

## *Me, 'Gus' and a Real Pain in the Old Neck*

Last week I had throat surgery and I am still recuperating at home. There were plenty of people willing to tell me the horrors of having my tonsils taken out as an adult and how I would be a hurtin' pup for a few weeks. As it turns out the stories were very accurate: it hurts. Lucky for me I have plenty of sick time saved up and the boss has been tolerant of the time off for recovery.

So, as I was lying in the hospital bed the day after the surgery, devoting all of my physical energies toward swallowing a sip of water, I was reminded of Confederate General Beauregard. Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, or "Gus" as we call him at the office, had a similar surgery during the Civil War but his boss was not nearly as understanding as mine. Beauregard and President Jefferson Davis were never what you would call close and despite Gus being the hero of Fort Sumter and the Battle of Manassas, the president was looking for a way to get rid of him.

The 43 year old Creole was a graduate of West Point, class of '38, and was known by his colleagues as "The Little Napoleon," or "Old Borey." A gifted soldier, he was also prone to talk too much. His stature in the high command of the Confederacy began to dwindle after Manassas when he got into some rather heated arguments with members of the army staff as well as the Davis cabinet. At one point he questioned whether the Secretary of War was nothing more than a "functionary at his desk" who would rather "write lectures on law while the enemy is mustering in our front." The president entered the argument to make peace between the two, but to no avail. It came to a boiling point

when Beauregard told the newspapers it had been the interference by President Davis which had prevented his destroying the enemy forces during the late battle.

The actual nature of his throat affliction is a bit hazy but apparently it began to trouble him in the days following his victory at the Battle of Manassas. It was serious enough to require surgery, an option not taken lightly in those days when most maladies were treated with “Blue Mass.” Blue Mass? Whatever the medical problem was, Blue Mass was the cure. Made from equal parts of mercury and honey it was used to treat throat ailments, tuberculosis, toothaches, insanity and childbirth. In this case Blue Mass was not enough and Gus was forced to go under the surgeon’s knife. He was still in recovery when an incensed President Davis chose to make some adjustments. The President decided the best place for Beauregard was far from Richmond and he was given orders to report to General Albert Sidney Johnston as second in command of the sprawling Department No. 2.

Gus’s new duties gave him little time to sit around sipping chicken soup. Late in January of 1862 Beauregard made his way to Kentucky and soon after to Jackson, Tennessee. By mid-March he had made his headquarters at the Duncan House on Jackson Street in Corinth. Fortunes in the Western Confederacy were at an all time low with the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson as Johnston and Beauregard rallied the troops for a smashing offensive against the Union invaders. The Creole was still feeling the effects of his surgery when the Battle of Shiloh was fought and he assumed command of the army upon the death of General Johnston. He was far from being a well man.

The Siege of Corinth put immense pressure on Gus and despite the recommendations of his surgeons to rest he pushed himself harder than ever. The days and nights were filled with hours of work to salvage the army's position and strength but it was to no avail; by the end of May he had determined to abandon the critical rail junction and move his headquarters to Tupelo. Beauregard was able to save the army but the loss of the city was a terrible blow to the Confederacy. For his part, Gus felt the withdrawal had been conducted so masterfully he was to be congratulated and the movement itself treated as a victory. President Davis did not agree and his irritation with Gus reached new heights.

Luckily for Beauregard the Union forces did not pursue him to Tupelo and he was finally able to think about his health. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of June, 1862, he accepted a medical certificate of disability presented by his surgeons and placed himself on sick leave. He took the train south to Bladon Springs, a resort just north of Mobile which was well known for the curative properties of the mineral waters. The centerpiece of the spa was an ornate Greek Revival hotel which boasted a ballroom, bowling alley, billiards, and even a roller skating rink. It was a perfect place to recover but there was only one problem: Gus had failed to ask permission to defer his duties for his two week vacation.

President Davis was furious, at least outwardly. Actually, things could not have worked out better if he had planned them himself. Before the train had even reached Mobile General Braxton Bragg was ordered to take command of the army and a message was sent to Gus to take as much time off as he needed. He would eventually return to

active duty, not in Mississippi but in far away Charleston, South Carolina where it was believed the sea air would be good for his throat.

Unlike Gus I had the foresight to talk to my boss in advance of my surgery. I don't have any plans to visit Mobile but I am taking no chances and staying right here in Corinth till I'm ready to go back to my desk. You never know.