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Vicksburg

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Vicksburg

On July 4, 1863, in Pennsylvania and in Mississippi, the tide of war turned. On that day, while the great battle of Gettysburg raged in the East, General Ulysses S. Grant rode into Vicksburg, the last Confederate bastion on the Mississippi River.

Grant had begun his Vicksburg campaign in November, 1862. Under him he had four army corps commanded by Major Generals John A. McClernand, William T. Sherman, Cadwallader C. Washburn, and James B. McPherson. Iowa furnished twenty-eight infantry, two artillery, and two cavalry regiments to the various corps.

A number of Iowans commanded divisions and brigades during the campaign. James M. Tuttle, originally of the 2nd Iowa, Jacob C. Lauman of the 7th, Marcellus M. Crocker of the 13th, and Francis J. Herron of the 9th, now all brigadier generals, commanded divisions. Three other brigadiers — Charles L. Matthies, Hugh T. Reid, and William Vandever — led brigades, as did Colonels Joseph J. Woods, William Hall, and Alexander Chambers. Colonel Cyrus Bussey commanded the cavalry of the 17th Army Corps.

Grant's first plan was to march south from La

Grange, Tennessee, to the rear of Vicksburg, meanwhile sending Sherman's corps by boat to strike from the Yazoo River north of Vicksburg. Both projects failed: Grant's because Van Dorn cut his supply lines; Sherman's because Vicksburg was too well protected by the impassable swamps and bayous of the Yazoo. At the battle of Chickasaw Bayou, on December 27-29, Sherman was defeated and forced to retreat to the Mississippi.

While Grant withdrew to Memphis to regroup his forces, Sherman and McClernand, on January 10-11, 1863, attacked and captured Arkansas Post, some fifty miles up the Arkansas River, in order to clear this area west of the Mississippi of a Confederate concentration. In this attack Sherman lost 598 men, of whom 247 were Iowans.

On January 29 Grant moved his headquarters south to Young's Point on the west bank of the Mississippi nearly opposite Vicksburg. His problem was to get below Vicksburg, where the terrain was better for fighting. First, efforts were made to build canals from the Mississippi to Lake Providence, on the west bank of the river, and thence through bayous to the Red River, which entered the Mississippi below Vicksburg. These efforts failed, however, and as spring approached, Grant made other plans. His solution was to march his men south on the west side of the river, meanwhile running the fleet and supply ships he would need past the batteries of Vicksburg. On

the night of April 16 the run was made, led by Admiral David Porter in the flagship *Benton*. The boats were under constant fire for two hours, the shoreline lit by bonfires and burning houses, but most of them escaped without serious damage. "The sight was magnificent, but terrible," wrote Grant.

The men of Grant's army corps now marched south and crossed the river at Bruinsburg, Mississippi, bypassing the heavily fortified Grand Gulf, after a naval attack on that city had failed. On May 1 enough men had crossed to attack and occupy Port Gibson, a few miles east of Bruinsburg. Then the march northward to the rear of Vicksburg began.

Unknown to Grant's army until later, a brilliant cavalry raid by Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson had helped clear the way for their advance. Grierson of the 6th Illinois Cavalry, with his own regiment, the 7th Illinois, and the 2nd Iowa Cavalry, had left La Grange, Tennessee, on April 17, ordered south to "play smash with the railroads." Leading the 2nd Iowa Cavalry was Colonel Edward Hatch of Muscatine. On April 21, to mask his movements, Grierson detached Hatch's 2nd Iowa as a decoy, sending them back to La Grange, and the Confederates wasted much time and energy chasing Hatch, while Grierson and his two Illinois regiments continued their movement south, tearing up railroads and cutting telegraph

lines. The day after Grant took Port Gibson, Grierson and his ragged troopers entered Baton Rouge, Louisiana, completing what Sherman called "the most brilliant expedition of the war."

