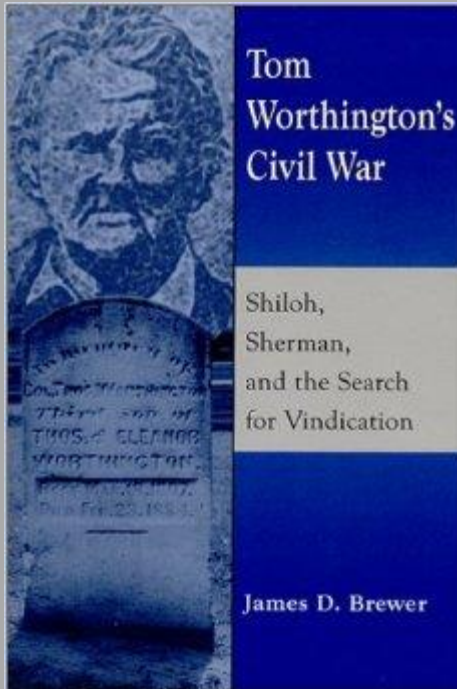


Book Review

Tom Worthington's Civil War:  
Shiloh, Sherman, and the Search for Vindication

James D. Brewer. (2001) Jefferson: McFarland



This is not the best, most comprehensive book about the Battle of Shiloh that was fought April 6 & 7, 1862. That distinction probably belongs to a 1966 book by O. Edward Cunningham, *Shiloh and the Western Campaign of 1862*, as edited by Gary D. Joiner and Timothy B. Smith, published in 2007 by Savas Beattie. Nor for that matter, Brewer's book probably should not be the first book you might read about the battle that occurred south of Pittsburg Landing since it is told from a unique, narrow perspective of someone who has ended up in the proverbial dustbin of history.

However this story about Tom Worthington, Jr. is very useful because it gives a Civil War reader insights into several facets: The early training and preparation of young, untested Union regiments, the statures of several Union commanders, including William T. Sherman, details

about the initial reactions of and responses by Federal troops and their units when first attacked, and the manner in which the higher command decided to move on after the battle was over and recriminations began. Finally the tale is about one man's obsession to tell the truth, at least as he saw it, an obsession that took its toll the rest of his life.

Thomas Worthington, Jr. was the son of Thomas Worthington, one of Ohio's founding fathers. The senior Worthington is credited with being the father of the Ohio-Erie Canal, he founded the town of Logan, Ohio (where my family lived for more than a half century), he was one of Ohio's first Senators, and he was Ohio's 6<sup>th</sup> governor. He built a mansion, Adena, now a state historical site that is well worth a trip to Chillicothe, Ohio's first and third capital.

But the younger Worthington never quite measured up to his father's many accomplishments; Tom, Jr. attended West Point, graduating 12<sup>th</sup> in the 1827 class of 40. Coincidentally the elder Tom Worthington died the same day Tom, Jr. graduated from West

Point. The Worthington family's finances were never healthy, and for ten years Tom tried to operate a mill he had inherited near Logan. It was during this period his family began to view young Tom as a problem child addicted to gambling, fond of liquor, and saddled with debts. Although Tom had joined the Ohio militia where he rose to the rank of brigadier general, still as late as 1845 the Hocking County Treasurer was threatening to sell 44 acres of Worthington's land because of unpaid taxes.

Upon the outbreak of the Mexican War, Worthington raised a company of "Hocking Volunteers" that eventually became part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ohio Infantry. Despite his credentials Worthington was not elected to become commander but instead was appointed as regimental adjutant, where Worthington chafed as a subordinate to a younger, non- West Point trained commander. Eventually the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ohio Infantry was marched through the hot territory of central Mexico primarily to guard the supply trains. After the battle at Monterey, Worthington returned to Ohio on sick leave, effectively ending his Mexican War service.

Worthington would later describe the next period of his life as being wasted. When the Civil War erupted Worthington attempted to write tactical manuals that emphasized the "right" way to do things. Not surprisingly, these manuals accomplished little except to create friction with his superiors a year later. In any event, after circumventing some procedural hurdles Worthington raised, organized, and trained the 46<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry, which was soon transported to Paducah, Kentucky, where it would be assigned to a division, presumably to be commanded by William T. Sherman. As a precursor to future difficulties, Worthington, then 54 years of age, wrote a letter the Henry Halleck to ask that his regiment be assigned to anyone other than Sherman, 42 years old. (Sherman was in the USMA class of 1840 while Grant was in the class of 1843.)

Nevertheless Worthington's 46<sup>th</sup> OVI was marshaled into Sherman's division. Quickly Tom was already questioning and second-guessing some of the decisions of his fellow officers. Worthington and Sherman seemed to be butting heads, even as the army was being transported up the Tennessee River toward Pittsburg Landing. For instance on March 6 Sherman chastised Worthington for being "slack in his departure from Paducah" while Worthington responded he had to take extra time to find supplies and ammunition that Sherman had failed to provide. Often there is only a thin red line separating imitative from insubordination, a demarcation that Tom frequently ignored. Upon being deployed near the Shiloh Church, south of Pittsburg Landing, Worthington continued his criticisms about a variety of issues, including the deployment and the lack of adequate supplies. Among other things Worthington fretted about the exposure of his regiment along with the other regiments most aligned the path of an enemy advance.

On Sunday, April 6, 1862, Worthington's nervousness and sense of impending doom were realized. As even the most casual students of Civil War history realize, that morning Confederate troops caught the Federals by surprise to sweep through the Union encampments thereby forcing a general and costly retraction of the blue lines. However the next day when reinforcements started to arrive the Federals were able to effectively counterpunch to regain the ground previously lost before the Confederate army totally withdrew from the battlefield. As should have been expected Worthington wasted little time before launching his unrelenting, bitter complaint that Sherman was unprepared for and fooled by the attack. In truth Tom's complaints had factual foundation but the more his complaints were dismissed or ignored, the more strident and exaggerated they became. In a footnote Cunningham summarizes Worthington's actions:

Worthington claimed the mess at Shiloh was due to the treason on the part of Halleck, Grant, Sherman, and the Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War. He demanded to be court-martialed and his wish was granted. Worthington lost his case, but later put his sensational charges in writing.

But in addition to his many writings Tom roamed the halls of Congress and streets of Washington trying to persuade anyone who would listen that Sherman had been negligent in his preparedness or lack of same before the attack.

While Worthington probably had a valid point about Sherman's lack of preparedness, and historians tend to agree on this point, Worthington simply was unable to grasp the larger point, that being the Washington administration and army was determined to move on. They needed stability and continuity in the command structure instead of squabbling about who was right and who was wrong. (There would be plenty of time for that after Gettysburg.) The army didn't need or want contentious or frequently insubordinate officers. Halleck covered Sherman's back by lying to Stanton about the matter; Sherman was promoted to major general shortly after Shiloh. Worthington failed to realize the Grant and Sherman relationship was going to one of the building blocks for the Federal command structure and that nobody within the establishment cared about his criticisms, no matter their validity.

The remainder of Brewer's book describes how for the rest of Tom's life he continued to tilt at the windmill that came to a head at Shiloh. Worthington was simply incapable of letting go and moving on, instead forever seeking validation. Frankly it's a difficult story to read if only because it's hard to read about someone who could have contributed to the Union's cause but was defeated by his own stubbornness and myopic vision almost as certainly as if he had been shot through the heart and killed as a hero that Sunday morning in April, 1862.

