is also quite useful, especially in locating monuments and interpretive tablets. (See map [here](#).)
6. To better understand the different elements of the interpretation, the following color code is used within the text.
  - Explanatory text is black.
  - Bierce’s narrative is red.
  - Directions are blue.
  - Optional directions are green.
  - Optional Driving Tour is purple.

When walking along public roads please stay to the left, walking toward oncoming traffic. Please do not climb on monuments, markers or cannons, and do not litter. Enjoy this tour of the Shiloh battlefield as Ambrose Bierce saw it.

### *Arma Virumque*

“Ours is a Christian Army”; so he said  
A regiment of bangomen who led.  
“And ours a Christian navy,” added he  
Who sailed a thunder-junk upon the sea.  
Better they know than men unwarlike do  
What is an army, and a navy too.  
Pray God there may be sent them by-and-by  
The knowledge what a Christian is, and why.  
For somewhat lamely the conception runs  
Of a brass-buttoned Jesus firing guns. <sup>1</sup>

**Walking Stand #1 –  
Pittsburg Landing:** The trail begins at the bottom of the bluff on the site of Pittsburg Landing. This is also Tour Stop #1 of the Shiloh National Military Park driving tour. Sergeant Bierce arrived on the river bank opposite this point on the afternoon of Sunday, April 6. He landed at this point near sundown.

**Driving Stand #1 –  
Pittsburg Landing:** The driving tour begins at the bottom of the bluff on the site of Pittsburg Landing. This is also Tour Stop #1 of the Shiloh National Military Park driving tour.



Ambrose Bierce as a young officer

Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce (1842-1914?) was born in the southern Ohio hill country of Meigs County, the youngest of ten children. The poor family of religious fundamentalists soon moved to Indiana where the boy grew to a young man of rebellious temperament. Except for his brother Albert,

Ambrose kept his family at a distance for most of his life.<sup>2</sup>

At the age of seventeen Ambrose moved in with his uncle, Lucius Verus Bierce, a man whose zealotry focused more on politics than religion. A fierce abolitionist, Lucius Bierce is supposed to have acquired a collection of artillery small swords for his militant neighbor, John Brown. Brown, of course, moved west and made use of the blades to settle bloody scores with his pro-slavery neighbors along Pottawattamie Creek in Kansas.

The restless boy stayed with his uncle only briefly before enrolling in Kentucky Military Academy in 1859. After a single year he dropped out and returned to his family's home in Elkhart, Indiana. There, directionless and almost certainly unhappy, he remained idle for a time before the coming adventure of war provided the opportunity to escape the restricting bonds of family and religion.<sup>3</sup>

He enrolled in the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana Volunteer Infantry on April 19, 1861. After getting a taste of war for ninety days, including seeing combat in what is now West Virginia, Bierce re-enlisted for three years at Elkhart, Indiana, on September 5, 1861. His previous experience, and possibly his single year of military education, qualified him for the

rank of sergeant in Company C.<sup>4</sup>

The 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana was sent to Kentucky and joined the Army of the Ohio, commanded by Major General Don Carlos Buell, in early 1862. Buell's command was then engaged in a long-range stalemate with Confederates at Bowling Green, Kentucky, under command of General Albert Sidney Johnston. Buell assigned the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana to the 19<sup>th</sup> Brigade, under command of Colonel William B. Hazen of the 41<sup>st</sup> Ohio.

Bierce's regiment failed to impress their new brigade commander at first meeting. Hazen, a graduate of West Point, failed to see why the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana, even with a little combat experience to their credit, should not drill "by the book" as his other regiments did. A severe regimen of instruction and discipline was imposed, and the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana's officers could often be seen reciting lessons from their tactical manuals late into the evening. Many officers and men balked at the regular army discipline, but a quickly maturing sergeant Bierce learned to appreciate it.<sup>5</sup>

Major General Ulysses S. Grant's twin victories at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, Tennessee, in February, 1862, broke the stalemate in front of Bowling Green. General Johnston, flanked from his

forward position, retreated to Nashville. Later, as the setback in the Tennessee Valley developed into a strategic disaster, Johnston abandoned the state and retreated through Alabama to the vital rail crossroads town of Corinth, Mississippi. Buell, advancing quickly in Johnston's wake, soon occupied Tennessee's capital city.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile General Grant moved his Army of the Tennessee forward to Pittsburg Landing. Buell's commander, Major General Henry W. Halleck, directed the Army of the Ohio to march overland and join Grant for a combined movement against Corinth. In March Buell began a slow march toward Grant, delayed by bad roads and burnt bridges. His leading unit, William B. Hazen's 19<sup>th</sup> Brigade of Brigadier General William Nelson's 4<sup>th</sup> Division, arrived at Savannah, Tennessee, twelve miles north of Pittsburg Landing, on Saturday, April 5.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Part I***<sup>8</sup>

This is a simple story of a battle; such a tale as may be told by a soldier who is no writer to a reader who is no soldier.

The morning of Sunday, the sixth day of April, 1862, was bright and warm. Reveille had been sounded rather late, for the troops, wearied from long marching, were to have a day of rest. The men were idling

around the embers of their bivouac fires; some preparing breakfast, others looking carelessly to the condition of their arms and accoutrements, against the inevitable inspection; still others were chatting with indolent dogmatism on that never-failing theme, the end and object of the campaign. Sentinels paced up and down the confused front with a lounging freedom of mien and stride that would not have been tolerated at another time. A few limped unsoldierly in deference to blistered feet. At a little distance in rear of the stacked arms were a few tents out of which frowsy-headed officers occasionally peered, languidly calling to their servants to fetch a basin of water, dust a coat or polish a scabbard. Trim young mounted orderlies, bearing dispatches obviously unimportant, urged their lazy nags by devious ways amongst the men, enduring with unconcern their good-humored raillery, the penalty of superior station. Little Negroes of not very clearly defined status and function lolled on their stomachs, licking their long bare heels in the sunshine, or slumbering peacefully, unaware of the practical waggy prepared by white hands for their undoing.

Presently the flag hanging limp and lifeless at headquarters was seen to lift itself spiritedly from the staff. At the same instant was heard a dull, distant sound

like the heavy breathing of some great animal below the horizon. The flag had lifted its head to listen. There was a momentary lull in the hum of the human swarm; then, as the flag drooped the hush passed away. But there were some hundreds more men on their feet than before; some thousands of hearts beating with a quicker pulse.

Again the flag made a warning sign, and again the breeze bore to our ears the long, deep sighing of iron lungs. The division, as if it had received the sharp word of command, sprang to its feet, and stood in groups at "attention." Even the little blacks got up. I have since seen similar effects produced by earthquakes; I am not sure but the ground was trembling then. The mess cooks, wise in their generation, lifted the steaming camp kettles off the fire and stood by to cast out. The mounted orderlies had somehow disappeared. Officers came ducking from beneath their tents and gathered in groups. Headquarters had become a swarming hive.

The sound of the great guns now came in regular throbbings – the strong, full pulse of the fever of battle. The flag flapped excitedly, shaking out its blazonry of stars and stripes with a sort of fierce delight. Toward the knot of officers in its shadow dashed from somewhere – he seemed to have burst out of the ground in

a clod of dust – a mounted aide-de-camp, and in the instant rose the sharp, clear notes of a bugle, caught up and repeated, and passed on by other bugles, until the level reaches of brown fields, the line of woods trending away to far hills, and the unseen valleys beyond were "telling of the sound," the farther, fainter strains half drowned in ringing cheers as the men ran to range themselves behind the stacks of arms. For this call was not the wearisome "general" before which the tents go down; it was the exhilarating "assembly," which goes to the heart as wine and stirs the blood like the kisses of a beautiful woman. Who that has heard it singing to him above the grumble of great guns can forget the wild intoxication of its music?