A steady stream of Union men now moved north. Vicksburg was supplied from the east by a railroad running through Jackson, some fifty miles away. Near Vicksburg was the Big Black River; at Jackson, the Pearl River. Along this railroad, and between these two rivers, Grant fought four brilliant battles before he reached Vicksburg. First came an engagement at Raymond, brief but hard fought, on May 12. Grant then turned his army toward Jackson, where the Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston was in command. If Vicksburg's defender, General John C. Pemberton, had moved toward Jackson fast enough, Grant would have been caught in a trap. But Pemberton could not bring himself to leave Vicksburg unguarded.

On May 14 McPherson approached Jackson from the north, Sherman from the south, in the midst of a violent thunderstorm. Crocker's division led the first assault on Jackson, with the roar of cannon mingling with rumblings of thunder. Again the 17th Iowa proved itself in a fierce charge across an open field and was first inside the enemy lines, suffering casualties to 80 of the 350 men of the regiment. Jackson fell easily, but Johnston managed to escape northward with most

of his men. He promptly sent a message to Pemberton, ordering him to "come up" in the Union rear, but Grant intercepted a copy of the message and quickly turned his great army westward. To prevent Johnston and Pemberton from joining forces, Grant ordered McClernand, who was nearest to Vicksburg, to move at once. Two divisions of McClernand's corps met Pemberton, strongly intrenched on Champion's Hill, on the morning of May 16. The battle which ensued has been considered one of the most important of the war, since it drove Pemberton back beyond the Big Black River and from there into Vicksburg, and cut him off from Johnston. The short, fierce battle lasted only four hours and resulted in some 2,400 Union casualties, of which 590 were Iowans.

At the Big Black, Pemberton made a last stand before retreating into Vicksburg. Brigadier General Michael K. Lawler's brigade of Carr's division of McClernand's corps met Pemberton at the Big Black on May 17. With Lawler were three Iowa regiments, the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd. This brigade lost 279 casualties in the battle, 221 of whom were Iowans. The colonel of the 23rd, William H. Kinsman of Council Bluffs, fell mortally wounded while leading a charge; Colonel Samuel Merrill of the 21st was severely wounded. McPherson's corps came to Lawler's aid, and Pemberton was again defeated. The Confeder-

ates managed to burn the bridge before retreating, thus preventing Grant from following up this victory before the enemy could reach Vicksburg.

On May 18 Grant moved his men across the river to begin the investment of Vicksburg, placing Sherman on the right, McPherson in the center, and McClernand on the left. Later, Washburn's 16th Corps arrived on McClernand's left. The encirclement of the city was completed by Union gunboats in the river. On May 22 Grant made his only assault on Vicksburg, and although many of his regiments reached the Confederate fortifications under a merciless fire, they could not hold them, and Grant settled down to a siege.

By night the Union army pushed its trenches closer and closer to the city, while the pickets of both armies, often within only a few feet of each other, chatted and traded. At last the constant bombardment from Grant's guns and from the gunboats in the river wore down the citizens and soldiers in Vicksburg. About 10 o'clock on the morning of July 3 the soldiers in the Union trenches saw white flags appearing on the enemy

CYRUS BUSSEY



EDWARD HATCH



J. A. WILLIAMSON



works. At 3 o'clock that afternoon Grant and Pemberton met between the lines. On July 4 Grant's victorious army entered Vicksburg.

Almost eighteen hundred Iowans were casualties of the Vicksburg campaign: 330 killed, 1,347 wounded, and 114 missing. Four Iowans won Congressional Medals of Honor: Colonel James A. Williamson of the 4th Iowa at Chickasaw Bayou; First Lieutenant James Hill of Cascade, 21st Iowa, at Champion's Hill; and Sergeants James M. Elson of Palo, 9th Iowa, and Leonidas M. Godley of Ashland, 22nd Iowa, in the May 22 assault on Vicksburg.

General Halleck wrote to Grant: "You and your army have well deserved the gratitude of your country, and it will be the boast of your children that their fathers were of the heroic army which reopened the Mississippi River."

The Iowa Monument at Vicksburg National Military Park

