

## THE CAMPAIGN CULMINATING IN THE FALL OF VICKSBURG: March 29 - July 4, 1863

By *Edwin C. Bearss\**

Following the failure of the "Bayou Expeditions," the second phase of his campaign to reduce Vicksburg, Major General Ulysses S. Grant was thrust upon the horns of a dilemma. He could return to Memphis and resume the drive down the Mississippi Central Railroad; he could launch an assault across the river to storm the defenses of "Fortress" Vicksburg; or he could move his army down the Louisiana shore and attempt to cross the Mississippi River south of the Confederate stronghold. The first of these alternatives, although it was strongly endorsed by Major General William T. Sherman, Grant rejected as a step backward; the second was laid aside as too costly. Grant therefore on March 29 issued orders for the Army of the Tennessee to begin its march down the west side of the Mississippi.

Within a month, Grant had concentrated two (Major Generals John A. McClernand's and James B. McPherson's) of his four corps near Hard Times, Louisiana, 30 miles south of Vicksburg. In the meantime, eight of Rear Admiral David D. Porter's gunboats and seven transports had run past the Vicksburg batteries and rendezvoused with Grant's army. To draw the Confederates' attention away from Grand Gulf, where they planned to cross the Mississippi River, the Union generals undertook and carried out a series of well-coordinated diversions. Among these were the Greenville Expedition, Sherman's demonstration against Snyder's Bluff, and a number of cavalry and infantry raids. The two most important of these raids were led by Colonels Benjamin H. Grierson and Abel D. Streight, and were directed against Confederate communication lines from Georgia to Mississippi.

On April 29, Porter's ironclads attacked the Confederate fortifications at Grand Gulf. The Union navy had been given the mission of knocking out the Southerners' big guns, thus paving the way for Grant's amphibious attack. Porter's gunboats, however, were repulsed. Undaunted, Grant had Porter, under cover of darkness, run his vessels past the Grand Gulf batteries. The next day (April 30), the Army of the Tennessee made an un-

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opposed crossing of the Mississippi River at Bruinsburg. Driving rapidly inland, Grant's soldiers encountered Brigadier General John S. Bowen's Confederate legions west of Port Gibson. For 18 hours, Bowen's badly outnumbered command fought a brilliant holding action. In the end, the Confederates were forced to break contact and fall back across the Bayou Pierre and Big Black River. Grant's bridgehead was made secure by his victory at Port Gibson.

The Union general now halted his army, while bringing up supplies and waiting for Sherman's corps to arrive from Milliken's Bend. By May 8, the Federals were ready to renew the advance. Grant would not march directly on Vicksburg. Instead, he would swing to the northeast and cut the railroad linking Vicksburg and Jackson at Edwards. If successful, Grant would not only capture Vicksburg but, more important, he would destroy Pemberton's formidable army. Moving out of the bridgehead, the Army of the Tennessee marched in three columns — McPherson on the right, Sherman in the center, and McClernand on the left.

At Raymond, on the 12th, McPherson's column, in a bitter engagement, defeated Brigadier General John Gregg's brigade. This battle caused Grant to change his plans. Gregg's skill in handling his command led McPherson to overestimate his strength. In addition, the Union brass had received reports that the Confederates were concentrating a force in Jackson to support Pemberton's Vicksburg army. Grant therefore decided to move against the Jackson Confederates. Two days later on the 14th, McPherson's and Sherman's corps captured Jackson. The concentration which Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston was endeavoring to effect at Jackson was scattered to the winds. Leaving Sherman's troops to destroy the railroads and war industries in Jackson, Grant turned McClernand's and McPherson's corps toward Vicksburg.

In the meantime, General Pemberton had moved out of the Vicksburg defenses. The morning of the 15th found Pemberton at Edwards. During the day, the Confederate army, 23,000 strong, moved to attack Grant's supply line near Dillon's plantation. Pemberton's march was poorly organized; nightfall found the head of the Confederate column camped at Mrs. Ellison's, a number of miles from its objective.