## *Part II*

The Confederate forces in Kentucky and Tennessee had suffered a series of reverses, culminating in the loss of Nashville. The blow was severe: immense quantities of war material had fallen to the victor, together with all the important strategic points. General Johnston withdrew Beauregard's army to Corinth, in northern Mississippi, where he hoped to so recruit and equip it as to enable it to assume the offensive and retake the lost territory.<sup>9</sup>

The town of Corinth was a wretched place – the capital of a

swamp. It is a two days march west of the Tennessee River, which here and for a hundred and fifty miles farther, to where it falls into the Ohio at Paducah, runs nearly north. It is navigable to this point – that is to say, to Pittsburg Landing, where Corinth got to it by a road worn through a thickly wooded country seamed with ravines and bayous, rising nobody knows where and running into the river under sylvan arches heavily draped with Spanish moss. In some places they were obstructed by fallen trees. The Corinth road was at certain seasons a branch of the Tennessee River. Its mouth was Pittsburg Landing. Here in 1862 were some fields and a house or two; now there are a national cemetery and a number of other improvements.

It was at Pittsburg Landing that Grant established his army, with a river in his rear and two toy steamboats as a means of communication with the other side, whither General Buell with thirty thousand men was moving from Nashville to join him. The question has been asked, why did General Grant occupy the enemy's side of the river in the face of a superior force before the arrival of Buell? Buell had a long way to come; perhaps Grant was weary of waiting. Certainly Johnston was, for in the gray of the morning of April 6th, when Buell's army was en bivouac near the little town of Savannah, eight or ten miles

below, the Confederate forces, having moved out of Corinth two days before, fell upon Grant's advance brigades and destroyed them. Grant was at Savannah, but hastened to Pittsburg Landing in time to find his camps in the hands of the enemy and the remnants of his beaten army cooped up with an impassible river at their backs for moral support. I have related how the news of this affair came to us at Savannah. It came on the wind – a messenger that does not bear copious details.

### *Part III*

On the side of the Tennessee River, over by Pittsburg Landing, are some low bare hills, partly enclosed by a forest. In the dusk of the evening of April 6 this open space, as seen from the other side of the stream – whence, indeed, it was anxiously watched by thousands of eyes, to many of which it grew dark long before the sun went down – would have appeared to have been ruled in long, dark lines, with new lines being constantly drawn across. These lines were the regiments of Buell's leading division, which having moved up from Savannah through a country presenting nothing but impassible swamps and pathless "bottom lands," with rank overgrowths of jungle, was arriving at the scene of action breathless, footsore and faint with hunger. It had been a terrible race; some regiments

had lost a third of their number from fatigue, the men dropping from the ranks as if shot, and left to recover or die at their leisure. Neither was the scene to which they had been invited likely to inspire the moral confidence that medicines physical fatigue. True, the air was full of thunder and the earth was trembling beneath their feet; and if there is truth to the theory of the conversion of force, these men were storing up energy from every shock that burst its waves upon their bodies. Perhaps this theory may better than another explain the tremendous endurance of men in battle. But the eyes reported only matter for despair.

Before us ran the turbulent river, vexed with plunging shells and obscured in spots by blue sheets of low-lying smoke. The two little steamers were doing their duty well. They came over to us empty and went back crowded, sitting very low in the water, apparently on the point of capsizing. The farther edge of the water could not be seen; the boats came out of the obscurity, took on their passengers and vanished in the darkness. But on the heights above, the battle was burning brightly enough; a thousand lights kindled and expired in every second of time. There were broad flushings in the sky, against which the branches of the trees showed black. Sudden flames burst out here and there, singly and in dozens. Fleeting

streaks of fire crossed over to us by way of welcome. These expired in blinding flashes and fierce little rolls of smoke, attended with the peculiar metallic ring of bursting shells, and followed by the musical humming of the fragments as they struck into the ground on every side, making us wince, but doing little harm. The air was full of noises. To the right and left the musketry rattled smartly and petulantly; directly in front it sighed and growled. To the experienced ear this meant that the death-line was an arc of which the river was the chord. There were deep, shaking explosions and smart shocks; the whisper of stray bullets and the hurtle of conical shells; the rush of round shot. There were faint, desultory cheers, such as announce a momentary or partial triumph. Occasionally, against the glare behind the trees, could be seen moving black figures, singularly distinct but apparently no longer than a thumb. They seemed to me ludicrously like figures of demons in old allegorical prints of hell. To destroy these and all their belongings the enemy needed but another hour of daylight. The steamers in that case would have been doing him fine service by bringing more fish to his net. Those of us who had the good fortune to arrive late could then have eaten our teeth in impotent rage. Nay, to make his victory sure it did not need that the sun should pause in the heavens; one of the many

random shots falling into the river would have done the business had chance directed it into the engine room of a steamer. You can perhaps fancy the anxiety with which we watched them leaping down.

But we had two other allies besides the night. Just where the enemy had pushed his right flank to the river was the mouth of a wide bayou, and here two gunboats had taken station. They too were of the toy sort, plated perhaps with railway metals, perhaps with boiler iron. They staggered under a heavy gun or two each. The bayou made an opening in the high bank of the river. The bank was a parapet, behind which the gunboats crouched, firing up the bayou as through an embrasure. The enemy was at this disadvantage: he could not get at the gunboats, and he could advance only by exposing his flank to their ponderous missiles, one of which would have broken a half-mile of his bones and made nothing of it. Very annoying this must have been – these twenty gunners beating back an army because a sluggish creek had been pleased to fall into a river at one point rather than another. Such is the part that accident may play in the game of war.

As a spectacle this was rather fine. We could just discern the black bodies of these boats, looking very much like turtles. But when they let off their big guns there was a conflagration.

The river shuttered in its banks, and hurried on, bloody, wounded, terrified! Objects a mile away sprang toward our eyes as a snake strikes at the face of his victim. The report stung us to the brain, but we blessed it audibly. Then we could hear the great shell tearing away through the air until the sound died out in the distance; then, a surprisingly long time afterward, a dull, distant explosion and a sudden silence of small-arms told their own tale.

#### *Part IV*

There was, I remember, no elephant on the boat that passed us across that evening, nor, I think, any hippopotamus. These would have been out of place. We had, however, a woman. Whether the baby was somewhere on board I did not learn. She was a fine creature, this woman; somebody's wife. Her mission, as she understood it, was to inspire the failing heart with courage; and when she selected mine I felt less flattered by her preference than astonished by her penetration. How did she learn? She stood on the upper deck with the red blaze of battle bathing her beautiful face, the twinkle of a thousand rifles mirrored in her eyes; and displaying a small ivory-handled pistol, she told me in a sentence punctuated by the thunder of great guns that if it came to the worst she would do her duty like a man! I am

**proud to remember that I took  
my hat off to this little fool.**

**Walking Stand #2 – Hazen’s Bivouac Marker at Grant’s Last Line.** Move due west up the bluff, keeping to the left (south) of the park road, past the Shiloh National Cemetery and the entrance to the visitor center parking lot, and then past the park flag pole on the left, and on to the next rise until the wooden sign reading “Corinth-Pittsburg Landing Road” can be seen, a full half mile from the landing. Continue past the sign onto the wide grassy path of the old Corinth-Pittsburg Landing Road. A yellow, oval-shaped tablet can be seen inside the woods to the left about 100 yards away. Approach this sign from a park trail about 50 yards farther down the road.

**Driving Stand #2 – Grant’s Last Line near Hazen’s Bivouac Marker.** Drive westward, up the bluff and past the visitor center, to the National Park Service Tour Stop #2, and the blue rectangular tablet and cannons describing the positions of Schwartz’s Battery E, 2<sup>d</sup> Illinois Light Artillery in Grant’s last line of defense on April 6. After exiting the vehicle the yellow, oval-shaped tablet described above can be seen inside the wood line about 100 yards due south, or in the same direction the cannons are pointed.

