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**Southern leadership during the
Vicksburg Campaign**

**PhD History Thesis
University of Kent**

2010

**Submitted by: Ray Backler
Supervised by: Dr. George Conyne**



F 220513

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Thesis Abstract

The Confederate surrender at Vicksburg on the 4th July 1863 was a disaster for the South during the American Civil War, because it caused the loss of control of the Mississippi River Valley. President Jefferson Davis was responsible for the loss of Vicksburg, not because the Union had superior resources, but because of his own shortcomings, chief of which were: not providing a co-ordinated defence plan for the West, incorrectly assessing the capabilities of his western generals, failing to understand the deficiencies in his own capabilities, and not reacting to the change needed, as the North developed new tactics to prosecute the war.

Whilst the main historical facts of Davis' involvement are well documented by Woodworth (1990), W. C. Davis (1991), Cooper (2000) and Ballard (2004), the extent of the political failures of the President have not been fully explored in relation to the Vicksburg catastrophe. Woodworth, in a seminal work, has examined the failure of Confederate command in the Western Theatre for the whole Civil War. Cooper and Davis, the President's most comprehensive biographers, have reviewed his Civil War career. Ballard has produced the standard account of the Vicksburg Campaign. These historians provided analysis of Davis' shortcomings during the Vicksburg Campaign, but there was room for a more detailed treatment as to how the defeat occurred.

The Mississippi River Valley was attacked from the north under the command of Major-General Ulysses S. Grant, using both banks of the river. In early 1863, the Confederate geographical command structure was still split along the line of the Mississippi River, with Lieutenant-General Edmund Kirby Smith in charge on the west bank and General Joseph E. Johnston in command on the east. Johnston was with the Army of Tennessee, commanded by his other key subordinate General Braxton Bragg, in Chattanooga many miles to the east of Vicksburg. Lieutenant-General John C. Pemberton, at Vicksburg, was left in isolation to control the forces on the east bank of the river.

There was little co-operation between the Confederate forces in the Western Theatre and an earlier attempt by Secretary of War George W. Randolph to insist that Lieutenant-General Theophilus H. Holmes, commanding in Arkansas, provide reinforcements to Pemberton, lead to Randolph's resignation. Neither Davis nor Kirby Smith ordered Holmes to support the defence of Vicksburg. Instead, Davis ordered the reinforcement of Pemberton by the detachment of a division from the already-outnumbered Army of Tennessee.

Pemberton enjoyed the support and friendship of Davis, but Johnston, as his superior, was hampered by this relationship. Davis was the only person able to change the situation because, whilst he was in control of the appointments and the geographical command structure, he was also in a position to support Johnston rather than isolate him. Thus the weak political leadership of Davis, despite the relative individual abilities of the military commanders, set up the conditions for the Confederacy to lose Vicksburg and created a strategic framework within which the subsequent military operations did not succeed.

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My supervisor, Dr. George Conyne, has had to cope with more than would normally be expected of a supervisor, because this was my first foray into the world of historical research. My thanks for his challenging comments and his advice in shaping this thesis. We both know that it couldn't have been done without him.

My wife, Sue, has been tremendous in her support throughout the last six years. I couldn't have completed this project without her. There were many challenges in unexpected aspects of our lives. She visited every Civil War battlefield and archive with me and has whiled away long hours without me during the writing process. I can only give my love and thanks.

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Chapter one

Introduction and literature review

Introduction

Criticisms by the historians Woodworth (1990),¹ W. C. Davis (1991)² and Cooper (2000),³ of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, in relation to the loss of Vicksburg on 4th July 1863, have been reduced because of mitigation arising from the poor performances of General Joseph E. Johnston, his commander of the Department of the West, and Lieutenant-General John C. Pemberton, Johnston's subordinate commander in Vicksburg. Admiration, amongst these same historians, for the brilliant campaign conducted by Major-General Ulysses S. Grant on behalf of the Union, has also muted criticism of Davis. When examining the entire Civil War, Woodworth, W. C. Davis and Cooper, have concluded that Jefferson Davis performed well, because he defied the superior resources of the North for four years, only just falling short of securing independence. However, when examining the Vicksburg Campaign, Davis' poor performance has been obscured by his better overall performance in the war. He knew of the shortcomings of his leading western generals from their earlier performances in the Civil War, yet he expected radical changes in their established capabilities. Communications between the President in Richmond and the western armies were slow, so orders were necessarily advisory rather than peremptory. Changes to the prevailing local conditions could not be anticipated by Davis, so of necessity he had to allow his

¹ Steven E. Woodworth, *Jefferson Davis and his generals. The failure of Confederate command in the West*, University Press of Kansas, (Lawrence, 1990).

² William C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis. The man and his hour*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1996). This was a paperback edition of the 1991 original.