Unlike the Southerners, the 32,000 Union soldiers had made an easy march on the 15th. The Federals had moved along three roads which converged near Edwards. Darkness found Brigadier General Alvin P. Hovey's

division of McClernand's command and McPherson's corps bivouacked near Bolton on the Jackson road; McClernand with two of his divisions was camped on the Middle road, three miles south of Bolton; two more Union divisions (one belonging to McClernand's corps, the other to Sherman's) halted on the Raymond road.

The next morning, the three Union columns cautiously resumed their advance. About the same time, Pemberton received orders from Johnston, his superior, to reverse his line of march. Johnston wished the two Confederate armies to join forces before giving Grant battle. But by the time Pemberton received this dispatch, his troops were in contact with the Union divisions advancing via the Middle and Raymond roads. Nevertheless, Pemberton tried to comply with Johnston's orders. Two of Pemberton's three divisions (Bowen's and Loring's) were quickly formed into line of battle covering the Raymond road; a regimental combat team was posted on the Middle road. Not knowing that McPherson's powerful column was marching along the Jackson road, Pemberton made no effort to protect his left flank. Having made these dispositions, Pemberton prepared to carry out Johnston's instructions. Before the Confederates were able to disengage, McPherson's column was sighted. Pemberton's third division, Major General Carter L. Stevenson's, took position on Champion Hill. Stevenson's mission was to protect the Southerners' left.

Grant, who had arrived on the field, ordered McPherson to carry the Confederate position. Quickly deploying the divisions commanded by Major General John A. Logan and Brigadier General Alvin P. Hovey, McPherson moved to the attack. Pressing forward, Hovey's division attacked Stevenson's right, while Logan assaulted his left. By 1:30 p. m., the bluecoats had captured the crest of Champion Hill, the Crossroad beyond, and 16 Confederate cannon. Furthermore, Stevenson's division had been terribly mauled.

All this time, there had been only slight skirmishing on the Middle and Raymond roads. McClernand, operating under orders from Grant "to move cautiously," had kept a tight rein on the Union troops in this sector. Likewise, Major General William W. Loring's and Brigadier General John S. Bowen's Confederate soldiers had maintained a passive attitude while Pemberton's left was cut to pieces.

It was about 2 p. m. before Bowen's combat-ready division moved to Stevenson's support. Surging forward, Bowen's Arkansans and Missourians

shattered Hovey's Union division, recaptured a number of the Confederate cannon, regained the Crossroad, and the crest of Champion Hill. For a few moments, it looked as if the Confederates would be able to cut Grant's army in two. Unfortunately for the Southerners, Loring had not moved to Bowen's support as directed by Pemberton. There were no reserves available to exploit Bowen's success. To make matters worse, a fresh Union division led by Brigadier General Marcellus M. Crocker had arrived on the field. Supported by the fire of 16 cannon, Crocker's men moved into the breach and checked Bowen's onslaught.

Having recovered the initiative, the Federals again ascended Champion Hill, pushing the Confederates before them. The crest of the hill and the Crossroad beyond, along with the Confederate guns, changed hands for a third and final time. In addition, McClernand had now received instructions from Grant to attack. Pressing forward, McClernand's soldiers easily brushed aside the Confederate troops manning the roadblock on the Middle road.

Pemberton, realizing that the day was lost, ordered his men to fall back to the Big Black River. Bowen's division and Stevenson's mauled command were able to break contact with the foe and retreat across Bakers Creek. Loring's division, which covered Pemberton's retreat, was unable to withdraw across the creek. Loring, believing that it would be impossible to rejoin Pemberton, retreated to Crystal Springs.

Having won the decisive battle of the Vicksburg campaign, Grant's Army of the Tennessee slept upon the field. The great victory had cost the Federals 410 dead, 1,844 wounded, and 187 missing. Pemberton's incomplete tabulation of his losses listed 381 killed, 1,018 wounded, and 2,441 missing. In addition, Loring, during his rapid march to Crystal Springs, had seen his division melt from 7,700 to 4,800, as many stragglers dropped out. The Confederates also saw 27 of their cannon fall into the Federals' hands.