Bierce witnessed the final attacks on General Grant’s line from the east bank of the river, as he describes in Part III. At about 5:30 on Sunday evening, April 6, the last Union resistance in the Hornet’s Nest area collapsed, resulting in the surrender of some 2,250 defenders. The majority of the Confederate soldiers were immediately engaged in disarming the prisoners and setting them on their way to Corinth. The exhausted rebel units also needed to reorganize.

Only four brigades managed to struggle across the forbidding Dill Branch Ravine. Two of them, commanded by Brigadier Generals John K. Jackson and James R. Chalmers, attacked the last Union line. Jackson’s troops did so without ammunition. Struggling through the precipitous gorge, their lines encountered heavy fire from the concentrated artillery batteries of Grant’s last line, directed by Colonel Joseph Webster. The effort was too weak to breach Webster’s wall of fire and iron. The Confederates drew off, ending the first day of combat.<sup>10</sup>

Brigadier General William Nelson crossed the river at about 9:00 p.m. and made bivouac for his 4<sup>th</sup> Division of the Army of the Ohio between this spot and Pittsburg Landing. Colonel Hazen’s Brigade, composed of the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana deployed on the left, the 6<sup>th</sup> Kentucky on the right, and the

41<sup>st</sup> Ohio in reserve, slept in line of battle at this location. Sergeant Bierce, as a member of Company C, was posted near the center of the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana, or about 100 yards to the left of this marker. This marker, like all markers on the battlefield, denotes the center of the unit whose operations are described in the text. When standing before the marker, the visitor always faces the same direction the soldiers were facing.

Although General Grant's Army of the Tennessee suffered heavy casualties and much straggling on April 6, a significant portion of the force was battle-ready on April 7. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division, Major General John A. McClernand commanding, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, Brigadier General Stephen A. Hurlbut, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Division, Brigadier General William T. Sherman, spent the evening reforming and by dawn of April 7 presented an effective, if loosely organized front deployed on Hazen's right.<sup>11</sup> Portions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, under Colonel James Tuttle, formed in reserve.

The Union gunboats participating in the action on the evening of April 6 were the *Lexington*, commanded by Lieutenant James W. Shirk, and the *Tyler*, commanded by Lieutenant William Gwin. These gunboats did not inflict any real damage to the Confederates, but as Bierce suggests, they did play a peripheral role in the battle by

providing a threat to the Confederate flank. They continued firing their large naval guns at thirty-minute intervals all night in an attempt to distress the rebel soldiers.<sup>12</sup>

Late in the evening a hard rain fell on the battlefield. Bierce, like most soldiers in the armies of Grant and Buell, bivouacked without a tent.

### **Part V**

Along the sheltered strip of beach between the riverbank and the water was a confused mass of humanity – several thousands of men. They were mostly unarmed; many were wounded; some dead. All the camp-following tribes were there; all the cowards; a few officers. Not one of them knew where his regiment was, nor if he had a regiment. Many had not. These men were defeated, beaten, cowed. They were deaf to duty and dead to shame. A more demented crew never drifted to the rear of broken battalions. They would have stood in their tracks and been shot down to a man by a provost-marshal's guard, but they could not have been urged up that bank. An army's bravest men are its cowards. The death they will not meet at the hands of the enemy they will meet at the hands of their officers, with never a flinching.

Whenever a steamboat would land, this abominable mob had

to be kept off her with bayonets; when she pulled away, they sprang on her and were pushed by scores into the water, where they were suffered to drown one another in their own way. Then men disembarking insulted them, shoved them, struck them. In return they expressed their unholy delight in the certainty of our destruction by the enemy.

By the time my regiment had reached the plateau night had put an end to the struggle. A sputter of rifles would break out now and then, followed perhaps by a spiritless hurrah. Occasionally a shell from a far away battery would come pitching down somewhere near, with a whirl crescendo, or flit above our heads with a whisper like that made by the wings of a night bird, or smother itself in the river. But there was no more fighting. The gunboats, however, blazed away at set intervals all night long, just to make the enemy uncomfortable and break him of his rest.

For us there was no rest. Foot by foot we moved through the dusky fields, we knew not whither. There were men all about us, but no campfires; to have made a blaze would have been madness. The men were of strange regiments; they mentioned the names of unknown generals. They gathered in groups by the wayside, asking eagerly our numbers. They recounted the depressing incidents of the day.

A thoughtful officer shut their mouths with a sharp word as he passed; a wise one coming after encouraged them to repeat their doleful tale all along the line.

Hidden in hollows and behind clumps of rank brambles were large tents, dimly lighted with candles, but looking comfortable. The kind of comfort they supplied was indicated by pairs of men entering and reappearing, bearing litters; the low moans from within and by long rows of dead with covered faces outside. These tents were constantly receiving the wounded, yet they were never full; they were continually ejecting the dead, yet were never empty. It was as if the helpless had been carried in and murdered, that they might not hamper those whose business it was to fall tomorrow.

The night was now black-dark; as is usual after a battle, it had begun to rain. Still we moved; we were being put into position by somebody. Inch by inch we crept along, treading on one another's heels by way of keeping together. Commands were passed along the line in whispers; more commonly none were given. When the men had pressed so closely together that they could advance no farther they stood stock-still, sheltering the locks of their rifles with their ponchos. In this position many fell asleep. When those in front suddenly stepped away those in the rear, roused by the

tramping, hastened after with such zeal that the line was soon choked again. Evidently the head of the division was being piloted at a snail's pace by someone who did not feel sure of his ground. Very often we struck our feet against the dead; more frequently against those who still had spirit enough to resent it with a moan. These were lifted carefully to one side and abandoned. Some had sense enough to ask in their weak way for water. Absurd! Their clothes were soaked, their hair dank; their white faces, dimly discernable, were clammy and cold. Besides, none of us had any water. There was plenty coming, though, for before midnight a thunderstorm broke upon us with great violence. The rain, which had for hours been a dull drizzle, fell with a copiousness that stifled us; we moved in running water up to our ankles. Happily, we were in a forest of great trees heavily "decorated" with Spanish moss, or with an enemy standing close to his guns the disclosures of the lightning might have been inconvenient. As it was, the incessant blaze enabled us to consult our watches and encouraged us by displaying our numbers; our black, sinuous line, creeping like a giant serpent beneath the trees, was apparently interminable. I am almost ashamed to say how sweet I found the companionship of those course men.

So the long night wore away, and as the glimmer of morning crept through the forest we found ourselves in more open country. But where? Not a sign of battle was here. The trees were neither splintered nor scarred, the underbrush was unmown, the ground had no footprints but our own. It was as if we had broken into glades sacred to eternal silence. I should not have been surprised to see sleek leopards come fawning about our feet, and milk-white deer confront us with human eyes.

A few inaudible commands from an invisible leader had placed us in order of battle. But where was the enemy? Where, too, were the riddled regiments we had come to save? Had our other divisions arrived during the night and passed the river to assist us? Or were we to oppose our paltry five thousand breasts to an army flushed with victory? What protected our right? Who lay upon our left? Was there really anything in front?

There came, borne to us on the raw morning air, the long, weird note of a bugle. It was directly before us. It rose with a low, clear, deliberate warble, and seemed to float in the gray sky like the note of a lark. The bugle calls of the Federal and the Confederate armies were the same: it was the "assembly"! As it died away I observed that the atmosphere had suffered a change; despite

the equilibrium established by the storm, it was electric. Wings were growing on blistered feet. Bruised muscles and jolted bones, shoulders pounded by the cruel knapsack, eyelids leaden from lacks of sleep – all were pervaded by the subtle fluid, all were unconscious of their clay. The men thrust forward their heads, expanded their eyes and clenched their teeth. They breathed hard, as if throttled by tugging at the leash. If you had laid your hand in the beard or hair of one of these men it would have crackled and shot sparks.