³ William J. Cooper Jr., *Jefferson Davis. American*, Vintage Books, New York, 2001. This was a paperback edition of the 2000 original.

departmental commanders leeway to interpret his orders as they saw fit. Davis expected his generals to co-operate without detailing his co-ordinating plans, in the absence of which local commanders continued to pursue local objectives. He allowed command problems in Tennessee, Arkansas and Mississippi to remain unresolved that had the effect of diverting resources away from Vicksburg. Davis was mainly responsible for the loss of Vicksburg, not because the Union had superior resources, but because of his shortcomings, chief of which were: not providing a co-ordinated defence plan for the West, incorrectly assessing the capabilities of his western generals, failing to understand the deficiencies in his own capabilities, and not reacting to the change needed, as the North developed new tactics to prosecute the war.

Southern leadership in the Civil War was confused between the political and military dimensions, as well as by the rigid geographic department structure that placed political as well as military pressures on the department commanders. At divisional level of command, co-operation with other divisional commanders was necessary, as well as with the co-ordinating orders from the army commander, but division commanders were not normally subjected to inordinate political interference. Commanders of small armies that were little more than a division in size, operated in a similar way to divisional commanders and were subject to orders from the departmental commander that always had a political dimension. Within larger armies two or more divisions were controlled by a corps commander. This was a powerful military position that had little or no political responsibility. At the next level of command, the commander of a larger army almost always had the dual role as a civilian commander, as the incumbent was usually designated to be in charge of a department. As a departmental commander, this civilian

responsibility made it difficult for the incumbent to move outside of the geographical area, even when an army required leadership if it moved outside of its departmental base. When the additional level of theatre command was added, the incumbent was controlling multiple departments and multiple armies, with political involvement with the Confederate government in Richmond and political involvement on a local level through each of his departmental commanders. Departmental commanders sometimes also had to deal directly with Richmond. This interfered with the new concept of theatre command that was introduced with the inception of the Department of the West during the Vicksburg Campaign. This complex structure was highly dependent on the capabilities of the individuals involved and the Vicksburg Campaign exposed the weaknesses in this command structure because of individual frailties. The similar structure in the East, as it operated under Davis and General Robert E. Lee, was not blighted in the same way. This thesis has examined the Western Confederate leadership, through reviewing the contribution of the important divisional, corps, army, department and theatre commanders and has considered the interaction of these military leaders between themselves and with the political leadership, in so far as it has affected the Vicksburg Campaign.

As the architect of the departmental system, Davis had a stubborn streak that meant he refused to consider making changes to the rigid geographical command structure he had created in the West, despite extensive criticism from his contemporaries. He was always convinced he was right, to the point where once he made up his mind he seldom changed it, even when it was necessary because of the changing situation. He stood by his appointees, provided they stood by him, even when it was obvious to others

that there were questions over their competence. After the fall of Vicksburg, Davis, in adversity, reacted by retreating into an extremely detailed critical letter of thirty-four numbered points to Johnston.⁴ Davis handled several disputes like this during his lifetime, the most famous example being his bitter dispute with Winfield Scott during 1855-6, whilst he was in office as United States Secretary of War.⁵ Handling adversity in this way satisfied Davis, but alienated the recipient. These personality shortcomings were exposed by the extraordinary pressures placed on the Confederate leadership during the Vicksburg Campaign and this thesis has examined the performance of the President in this context.

The prevailing Southern political culture produced politicians that were less tolerant than many of their Northern counterparts. Fire-Eaters led the drive toward secession in defence of the institution of slavery, a subject on which there could be no compromise with the North. Many in the North, including President Abraham Lincoln, were seen collectively as abolitionists. Lincoln's election was considered in the South as an inflammatory act. However, Lincoln had professed a desire to change slavery in the South over a long period of time, by working with Southern politicians, but he was seen as a 'Black' Republican and sufficient Fire-Eaters in the South drove through secession. Southern political culture was rooted in the plantation structure, where the owner ruled his family and his slaves. Such men, driven by concepts of Southern honour, were not used to having their political authority challenged. When Davis made a decision, he was used to pressing on toward his objective, regardless of any opposition, a trait shared by many of the leading politicians in the states making up the Confederacy. As President,

⁴ Joseph E. Johnston, *Narrative of Military Operations During the Civil War*, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1990), pp. 230-241. This was an unabridged reproduction of the original version published as: *Narrative of military operations directed during the late War Between the States*, D Appleton, (New York, 1874).

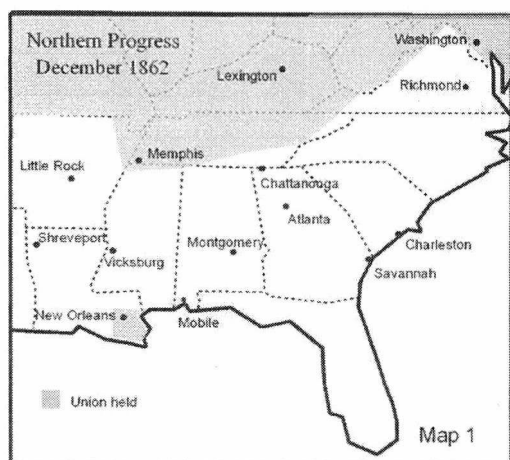
⁵ W. C. Davis, *Davis*, pp. 228-230.