Although many Confederate authorities did not realize it, the battle of Champion Hill had sealed the fate of "Fortress" Vicksburg. On the morning of May 17, General Pemberton ordered General Bowen to hold the line of fortifications covering the Big Black Bridge. Pemberton wanted the bridgehead held pending news of the fate of General Loring's division. The Confederate commander did not know that Loring's division had been cut off and was en route to Crystal Springs.

In the meantime, General Grant's Army of the Tennessee had resumed its

drive on Vicksburg. By mid-morning, General McClernand's XIII Corps had taken position in front of the Confederate fortifications guarding the Big Black Bridge. At the same time, General Sherman's XV Corps was moving on Bridgeport, while General McPherson's XVII Corps was concentrating at Amsterdam. Before McPherson's and Sherman's troops could get into position, McClernand's had attacked and routed the Confederate troops holding the bridgehead.

The Southerners, after burning the bridges, fell back into the Vicksburg defenses. Grant immediately put his pioneers to work throwing bridges across the Big Black. By the next morning, all the bridges had been completed. Crossing the Big Black, the Army of the Tennessee rapidly pushed on. Sherman's and McPherson's corps moved along the Bridgeport road; McClernand's advanced on the Jackson and Baldwin's Ferry roads. Night-fall on the 18th found Grant's army near the defenses of Vicksburg. On the right, Sherman's troops were in contact with the Confederate outposts.

Pemberton's defeated legions had reached Vicksburg the previous evening, where they were greeted by two fresh divisions led by Major Generals John H. Forney and Martin L. Smith. These two units had held the Vicksburg defenses while Pemberton was in the field. Without hesitating a moment, Pemberton ordered his 32,000 men into the earthworks. Consisting of nine strong points connected by a line of trenches, the works protecting Vicksburg from a land attack were about nine miles in extent. Pemberton knew that the Union army was advancing by way of the Jackson and Bridgeport roads, so he ordered Smith's and Forney's troops to hold the rifle pits on the left and center. General Stevenson's division, which had been roughly handled at Champion Hill, was given the task of defending the Confederate right. Bowen's combat-tested troops were to constitute Pemberton's strategic reserve. Colonel Edward Higgins' River Defense forces would continue to guard the river front.

On the morning of the 19th, Sherman's corps succeeded in establishing contact with units of Admiral Porter's fleet north of the city. The Confederate defenders were now isolated with the Union army on one side, the navy on the other. Made bold by his victories at Champion Hill and the Big Black, Grant scheduled an assault on Vicksburg for the afternoon of the 19th.

Only Sherman's corps had established itself close to the Confederate works. Therefore, Sherman was the only Union corps commander who

was able to drive his attack home. Sherman hurled Major General Frank P. Blair's division against the Confederate defenses in the Stockade Redan sector held by units from Forney's and Smith's commands. The dense abatis in front of the Southerners' works served to throw Blair's battle lines into confusion. Soldiers from three of Blair's regiments reached the ditch fronting Stockade Redan, but they were unable to mount the parapet. The rest of Blair's troops, unable to breast the Confederates' fire, were pinned down. Throughout the remainder of the long, hot afternoon, the bluecoats and butternuts blazed away at one another.

Many of the Union soldiers fired all their ammunition. Volunteers were sent to the rear to bring forward additional cartridges. One of these, Musician Orion P. Howe, age 14 years, was awarded the Medal of Honor for carrying out this hazardous assignment. On the other portions of the front, McClernand's and McPherson's troops established themselves within several hundred yards of the Confederate earthworks.

At dark, Blair withdrew his men from their proximity to the Confederate works. To harass the Union efforts to pull back, the Southerners set fire to several buildings near the redan. Thus, Grant's first attempt to take Vicksburg by storm had ended in failure. This attack had cost the Federals more than 900 casualties, most of them in Blair's division. Confederate losses totaled less than 100 officers and men.