### ***Part VI***

I suppose the country lying between Corinth and Pittsburg Landing could boast a few inhabitants other than alligators. What manner of people they were it is impossible to say, inasmuch as the fighting dispersed, or possibly exterminated them; perhaps in merely classifying them as non-saurian I shall describe them with sufficient particularity and at the same time divert from myself the natural suspicion attaching to a writer who points out to persons who do not know him the peculiarities of persons he does not know. One thing, however, I hope I may without offense affirm of these swamp-dwellers – they were pious. To what deity their veneration was given – whether, like the Egyptians, they worshipped the

crocodile, or, like other Americans, adored themselves, I do not presume to guess. But whoever, or whatever, may have been the divinity whose ends they shaped, unto Him, or It, they had builded a temple. This humble edifice, centrally situated in the heart of a solitude, and conveniently accessible to the super-sylvan crow, had been christened Shiloh Chapel, whence the name of the battle. The fact of a Christian church – assuming it to have been a Christian church – giving name to a wholesale cutting of Christian throats by Christian hands need not be dwelt on here; the frequency of its recurrence in the history of our species has somewhat abated the moral interest that would otherwise attach to it.

**Walking Stand #3 - The Cloud Field:** Proceed west a short distance to the trace of the Corinth Road, and turn to the left (south). Follow the Corinth Road until it joins the paved road. Follow that route, keeping to the left of the road, until it intersects with the Hamburg-Savannah Road, which leads straight ahead (south, or the left fork). Follow the Hamburg-Savannah Road south, past the pyramid of cannon balls marking the headquarters of General Hurlbut's division, to the row of cannons marking the April 6<sup>th</sup> position of Captain Frederick Welker's Battery H, 1<sup>st</sup> Missouri Light Artillery. The total distance is just less than 1,500

yards from Hazen's bivouac. Bierce crossed the field to the left early on the morning of April 7.

**Driving Stand #3 – The Cloud Field:** Continue driving west to the first left hand turn. Turn left and drive south to a fork in the road, and continue straight ahead (the left fork) about 1¼ miles to the row of cannons marking the April 6<sup>th</sup> position of Captain Frederick Welker's Battery H, 1<sup>st</sup> Missouri Light Artillery. There is room to park on the left hand side of the road where the closed Cloud Field Road turns to the left.

General Nelson's advance commenced at about 5:00 on Monday morning. Hazen's men picked their way slowly through the wilderness just north of Dill Branch Ravine, maintaining contact with the Kentuckians of Colonel Sanders Bruce's brigade on their left.

Emerging into the Cloud Field, the line halted and skirmishers moved forward into the field. The terrain of Cloud Field clearly illustrates the dilemma faced by skirmishers in crossing such open ground. From the position of Hurlbut's headquarters, about 200 yards to the north, it is difficult to see the southern tree line below a point about six feet high. An enemy in the wood line ahead could lay unseen and permit skirmishers to advance to this point, and then open fire at less than 200 yards range. The first

fire of Monday morning occurred in this area when a thin line of Confederate skirmishers belonging to Brigadier General James Chalmers' Brigade fired upon Hazen's skirmishers and fell back. A more severe affair of skirmishers occurred later in Wicker Field, which Bierce describes in his narrative.<sup>13</sup>

**Walking Stand #4 – Wicker Field:** Continue south along the Hamburg-Savannah Road 525 yards to the northern edge of Wicker Field. At about 9:00 a.m. Hazen's brigade reached this point, still with a strong skirmish line well advanced. About 250 yards to the south-southwest across this field is an obelisk-shaped monument honoring the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana Regiment. Continue across the field to this monument. When the grass is high, it is best to proceed along the paved road to the south side of the field, where a mowed path will provide access to the monument.

**Driving Stand #4 – The Bloody Pond:** Drive south along the Hamburg-Savannah Road about ½ mile to the Bloody Pond display. This is Tour Stop # 14 on the Shiloh National Military Park driving tour. The Wicker Field, with the monument described in the walking tour above lies to the west of the road about 100 yards north of this display.

### ***Part VII***

Owing to the darkness, the storm and the absence of a road, it had been impossible to move the artillery from the open ground about the Landing. The privation was much greater in a moral than in a material sense. The infantry soldier feels a confidence in this cumbrous arm quite unwarranted by its actual achievements in thinning out the opposition. There is something that inspires confidence in the way a gun dashes up to the front, shoving fifty or a hundred men to one side as if it said, "Permit *me!*" Then it squares its shoulders, calmly dislocates a joint in its back, sends away its twenty-four legs and settles down with a quiet rattle which says as plainly as possible, "I've come to stay." There is a superb scorn in its grimly defiant attitude, with its nose in the air; it appears not so much to threaten the enemy as deride him.

Our batteries were probably toiling after us somewhere; we could only hope the enemy might delay his attack until they should arrive. "He may delay his defense if he like," said a sententious young officer to whom I had imparted this natural wish. He had read the signs aright; the words were hardly spoken when a group of staff officers about the brigade commander shot away in divergent lines as if scattered by a whirlwind, and galloping each

to the commander of a regiment gave the word. There was a momentary confusion of tongues, a thin line of skirmishers detached itself from the compact front and pushed forward, followed by its diminutive reserves of half a company each - one of which platoons it was my fortune to command. When the straggling line of skirmishers had swept four or five hundred yards ahead, "See," said one of my comrades, "she moves!" She did indeed, and in fine style, her front as straight as a string, her reserve regiments in columns doubled on the center, following in true subordination; no braying of brass to apprise the enemy, no fifing and drumming to amuse him; no ostentation of gaudy flags; no nonsense. This was a matter of business.

In a few moments we had passed out of the singular oasis that had so marvelously escaped the desolation of battle, and now the evidences of the previous day's struggle were present in profusion. The ground was tolerably level here, the forest less dense, mostly clear of undergrowth, and occasionally opening out into small natural meadows. Here and there were small pools - mere discs of rainwater with a tinge of blood. Riven and torn with cannon-shot, the trunks of the trees protruded bunches of splinters like hands, the fingers above the wound interlacing with those below. Large

branches had been lopped, and hung their green heads to the ground, or swung critically in their netting of vines, as in a hammock. Many had been cut clean off and their masses of foliage seriously impeded the progress of the troops. The bark of these trees, from the root upward to a height of ten or twenty feet, was so thickly pierced with bullets and grape that one could not have laid a hand on it without covering several punctures. None had escaped. How the human body survives a storm like this must be explained by the fact that it is exposed to it but a few moments at a time, whereas these grand old trees had had no one to take their places, from the rising to the going down of the sun. Angular bits of iron, concavo-convex, sticking in the sides of muddy depressions, showed where shells had exploded in their furrows. Knapsacks, canteens, haversacks distended with soaked and swollen biscuits, gaping to disgorge, blankets beaten into the soil by the rain, rifles with bent barrels or splintered stocks, waist-belts, hats and the omnipresent sardine-box - all the wretched debris of the battle still littered the spongy earth as far as one could see, in every direction. Dead horses were everywhere; a few disabled caissons, or limbers, reclining on one elbow, as it were; ammunition wagons standing disconsolate behind four or six sprawling mules. Men? There were men enough;

all dead, apparently, except one, who lay near where I had halted my platoon to await the slower movement of the line – a Federal sergeant, variously hurt, who had been a fine giant in his time. He lay face upward, taking in his breath in convulsive, rattling snorts, and blowing it out in sputters of froth which crawled creamily down his cheeks, piling itself alongside his neck and ears. A bullet had clipped a groove in his skull, above the temple; from this the brain protruded in bosses, dropping off in flakes and strings. I had not previously known one could get on, even in this unsatisfactory fashion, with so little brain. One of my men, whom I knew for a womanish fellow, asked if he should put his bayonet through him. Inexpressibly shocked by the cold-blooded proposal, I told him I thought not; it was unusual, and too many were looking.

### *Part VIII*

It was plain that the enemy had retreated to Corinth. The arrival of our fresh troops and their successful passage of the river had disheartened him. Three or four of his gray cavalry videttes moving amongst the trees on the crest of a hill in our front, and galloping out of sight at the crack of our skirmishers' rifles, confirmed us in the belief; an army face to face with its enemy does not employ cavalry to watch its front. True, they might be a general and his staff.

