

Hackleman and Oglesby

The Republican convention in Chicago was one for the books. Yes, I said Chicago, not Tampa. This is a history column and I'm talking about the convention of 1860, not the one in 2012. This was the convention that elected Abraham Lincoln as the Republican candidate on the 4th call of the roll.

So what does the Republican convention in "The Wigwam" have to do with Civil War Corinth? Well, if you were a politically savvy guy and you had the right connections, you could possibly wrangle an officer's commission, especially if you were friends with the president. Two Union generals who fought in the Battle of Corinth were at that convention and both had friends in the right places.

Pleasant A. Hackleman had plenty of such friends. He was a 49 year-old native Hoosier and held several judicial positions in the Indiana State House. Though he was defeated in a bid for congress he was chosen as a delegate to the Republican convention and cast his final vote for Abraham Lincoln. His connections secured a colonel's commission of the 16th Indiana and he was involved in some of the early fighting in Virginia. His performance in the field (and, of course, the political connections) secured a promotion to Brigadier General and orders to report to General Grant in Mississippi.

Then there was Richard Oglesby who had friends at an even higher level. "Uncle Dick" Oglesby was born in Kentucky but he was an Illinois man from the start. He studied law and was admitted to the bar shortly before the Mexican War. He served as a junior officer in an Illinois regiment (the unit that captured General Santa Anna's cork leg) and later went prospecting for gold in California. He entered Illinois politics and was one of the first to join the new Republican Party. He was a friend of Lincoln's and it was Oglesby who came up with the nickname "Honest Abe" on the convention floor. It was also "Uncle Dick" who had the idea of bringing a couple of wooden rails onto the stage and claimed they had been cut by "the rail-splitter" another nick-name courtesy of Dick Oglesby.

"Uncle Dick" took a commission as Colonel in the 8th Illinois Infantry and did well at Fort Donelson though, to his mortification, he was home on furlough during the Battle of Shiloh. Like Hackleman, he too was given a post battle promotion to brigadier general.

During the Battle of Corinth both Dick Oglesby and Pleasant Hackleman were in command of brigades in the division of General Thomas Davies. They started the morning of October 3rd in a section of the old Confederate "Beauregard Line" of earthworks north of town. They were heavily outnumbered by the attacking Southerners and were forced to fall back to a second position near a home forever known as "The White House."

The generals lined their men up on the south side of a large field and for the better part of an hour 27 cannon made the ground shake. When the artillery duel ceased the Confederates attacked and the fighting was furious. The lines moved forward and back, first one side had the advantage and then the other. Oglesby's men had just beaten back a particularly savage charge

when a bullet entered his left armpit, passed near his heart and pierced both lungs. He was loaded into an ambulance and taken from the field.

The ambulance had not gone far when Hackleman was hit in the neck while rallying his men. The ambulance was stopped and the two men were brought into Corinth together. They were taken to the Tishomingo Hotel which had been pressed into service as a hospital and a more grisly sight is hard to imagine. Sgt. Sam Byers of the 5th Iowa Infantry described the scene: “In one large room of the Tishomingo House surgeons worked all the night, cutting off arms and legs...I saw the floors, tables, and chairs covered with the amputated limbs, some white and some broken and bleeding. There were simply bushels of them, and the floor was running blood.”

That evening General Davies came to the Tishomingo to see his two brigade commanders who were lying together in the ladies’ parlor. His third brigade commander, Colonel Silas Baldwin was also in the room, hiding in the corner with a slightly wounded hand. It was clear that Hackleman was fading fast and there was nothing more the surgeons could do. Davies was with Hackleman as the general breathed his last. Nearby, Oglesby was in excruciating pain and each labored breath blew a froth of bubbles out of his wound. He was not expected to live through the night. Baldwin would soon be tossed out of the army for his cowardly conduct.

“Uncle Dick” was still clinging to life on the 8th of October when President Lincoln sent a telegram to congratulate General Grant on the victory in his district. He took the time to add he was “very anxious to know the condition of Gen. Oglesby who is an intimate personal friend.” The wound had been pronounced mortal and the doctors were waiting for him to pass on. But he didn’t die. The wound stopped bleeding and, as luck would have it, his family doctor was on duty in Bethel, Tennessee and rushed to his side.

It was a long recovery but Dick Oglesby beat the odds. He returned to the army in the spring of 1863 wearing the twin stars of a major general. He fought well in the Vicksburg campaign but resigned his commission in 1864 to run for Governor of Illinois. He won in a landslide and became a three term governor as well as a U.S. senator. He died in 1899 still carrying the bullet in his chest he had taken at Corinth.

As for Pleasant Hackleman, his body was returned to Indiana for burial, the only general officer on either side to be killed in the Battle of Corinth.