

Hold The Fort

By
Bill Dagle

It was October 5, 1864; and General Sherman had begun his famous “March to the Sea.” Sherman’s army was camped near Atlanta while Confederate General Hood had gained the rear and was destroying the railroad. Heading north, Hood burned blockhouses and captured many Union Soldiers.

Sherman’s army began pursuing Hood to save the supplies and larger posts, the principal one of which was located at Altoona Pass. By the time Sherman arrived at Altoona, the fort was surrounded by Hood’s men. From 20 miles away on Kenesaw Mountain, Sherman signaled with white flags, “Hold the fort; I am coming. W.T Sherman.”

Cheers went up from the fort; and for three hours, the Union soldiers held the Confederates at bay until Sherman arrived. Over half the soldiers at the fort lost their lives, but Sherman’s message and rescue would eventually save the day.

Major Whittle, a former Union general, related this story one evening at a Sunday School Convention in Rockford, Illinois, years after the war. In the audience that evening was the famous evangelist, D. L. Moody and Phillip P. Bliss, the hymn writer and composer. Major Whittle used the Civil War story to close the meeting. He said that Christians should not give in to Satan’s attacks, for we have the promise of Christ’s return and victory over death and sin. We are to “Hold the Fort” until our Saviour arrives.

That was all Bliss needed; and by the next day, the hymn, *Hold the Fort*, words and music, were completed by Mr. Bliss. In short time, the hymn became a favorite Sunday School song both in America and England. Years later, Bliss said that he hoped that he would not be remembered only for writing this hymn; but after his death, a tall granite shaft was erected in Rome, Pennsylvania, as a memorial. The boys and girls of Sunday Schools in America and England had sent their pennies to Mr. Moody to pay for the monument and requested that these words be etched upon it, “**P. P. Bliss, Author of *Hold the Fort*.**” As far as they were concerned, this was the best song Mr. Bliss had ever written:

Ho, my comrades, see the signal Waving in the sky! Reinforcements now appearing,
Victory is nigh.

See the mighty host advancing, Satan leading on; Mighty men around us falling, Courage
almost gone!

See the glorious banner waving! Hear the trumpet blow! In our Leader’s name we
triumph Over every foe.

Fierce and long the battle rages, But our help is near; Onward comes our great
Commander Cheer, my comrades, cheer!

Chorus

“Hold the fort, for I am coming,” Jesus signals still; Wave the answer back to heaven,
“By Thy grace we will”