Crowning this rise we found a level field, a quarter of a mile in width; beyond it a gentle acclivity, covered with an undergrowth of young oaks, impervious to sight. We pushed on into the open, but the division halted at the edge. Having orders to conform to its movements, we halted too; but that did not suit; we received an intimation to proceed. I had performed this sort of service before, and in the exercise of my discretion deployed my platoon, pushing it forward at a run, with trailed arms, to strengthen the skirmish line, which I overtook some thirty or forty yards from the wood. Then - I can't describe it - the forest seemed all at once to flame up and disappear with a crash like that of a great wave upon the beach - a crash that expired in hot hissings, and the sickening "spat" of lead against flesh. A dozen of my brave fellows tumbled over like ten-pins. Some struggled to their feet, only to go down again, and yet again. Those who stood fired into the smoking brush and doggedly retired. We had expected to find, at most, a line of skirmishers similar to our own; it was with a view to overcoming them by a sudden coup at the moment of collision that I had thrown forward my little reserve. What we had found was a line of battle, coolly holding its fire till it could count our teeth. There was no more to be done but get back across the open ground, every superficial yard of which was

throwing up its little jet of mud provoked by an impinging bullet. We got back, most of us, and I shall never forget the ludicrous incident of a young officer who had taken part in the affair walking up to his colonel, who had been a calm and apparently impartial spectator, and gravely reporting: "The enemy is in force just beyond this field, sir."

The woods on the south side of the Wicker Field also contained a section of artillery. Skirmishers from the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana and 6<sup>th</sup> Kentucky advanced into the field, and reaching this point drove the gunners from their weapons and compelled the infantry to retire. The blue-coated skirmishers were unable to secure the guns which were soon drawn off by returning Confederates following the action described above.<sup>14</sup>

The colonel commanding the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana at Shiloh was Gideon C. Moody. However, it would not be surprising, based upon Bierce's description, if he intended to portray Colonel Hazen, the brigade commander. Other soldiers on this field described Hazen deporting himself in the same composed and detached manner as this officer, leading the brigade without drawn sword, and only a small rattan switch in his hand.<sup>15</sup>

After establishing the line in the Wicker Field, Hazen called for

artillery support, and shortly Captain John Mendenhall deployed his Battery H&M, 4<sup>th</sup> U.S. Artillery in the field to the right of the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana. The regiment remained in this position for some time, subjected to an artillery bombardment from three different Confederate batteries located along the Hamburg-Purdy Road, about a half mile to the south.<sup>16</sup>

Later the regiment moved south 400 yards and engaged rebel infantry in a protracted and bloody firefight around the Manse George cabin and smokehouse.<sup>17</sup>

**Optional Stand – Hazen’s Wicker Field Position:** By moving about 150 yards to the northwest the front of Hazen’s Brigade in this area can be traced. Immediately to the right of the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana memorial are two guns and a tablet marking the 1<sup>st</sup> position of Mendenhall’s battery, and just beyond that a granite monument to the 41<sup>st</sup> Ohio. By passing on into the woods a trail can be located that continues northwest. About 100 yards away is a yellow oval-shaped tablet denoting the position of the 6<sup>th</sup> Kentucky in line of battle during the late morning. Return to the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana monument by retracing the route.

### ***Part IX***

In subordination to the design of this narrative, as defined by its title, the incidents related necessarily group themselves about my own personality as a center; and, as this center, during the few terrible hours of the engagement, maintained a variably constant relation to the open field already mentioned, it is important that the reader should bear in mind the topographical and tactical features of the local situation. The hither side of the field was occupied by the front of my brigade - a length of two regiments in line, with proper intervals for field batteries. During the entire fight the enemy held the slight wooded acclivity beyond. The debatable ground to the right and left of the open was broken and thickly wooded for miles, in some places quite inaccessible to artillery and at very few points offering opportunities for its successful employment. As a consequence of this the two sides of the field were soon studded thickly with confronting guns, which flamed away at one another with amazing zeal and rather startling effect. Of course, an infantry attack delivered from either side was not to be thought of when the covered flanks offered inducements so unquestionably superior; and I believe the riddled bodies of my poor skirmishers were the only ones left on this "neutral ground" that day. But there

was a very pretty line of dead continually growing in our rear, and doubtless the enemy had at his back a similar encouragement.

The configuration of the ground offered us no protection. By lying flat on our faces between the guns we were screened from view by a straggling row of brambles, which marked the course of an obsolete fence; but the enemy's grape was sharper than his eyes, and it was poor consolation to know that his gunners could not see what they were doing, so long as they did it. The shock of our own pieces nearly deafened us, but in the brief intervals we could hear the battle roaring and stammering in the dark reaches of the forest to the right and left, where our other divisions were dashing themselves again and again into the smoking jungle. What would we not have given to join them in their brave, hopeless task! But to lie inglorious beneath showers of shrapnel darting divergent from the unassailable sky - meekly to be blown out of life by level gusts of grape - to clench our teeth and shrink helpless before big shot pushing noisily through the consenting air -- this was horrible! "Lie down, there!" a captain would shout, and then get up himself to see that his order was obeyed. "Captain, take cover, sir!" the lieutenant-colonel would shriek, pacing up and down in the most exposed position that he could find.

O those cursed guns! - not the enemy's, but our own. Had it not been for them, we might have died like men. They must be supported, forsooth, the feeble, boasting bullies! It was impossible to conceive that these pieces were doing the enemy as excellent a mischief as his were doing us; they seemed to raise their "cloud by day" solely to direct aright the streaming procession of Confederate missiles. They no longer inspired confidence, but begot apprehension; and it was with grim satisfaction that I saw the carriage of one and another smashed into matchwood by a whooping shot and bundled out of the line.

**Walking Stand #5 – The Peach Orchard:** From the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana monument move 200 yards southeast back to the Hamburg-Savannah Road near the granite monument to Mendenhall's battery (note that the battery actually served in the position to the northwest, and then several hundred yards further west). The famous Bloody Pond is immediately in front to the right. Continue past the pond to the wood line marking the northern edge of the Peach Orchard to the Tour Stop #13. Turn to the right and proceed to the Manse George Cabin, about 200 yards to the west. The total distance from the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana Monument to the Manse George Cabin is about 550 yards.

**Driving Stand #5 – The Peach Orchard:** Drive south from Bloody Pond for 200 yards to the Peach Orchard display. This is Tour Stop # 13 on the Shiloh National Military Park Driving Tour. The Manse George Cabin, where Bierce was posted during the action here described, is about 200 yards to the west

After supporting Mendenhall's battery for some time Colonel Moody's regiment moved forward to the Manse George cabin and took position along the rail fence fronting the Peach Orchard's northern boundary. Here they remained for what Moody estimated to be two hours. At about 10:30 a.m., a Confederate brigade under command of Colonel John C. Moore of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Texas attacked across the field to the right of the Peach Orchard and engaged the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana in a bloody, close-quarter fire fight. After a lengthy engagement the Confederates were driven back and Moody's regiment was relieved by a battalion of Colonel Walter Whitaker's 6<sup>th</sup> Kentucky. Before long, though, the rebels launched a fresh attack, threatening to overpower the Kentuckians. Moody's Hoosiers, re-supplied with fresh ammunition, returned to the front line.<sup>18</sup>

West of Moore's Brigade, inside the woods, Colonel John Martin's Confederate brigade attacked the right of Hazen's line, composed of the 41<sup>st</sup> Ohio

and other elements of the 6<sup>th</sup> Kentucky. Several batteries of artillery supported the rebel offensive from the south side of Sarah Bell Field and the south side of Davis Wheat Field, to the southwest.<sup>19</sup>

### *Part X*

The dense forests wholly or partly in which were fought so many battles of the Civil War, lay upon the earth in each autumn a thick deposit of dead leaves and stems, the decay of which forms a soil of surprising depth and richness. In dry weather the upper stratum is as inflammable as tinder. A fire once kindled in it will spread with a slow, persistent advance as far as local conditions permit, leaving a bed of light ashes beneath which the less combustible accretions of previous years will smolder until extinguished by rains. In many of the engagements of the war the fallen leaves took fire and roasted the fallen men. At Shiloh, during the first day's fighting, wide tracts of woodland were burned over in this way and scores of wounded who might have recovered perished in slow torture. I remember a deep ravine a little to the left and rear of the field I have described, in which, by some mad freak of heroic incompetence, a part of an Illinois regiment had been surrounded, and refusing to surrender was destroyed, as it very well deserved.