Undaunted by this repulse, Grant planned a second assault on the defenses of Vicksburg. Admiral Porter agreed to co-operate with the army. The attack was set for 10 a. m. on May 22. For several hours before the beginning of the onslaught, the Union gunners (both the army and the navy) blasted the butternuts' defenses with a fierce bombardment.

At 10 a. m., the guns suddenly fell silent and the Union infantry surged forward. Sherman's XV Corps, spearheaded by 150 volunteers, again drove against the Stockade Redan. In the Jackson road sector, McPherson's troops attacked Forney's division defending the Great Redoubt and the 3d Louisiana Redan. Within a few minutes, the hard-fighting Confederates had stopped McPherson's and Sherman's soldiers. McClernand's bluecoats attacked the Railroad Redoubt and the 2d Texas Lunette. At the redoubt, the Federals scored a penetration. The 30th Alabama was forced to fall back. McClernand, however, had committed all his troops. To exploit his success, McClernand would have to have reinforcements. He called upon Grant for assistance. Besides ordering one of McPherson's divisions to McClernand's

support, Grant directed McPherson and Sherman to renew the attack. This they did, but with no more success than before. Furthermore, Pemberton had thrown in his reserves. Counterattacking, Waul's Texas Legion recovered the Railroad Redoubt, and the breach in the Confederate lines was sealed. Pemberton's Confederates had rebuffed Grant in his second effort to storm Vicksburg. In the fighting on the 22d, the Federals had suffered 3,199 casualties; the Southerners had lost less than 500.

Following this check, Grant determined to lay siege to the Vicksburg Confederates. At this time, Grant's army mustered about 45,000 strong. If Grant were to besiege the city, while fending off the armies which the Southern authorities would assemble to relieve Pemberton, he would have to be reinforced. In answer to Grant's call for help, troops were rushed to the Mississippi Theatre of Operations from points as far off as Kentucky and Missouri. By the middle of June, Grant's army had increased to over 77,000 officers and men.

In the meantime, the Federals had forged an iron ring around Vicksburg. Ammunition, food, and reinforcements were cut off from Pemberton's beleaguered army. On the river, the Union navy reigned supreme. Thousands of shells were hurled into the city by the Union sailors. In addition, the gunboats held at bay the Confederate forces attempting to relieve Vicksburg from the Trans-Mississippi. At the same time, the Union engineers pushed 13 approach trenches toward the Confederate earthworks. Advance batteries were established. Soon, the Federal artillery was in complete ascendancy. On June 25 and again on July 1, mines were detonated under the 3d Louisiana Redan. After the first of these explosions, the Federals launched a fierce attack. Bringing up the crack 6th Missouri, the Confederates checked this Union thrust. On July 4, when Vicksburg surrendered, the bluecoats were preparing to place mines under a number of Confederate strong points.

During the siege, there was hostile activity during the daylight hours, but informal truces and fraternization at night. Since these favored the besiegers, the Confederate officers tried to stop them. When they were unable to prevent the fraternization, they tried to control it. Near Stockade Redan, a "trysting place" was located. Here, men who had relatives and friends in the opposing armies were allowed to meet in the presence of officers.

Finally, on July 2, Pemberton became convinced that the large army led by General Joseph E. Johnston would not come to his relief. Confronted by

a dwindling supply of food, and his troops' loss of the will to fight, the Confederate general decided to approach Grant and see on what terms he could surrender. On July 3, Pemberton and Grant met to talk over possible terms for the capitulation of Vicksburg. Grant demanded "unconditional surrender," and the meeting broke up. During the night, Grant modified his terms. He would not insist on an "unconditional surrender." Pemberton accepted Grant's new proposition. At 10 a. m. on July 4, the Vicksburg garrison, 29,491 strong, marched out of their works and stacked their arms in token of surrender.

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