

Albert Sidney Johnston

(February 2, 1803 – April 6, 1862) was a career U.S. Army officer and a Confederate general during the American Civil War. Considered by Confederate President Jefferson Davis to be the finest general in the Confederacy, he was killed early in the war at the Battle of Shiloh and was the highest ranking officer, Union or Confederate, killed during the Civil War.



Johnston was born in Washington, Kentucky, the youngest son of Dr. John and Abigail Harris Johnston. Although Albert Johnston was born in Kentucky, he lived much of his life in Texas, which he considered his home. He was educated at Transylvania University in Lexington and later secured an appointment to West Point. In 1826 he graduated eighth in his class from the United States Military Academy with a commission as a second lieutenant in the 2nd U.S. Infantry. He was assigned to posts in New York and Missouri and served in the Black Hawk War in 1832 as chief of staff to General Henry Atkinson. In 1829 he married Henrietta Preston. He resigned his commission in 1834 to return to Kentucky to care for his dying wife. His wife later died from a cancerous disease. They had one son, William Preston Johnston, who became a colonel in the Confederate army and served on the staff of Jefferson Davis. After the war he was a professor at Washington and Lee University until November, 1880 when he became president of Louisiana State University and later became president of Tulane University in New Orleans in 1884.

In April 1834, Albert Sidney Johnston took up farming in Texas, but enlisted as a private in the Texas Army during the Texas War of Independence against the Republic of Mexico in 1836. One month later, Johnston was promoted to major and the position of aide-de-camp to General Sam Houston. He was named Adjutant General as a colonel in the Republic of Texas Army on August 5, 1836. On January 31, 1837, he became senior brigadier general in command of the Texas Army. The second president of the Republic of Texas, Mirabeau B. Lamar, appointed him Secretary of War on December 22, 1838. In 1839, Johnston conducted a campaign against Indians in northern Texas. In February 1840, he resigned and returned to Kentucky, where he married Eliza Griffin in 1843. They returned to Texas and settled on a large plantation he named China Grove in Brazoria County, Texas.

Johnston returned to the Texas Army during the Mexican-American War under General Zachary Taylor as a colonel of the 1st Texas Rifle Volunteers. The enlistments of his volunteers ran out just before the Battle of Monterrey. Johnston managed to convince a few volunteers to stay and fight as he himself served as the inspector general of volunteers and fought at the battles of Monterrey and Buena Vista. Johnston remained on his plantation after the war until he was appointed by now-President Taylor to the U.S. Army as a major and was made a paymaster in December of 1849. He served in that role for more than five years, making six tours, and traveling more than 4,000 miles annually on the Indian frontier of Texas. He served on the Texas frontier and elsewhere in the West. In 1855 President Franklin Pierce appointed him colonel of the new 2nd U.S. Cavalry. As a key figure in the Utah War, he led U.S. troops who established a non-Mormon government in the formerly Mormon territory. He received a brevet promotion to brigadier general in 1857 for his service in Utah. He spent 1860 in Kentucky until December 21, when he sailed for California to take command of the Department of the Pacific.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Johnston was the commander of the U.S. Army Department of the Pacific in California. He was approached by some Californians who urged him to take his forces east to join the

Union against the Confederacy. He resigned his commission, April 9, 1861, as soon as he heard of the secession of Texas. He remained in California until June. After a rapid march through the deserts of Arizona and Texas, he reached Richmond, Virginia, on or about September 1, 1861. There Johnston was appointed a general by his friend, Jefferson Davis. On May 30, 1861, Johnston became the second highest ranking Confederate General as commander of the Western Department. The war in the West turned ugly by early 1862. Johnston's subordinate generals lost Fort Henry on February 6, 1862, and Fort Donelson on February 16, 1862, to Union Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. and Union Maj. Gen. Don Carlos Buell captured the vital city of Nashville, Tennessee. Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard was sent west to join Johnston and they organized their forces at Corinth, Mississippi.



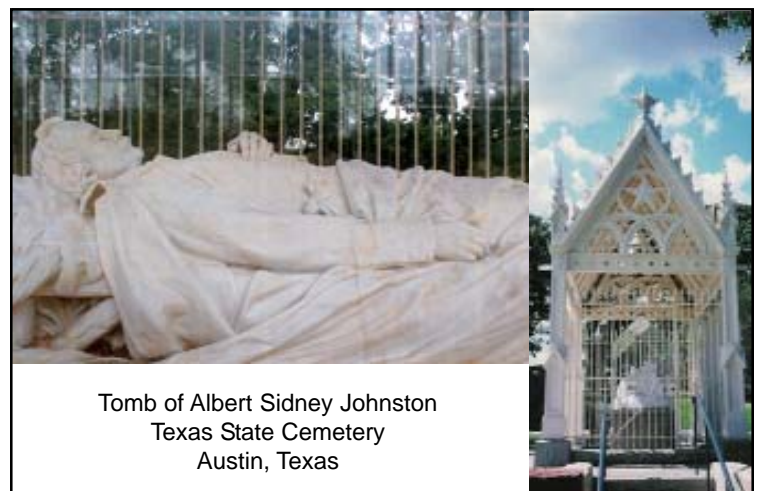
Albert Sidney Johnston Monument
Shiloh Battlefield, Tennessee

Johnston concentrated many of his forces from around the theater and launched a massive surprise attack against Grant at the Battle of Shiloh on April 6, 1862. As the Confederate forces overran the Union camps, Johnston seemed to be everywhere, personally leading and rallying troops up and down the line. At about 2:30 p.m., while leading one of those charges, he was wounded, taking a bullet behind his right knee. He did not think the wound serious at the time, and sent his personal physician to attend to some wounded Union soldiers instead. The bullet had in fact clipped his popliteal artery and his boot was filling up with blood. Within a few minutes Johnston was observed by his staff to be nearly fainting off of his horse, and asked him if he was wounded, to which he replied "Yes, and I fear seriously." Johnston was taken to a small ravine, where he bled to death in minutes. His death was a strong blow to the morale of the Confederacy. Jefferson Davis considered him the best general in the country; this was two months before the emergence of Robert E. Lee as the preeminent general of the Confederacy.

Johnston was buried in New Orleans, Louisiana. In 1866, a joint resolution of the Texas Legislature was passed to have his body reinterred to the Texas State Cemetery in Austin. The re-interment occurred in 1867. Forty years later, the state appointed Elisabet Ney to design a monument and sculpture of him to be erected at his gravesite.



Johnston Statue atop Army of Tennessee Tomb, Metairie Cemetery
New Orleans, Original burial place of Albert Sidney Johnston



Tomb of Albert Sidney Johnston
Texas State Cemetery
Austin, Texas