My regiment having at last been relieved at the guns and moved over to the heights above this ravine for no obvious purpose, I obtained leave to go down into the valley of death and gratify a reprehensible curiosity. Forbidding enough it was in every way. The fire had swept every superficial foot of it, and at every step I sank into ashes to the ankle. It had contained a thick undergrowth of young saplings, every one of which had been severed by a bullet, the foliage of the prostrate tops being afterward burnt and the stumps charred. Death had put his sickle into this thicket and fire had gleaned the field. Along a line which was not that of extreme depression, but was at every point significantly equidistant from the heights on either hand, lay the bodies, half buried in ashes; some in the unlovely looseness of attitude denoting sudden death by the bullet, but by far the greater number in postures of agony that told of the tormenting flame. Their clothing was half burnt away - their hair and beard entirely; the rain had come too late to save their nails. Some were swollen to double girth; others shriveled to manikins. According to degree of exposure, their faces were bloated and black or yellow and shrunken. The contraction of muscles which had given them claws for hands had cursed each countenance with a hideous grin. Faugh! I cannot catalogue the charms of these

gallant gentlemen who had got what they enlisted for.

The portion of the field over which Hazen's Brigade fought on April 7<sup>th</sup> was hotly contested the previous day. To Bierce's left, as he faced the south, stood the Peach Orchard, the trees shorn of foliage from the fighting, and on his right the tangled thicket known as the Hornets' Nest. The underbrush there caught fire during repeated Confederate charges on the first day of battle, and the fire engulfed some of the wounded soldiers. About 250 yards to the southeast of the Manse George cabin there is a ravine, such as Bierce describes in the following passage, where three Illinois regiments suffered heavy casualties, and eyewitnesses from one, the 9<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry, reported that their wounded burned. It is likely that this ravine is the site Bierce describes. Recollections of veterans were often confused as to time, distance, and direction. Sadly, what is certain is that the scene Bierce describes did occur at Shiloh.<sup>20</sup>

At this point in the narrative Bierce's timeline begins to fail, possibly from faulty memory, but more likely because the version presented simply makes a better story. It is not possible that Bierce could have witnessed the burnt-over ravine during a lull in the fighting as he describes, because that terrain was either in Confederate hands or actively

contested by other units up through the time that Bierce's fight ended. In Part XI Bierce will again mis-state the time.

**Walking Stand # 6 – The Davis Wheat Field:** The next leg of the trail starts at the Manse George Cabin, where the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana was posted until about 11:00 am. This is where they received the attack of Moore's Brigade. From there proceed southwest for about 220 more yards, along the wood line, to a blue rectangular tablet denoting the position of the 17<sup>th</sup> Kentucky Regiment on April 6<sup>th</sup>. Immediately adjacent to this tablet a trail runs west-northwest into the woods about 100 yards to a red rectangular tablet denoting the position of Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest's Cavalry regiment on April 6<sup>th</sup>. From this position continue southwest about 250 yards, through the woods and the open Davis Wheat Field, to the two cannons and red oval marker denoting the position of the 5<sup>th</sup> Company of the Washington Artillery. This trail roughly approximates the axis of advance of the left flank of Hazen's Brigade in the action described below. During the summer, the woods between the Forrest tablet and the Davis Wheat Field are impassible because of heavy vegetation. In this case proceed south from the 17<sup>th</sup> Kentucky tablet, following the wood line, for about 500 yards to the paved Hamburg-Purdy Road. Cross the Hamburg-Purdy Road, turn

right and proceed east about 350 yards to the site 5<sup>th</sup> Company of the Washington Artillery.

**Driving Stand #6 – The Davis Wheat Field:** Leave Tour Stop #13, turn right, and drive south on the Hamburg-Savannah Road to the intersection with the Hamburg-Purdy Road. Turn right and drive west about 1/2 mile to the open field where a crescent moon-shaped monument sits to the left of the road, and a two-gun artillery position sits to the right. This is the Davis Wheat Field. Pull to the side of the road and park carefully. Take special care when exiting the vehicle. This area is not a stop on the Shiloh National Military Park driving tour.

### ***Part XI***

It was now three o'clock in the afternoon, and raining.<sup>21</sup> For fifteen hours we had been wet to the skin. Chilled, sleepy, hungry and disappointed - profoundly disgusted with the inglorious part to which they had been condemned - the men of my regiment did everything doggedly. The spirit had gone quite out of them. Blue sheets of powder smoke, drifting amongst the trees, settling against the hillsides and beaten into nothingness by the falling rain, filled the air with their peculiar pungent odor, but it no longer stimulated. For miles on either hand could be heard the hoarse murmur of the battle,

breaking out near by with  
frightful distinctness, or sinking  
to a murmur in the distance;  
and the one sound aroused no  
more attention than the other.

We had been placed again in  
rear of those guns, but even  
they and their iron antagonists  
seemed to have tired of their  
feud, pounding away at one  
another with amiable  
infrequency. The right of the  
regiment extended a little  
beyond the field. On the  
prolongation of the line in that  
direction were some regiments  
of another division, with one in  
reserve. A third of a mile back  
lay the remnant of somebody's  
brigade looking to its wounds.  
The line of forest bounding this  
end of the field stretched as  
straight as a wall from the right  
of my regiment to Heaven  
knows what regiment of the  
enemy. There suddenly  
appeared, marching down along  
this wall, not more than two  
hundred yards in our front, a  
dozen files of gray-clad men  
with rifles on the right  
shoulder. At an interval of fifty  
yards they were followed by  
perhaps half as many more; and  
in fair supporting distance of  
these stalked with confident  
mien a single man! There  
seemed to me something  
indescribably ludicrous in the  
advance of this handful of men  
upon an army, albeit with their  
left flank protected by a forest.  
It does not so impress me now.  
They were the exposed flanks of  
three lines of infantry, each half  
a mile in length. In a moment

our gunners had grappled with  
the nearest pieces, swung them  
half round, and were pouring  
streams of canister into the  
invaded wood. The infantry  
rose in masses, springing into  
line. Our threatened regiments  
stood like a wall, their loaded  
rifles at "ready," their bayonets  
hanging quietly in the  
scabbards. The right wing of  
my own regiment was thrown  
slightly backward to threaten  
the flank of the assault. The  
battered brigade away to the  
rear pulled itself together.

Then the storm burst. A great  
gray cloud seemed to spring out  
of the forest into the faces of the  
waiting battalions. It was  
received with a crash that made  
the very trees turn up their  
leaves. For one instant the  
assailants paused above their  
dead, then struggled forward,  
their bayonets glittering in the  
eyes that shone behind the  
smoke. One moment, and those  
unmoved men in blue would be  
impaled. What were they  
about? Why did they not fix  
bayonets? Were they stunned  
by their own volley? Their  
inaction was maddening!  
Another tremendous crash! -  
the rear rank had fired!  
Humanity, thank Heaven! is not  
made for this, and the shattered  
gray mass drew back a score of  
paces, opening a feeble fire.  
Lead had scored its old-time  
victory over steel; the heroic  
had broken its great heart  
against the commonplace.  
There are those who say that it  
is sometimes otherwise.

All this had taken but a minute of time, and now the second Confederate line swept down and poured in its fire. The line of blue staggered and gave way; in those two terrific volleys it seemed to have quite poured out its spirit. To this deadly work our reserve regiment now came up with a run. It was surprising to see it spitting fire with never a sound, for such was the infernal din that the ear could take in no more. This fearful scene was enacted within fifty paces of our toes, but we were rooted to the ground as if we had grown there. But now our commanding officer rode from behind us to the front, waved his hand with the courteous gesture that says *apres vous*, and with a barely audible cheer we sprang into the fight. Again the smoking front of gray receded, and again, as the enemy's third line emerged from its leafy covert, it pushed forward across the piles of dead and wounded to threaten with protruded steel. Never was seen so striking a proof of the paramount importance of numbers. Within an area of three hundred yards by fifty there struggled for front places no fewer than six regiments; and the accession of each after the first collision, had it not been immediately counterposed, would have turned the scale.

As matters stood, we were now very evenly matched, and how

long we might have held out God only knows. But all at once something appeared to have gone wrong with the enemy's left; our men had somewhere pierced his line. A moment later his whole front gave way, and springing forward with fixed bayonets we pushed him in utter confusion back to his original line. Here, among the tents from which Grant's people had been expelled the day before, our broken and disordered regiments inextricably intermingled, and drunken with the wine of triumph, dashed confidently against a pair of trim battalions, provoking a tempest of hissing lead that made us stagger under its very weight. The sharp onset of another against our flank sent us whirling back with fire at our heels and fresh foes in merciless pursuit - who in their turn were broken upon the front of the invalided brigade previously mentioned, which had moved up from the rear to assist in this lively work.

As we rallied to reform behind our beloved guns and noted the ridiculous brevity of our line - as we sank from sheer fatigue, and tried to moderate the terrific thumping of our hearts - as we caught our breath to ask who had seen such-and-such a comrade, and laughed hysterically at the reply - there swept past us and over us into the open field a long regiment with fixed bayonets and rifles on the right shoulder. Another followed, and another; two -

three - four! Heavens! where  
do all these men come from,  
and why did they not come  
before? How grandly and  
confidently they go sweeping on  
like long blue waves of ocean  
chasing one another to the cruel  
rocks!

Involuntarily we draw in our  
weary feet beneath us as we sit,  
ready to spring up and  
interpose our breasts when  
these gallant lines shall come  
back to us across the terrible  
field, and sift brokenly through  
among the trees with spouting  
fires at their backs. We still our  
breathing to catch the full  
grandeur of the volleys that are  
to tear them to shreds. Minute  
after minute passes and the  
sound does not come. Then for  
the first time we note that the  
silence of the whole region is  
not comparative, but absolute.  
Have we become stone deaf?  
See; here comes a stretcher-  
bearer, and there a surgeon!  
Good heavens! a chaplain! The  
battle was indeed at an end.

As Bierce suggests Colonel  
Hazen's attack and retreat from  
the Davis Wheat Field  
represents one of the many  
chaotic episodes of the battle.  
As to specific tactical details  
there has never been complete  
agreement on exactly what  
happened and why. In a  
general way, however, the  
progress and results of the fight  
have been documented.

Prior to the Confederate attack  
described by Bierce, Colonel

Hazen, responding to a threat to  
his right flank, refused his  
brigade line, presenting a front  
facing southwest with his right  
flank units. Moody, on the left  
with the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana and part of  
the 6<sup>th</sup> Kentucky maintained a  
south facing. Between 11:00 am  
and noon Hazen, under direct  
orders from Generals Nelson  
and Buell, who were personally  
present, launched a spoiling  
attack into Martin's advancing  
Confederates. In a bloody  
meeting engagement among the  
dense underbrush that had the  
day before been dubbed the  
Hornets Nest, Hazen broke  
Martin's line and pursued the  
fleeing enemy toward the Davis  
Wheat Field and the Hamburg-  
Purdy Road.<sup>22</sup>

When Hazen ordered this  
charge, the men of the 9<sup>th</sup>  
Indiana and 6<sup>th</sup> Kentucky, their  
battalions mixed into one  
loosely organized force, surged  
ahead behind two mounted  
officers, Lieutenant Colonel  
William H. Blake of the 9<sup>th</sup>  
Indiana, and Lieutenant  
Colonel George T. Cotton of the  
6<sup>th</sup> Kentucky. One officer noted  
that as this mob forged ahead  
the 41<sup>st</sup> Ohio, with Hazen  
personally leading came up on  
the right in perfect formation.<sup>23</sup>

Hazen pushed the pursuit  
through the Davis Wheat Field,  
and his men captured three  
guns of the Washington  
Artillery in hand-to-hand  
fighting. Unable to draw the  
guns off the field, soldiers of the  
41<sup>st</sup> Ohio stuffed mud down the

barrels, effectively disabling the guns until they could be cleaned out. The hand-to-hand fight disrupted the organization of the brigade at a time when the Confederates launched a desperate counterattack aimed at retaking the lost cannons.<sup>24</sup>

Soon rebel gunners belonging to Captain Linus McClung's Tennessee battery, deployed about 100 yards to the east along the Hamburg-Purdy Road, repositioned their guns, and fired into Hazen's thickly concentrated troops at point blank range, causing heavy casualties in the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana and the 6<sup>th</sup> Kentucky regiments. Simultaneously the Crescent Regiment of New Orleans, supported by the 1<sup>st</sup> Missouri Confederate regiment, counterattacked. Amid further hand-to-hand fighting Hazen's men were bourn back across the Davis Field and scattered among the thickets of the Hornets Nest. Hazen himself lost his way during the retreat, and did not rejoin his command until later in the afternoon.<sup>25</sup>

Some members of the brigade managed to rally and turn back the pursuing Confederates. Colonel Moody reported that the 9<sup>th</sup> Indiana remained at the front, firing 25 rounds into the enemy before they backed off. The brigade was subsequently relieved from the firing line for the rest of the day.<sup>26</sup>

After the end of the battle the brigade, now reunited with its

commander, advanced from a position near the Manse George Cabin directly across the Sarah Bell Field to the Hamburg-Purdy Road. There they stopped and bivouacked for the night.

**Walking Stand #7 – End of the Battle:** From the position of the Washington Artillery, proceed east 350 yards along the Hamburg-Purdy Road to the yellow oval marker denoting the position of Hazen's Brigade at the end of the battle.

**Driving Stand #7 – End of the Battle:** Carefully turn around and drive back to the east on the Hamburg-Purdy Road. A yellow oval marker to the right denotes the position of Hazen's Brigade at the end of the battle.

## ***Chapter XII***

And this was, O so long ago!  
How they come back to me -  
dimly and brokenly, but with  
what a magic spell - those years  
of youth when I was soldiering!  
Again I hear the far warble of  
blown bugles. Again I see the  
tall, blue smoke of camp-fires  
ascending from the dim valleys  
of Wonderland. There steals  
upon my sense the ghost of an  
odor from pines that canopy the  
ambuscade. I feel upon my  
cheek the morning mist that  
shrouds the hostile camp  
unaware of its doom, and my  
blood stirs at the ringing rifle-  
shot of the solitary sentinel.  
Unfamiliar landscapes,

glittering with sunshine or  
sullen with rain, come to me  
demanding recognition, pass,  
vanish and give place to others.  
Here in the night stretches a  
wide and blasted field studded  
with half-extinct fires burning  
redly with I know not what  
presage of evil. Again I shudder  
as I note its desolation and its  
awful silence. Where was it?  
To what monstrous inharmony  
of death was it the visible  
prelude?

O days when all the world was  
beautiful and strange; when  
unfamiliar constellations  
burned in the Southern  
midnights, and the mocking-  
bird poured out his heart in the  
moon-gilded magnolia; when  
there was something new under  
a new sun; will your fine, far  
memories ever cease to lay  
contrasting pictures athwart the  
harsher features of this later  
world, accentuating the ugliness  
of the longer and tamer life? Is  
it not strange that the  
phantoms of a blood-stained  
period have so airy a grace and  
look with so tender eyes? - that  
I recall with difficulty the  
danger and death and horrors  
of the time, and without effort  
all that was gracious and  
picturesque? Ah, Youth, there  
is no such wizard as thou! Give  
me but one touch of thine artist  
hand upon the dull canvas of  
the Present; gild for but one  
moment the drear and somber  
scenes of today, and I will  
willingly surrender another life  
than the one that I should have  
thrown away at Shiloh.

Following Shiloh Ambrose  
Bierce experienced a long and  
eventful term of service in the  
army. Soon after the battle he  
was appointed sergeant major  
of the regiment and served in  
that capacity until April of 1863,  
when he received a commission  
as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant.<sup>27</sup>

As an officer, Bierce served on  
the staff of the newly promoted  
Brigadier General William B.  
Hazen, as topographical  
engineer. The duties of the  
topographical engineer  
appealed to Bierce's  
adventurous sensibilities. He  
was often called upon to scout  
between the lines and make  
drawings of enemy positions.  
Some of his maps were later  
reproduced for the *Atlas* of the  
official records of the war.

During the Atlanta Campaign of  
1864, he accompanied Hazen's  
brigade through the battles of  
Resaca and Pickett's Mill before  
suffering a severe head wound  
at Kennesaw Mountain. Before  
Bierce recovered, Hazen was  
promoted to division command  
and led his troops to the sea  
with Sherman's great march.  
Bierce secured a position on the  
staff of General Samuel Beatty  
and witnessed the battles of  
Franklin and Nashville before  
the war ended.<sup>28</sup>

After his discharge from the  
army, Bierce worked briefly for  
the Treasury Department in  
Reconstruction-era Alabama.  
Within a year, however, he

rejoined his old mentor, Hazen, for a journey of exploration to California. Upon arrival Hazen attempted to secure Bierce a commission in the regular army. When faced with accepting the billet of a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, a somewhat junior position than the one he thought he deserved, the young man balked.<sup>29</sup>

This misfortune turned out to be of great benefit to Bierce. Turning to writing, he embarked upon a long career in journalism and literature that took him to England, Washington D. C., New York, and many other places. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, he was working for publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst at the San Francisco *Examiner*.<sup>30</sup>

“Bitter Bierce,” whose slashing editorial attacks upon public and private figures provoked outrage and numerous attempts at censorship, became one of the most influential newspapermen of the “yellow journalism” era. At the same time his fiction, especially works based on his Civil War experiences, established for him a lasting place in the literary history of the United States.<sup>31</sup>

His famous collection of short stories, *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*, published in 1891, features his most well-known works. The short stories “Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,” “One of the Missing,” and “Sun of the Gods,” are

fascinating studies in the psychology of soldiers in war. Some stories have been produced as popular television programs. His other work of lasting prominence, the wickedly satirical *Devil’s Dictionary*, helped to gain him the label of *misanthrope*, a reputation he never tried seriously to challenge.

Always restless, and beset by personal tragedies, Bierce left the newspaper business in the early 1900’s, and concentrated on publishing a multi-volume *Collected Works*. Soon after completing these in 1914, he traveled to Mexico, ostensibly to write about the ongoing fighting between the forces of Venustiano Carranza and Pancho Villa during the Mexican Civil War. There he disappeared, and was never heard from again.<sup>32</sup>

**End of the Trail – Visitor Center:** To return to the visitor center walk west, through Davis Field, to the intersection of the Eastern Corinth and Hamburg-Purdy Roads. This is the location of Harper’s Mississippi Battery on the afternoon of April 7. After Hazen’s failed attack on the Washington Artillery battery, this position was assaulted by Union forces including the 14<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Regiment. A blue oval marker denoting a position of the 14<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin sits about 100 yards to the north.

Turn right and walk north along the Eastern Corinth Road for about 1 mile. Along the way tablets can be seen marking the several attacks against the Hornets' Nest by a series of Confederate brigades on April 6<sup>th</sup>. Soon after, the road passes through the Union line at the Hornets' Nest.

Upon reaching the intersection of the Eastern Corinth and Corinth Roads, turn right and walk east and north past the Confederate Monument (Shiloh Tour Stop #3), to the intersection with the Hamburg-Savannah Road. To the right as you pass along the Corinth Road is the field and woods where Union General Benjamin Prentiss surrendered 2,250 troops under his command on the afternoon of April 6. Continue left on the Corinth Road and follow it north, following the same route taken on the outbound trip. A walk of just about a mile leads to the visitor center.

**Driving Tour:** This ends the driving tour. The visitor center can be reached by retracing the route along the Hamburg-Savannah Road and the Corinth Road. ■

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest thanks go to my former colleagues at the Shiloh National Military Park for their assistance and encouragement in developing this program. The people could not ask for better stewards of their battlefield. Chief Ranger Stacy D. Allen and Dr. Timothy B. Smith deserve special credit for their guidance and help.

## NOTES

1. Ambrose Bierce, *The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce* (New York: Walter Neale, 1909-1912), 4:57.
2. Ambrose Bierce, *The Collected Writings of Ambrose Bierce* (1946; reprint, Secaucus, NJ: The Citadel Press, 2001), xi.
3. Ambrose Bierce, *A Sole Survivor: Bits of Autobiography*, eds. S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), x. (Hereafter cited as Joshi and Schultz.)
4. State of Indiana, *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Indiana. Volume IV. 1861 – 1865. Containing Rosters of Enlisted Men of Indiana Regiments Numbered From the Sixth to the Twenty-Ninth Inclusive* (Indianapolis: Samuel M. Douglass, State Printer, 1866), 134. (Hereafter cited as AG.)
5. William B. Hazen, *A Narrative of Military Service* (1885; reprint, Huntington, WV: Blue Acorn, 1993), 21.

6. Wiley Sword, *Shiloh: Bloody April* (1974; reprint, Dayton, OH: Morningside, 1983), 61.
7. Sword, 44; United States War Department, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1880 – 1901), series I, vol. X, part 1, 106. (Hereafter cited as OR.)
8. Ambrose Bierce, *The Collected Works*, vol. 1.
9. Bierce is mocking Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard by saying that “General Johnston withdrew Beauregard’s army.” At the time of the writing, Beauregard was involved in public controversies regarding his performance at Shiloh as executive officer of the Confederate army, and then commander in the wake of Johnston’s death. Part of that controversy involved Beauregard taking undue credit, and then criticizing Johnston, who, of course could not respond.
10. Sword, 363.
11. Sword, 352.
12. Sword, 377.
13. Sword, 383; OR, 342-343.
14. OR, 342.
15. Hazen, 42.
16. OR, 341.
17. McConnell, 9th Indiana file, Shiloh National Military Park; OR, 342.
18. Joseph R. Reinhart, *A History of the 6th Kentucky Volunteer Infantry U.S.: The Boys Who Feared No Noise* (Louisville, KY: Beargrass Press, 2000), 64; OR, 342.
19. OR, 342; Sword, 389-91.
20. Peter Cozzens, “My Poor Little Ninth: The Ninth Illinois at Shiloh,” *Illinois Historical Journal* 83 (Spring 1990): 31-44; OR, 233.
21. Bierce’s timeline is mistaken. The following actions took place at about 11:00 a.m.
22. Hazen, 26-27.
23. D. B. McConnell, Shiloh National Military Park, 9th Indiana file.
24. Hazen, 27; Emerson Opdycke, *The Battle for God and the Right: The Civil War Letterbooks of Emerson Opdycke*, ed. Glenn V. Longacre and John E. Haas (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 28.
25. Hazen, 28.
26. OR, 342.
27. AG, 2:61.
28. Joshi and Schultz, xi.
29. *Ibid.*, xi.
30. *Ibid.*, xv.
31. *Ibid.*, xiii.

32. Ibid., xxvi.