Davis had to operate within the strictures of this culture, which led to disputes with State Governors, senior State politicians and Confederate members of Congress. Opposition increased as the war progressed and Davis, ever sensitive to criticism, was influenced in his political and military decision making. The effect of the prevailing Southern culture on Davis during the Vicksburg Campaign has been examined in this thesis.

Davis was a proud man, trained at West Point, a hero of the Mexican War and an experienced politician on the national stage, where he held strong opinions on the issues of the day, in defence of Southern rights. Davis was unable to consider flexibility in the geographical western command structure and the military hierarchy he had promulgated. Within that framework he stubbornly persevered by ignoring the established capabilities of his western generals that, at the campaign's outset, virtually eliminated any chance of success. The President had turned a blind eye to the earlier shortcomings of his favoured commanders, but these shortcomings, and more, were revealed again during the Vicksburg Campaign, returning to haunt the President. This thesis provided an opportunity to examine how Davis' inflexibility and his poor judgement of his commanders affected the Vicksburg Campaign.

Davis had designated Vicksburg as the next most important point in the Confederacy to defend, after Richmond. He did not issue direct orders to ensure there was co-operation from the Trans-Mississippi for the defence of Vicksburg. No common strategic plan existed to determine the defence of the Mississippi River Valley. Defence of the west bank of the Mississippi River, in order to save Vicksburg, was entirely dependent on the voluntary co-operation of the Trans-Mississippi commanders, who experienced local pressures that diverted them from the central goal of keeping the

navigation of the river closed to the Union. There was scope within this thesis to examine how the ineffective command in the Trans-Mississippi was allowed to happen, preventing unified command in the Mississippi River Valley, and how this affected the outcome of the Vicksburg Campaign.



Early in the war, the Union armies captured Memphis and New Orleans, which increased the significance of Vicksburg to the Southern war effort, because it was soon the only remaining obstacle to Union control of the Mississippi River Valley. The capture of Vicksburg became the key to Union success in

the Western Theatre, and huge resources were applied to the campaign under a command that was unified on both banks of the Mississippi River. During the Vicksburg Campaign Major-General Ulysses S. Grant, supported by Major-General William T. Sherman, began to develop the concept of widening the scope of the war. This included targeting the civilian resources the South used to support the war effort, as well as the destruction of the Southern armies. This contrasted with the Southern strategy at Vicksburg, of holding the city and risking an army to do it. The tactical development of the Union war effort was not understood by Davis or any of his leading generals, with the exception of Johnston. Since Davis' concept of defence pinned Pemberton's army within Vicksburg, it helped to achieve exactly the objective that Grant wanted. Whilst Grant demonstrated greater leadership capabilities in the Vicksburg Campaign than Pemberton or Johnston, he was aided by the poor strategy promulgated by Davis from afar. This thesis has

explored the extent to which poor Southern leadership contributed to the loss of Vicksburg, where there was a failure to understand the development of new practices in the way the war was conducted, a factor that has been overshadowed by the Northern tenacity and brilliance exhibited during the campaign.

Davis did not understand every aspect of the changes in tactics that occurred in the Civil War. When in Mexico, he had ensured that his regiment was armed with rifled muskets, so he was well aware of the effect on range and the effect on accuracy that this weapon had over smooth-bore musketry. This caused the development of trench warfare during the Civil War, initially in the form of rifle pits, often enhanced by logs that gave significant advantages to the defenders. Offensive actions usually had to have some military advantage to succeed, such as surprise or a defensive error; otherwise a disproportionate amount of troops was needed to carry the day. The victor was usually the army in possession of the field at the end of the battle, and the defeated army was allowed to retreat, because the casualties and disruption in the victor's army caused sufficient disarray that a pursuit was not attempted. Outright victories rarely happened until after the Vicksburg Campaign had changed Union thinking toward the relentless pursuit of attritional tactics.

After the likelihood of a quick finish to the war was eliminated and the possibility of foreign intervention waned, the only hope of winning the war in the South was by prolonging the conflict. The Southern objective became to fight on for so long that public support for the war in the North dwindled, forcing a peace by popular demand. Grant saw that the only way the North could win the war was by destroying Southern armies. The Vicksburg Campaign enabled an examination of these objectives. Grant

wanted to destroy the Confederate army. Johnston wanted to keep this army manoeuvrable, using Fabian tactics, and avoid defeat for the South; but that meant giving up Vicksburg, even though his intention was to do this temporarily. Pemberton wanted to follow Davis' orders and hold on to Vicksburg. Adhering to the doctrine of holding the city played into Grant's hands. Johnston was brought into yet more conflict with Davis over their differing policy. Davis took the risk of losing the army as well as the city, even when he was aware of the leadership problems in the West and he stubbornly continued along his given path to the loss of Vicksburg, a place that politically and militarily he could ill afford to lose.

Official Records

The most important element of every study of the American Civil War was *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*.⁶ This has hereinafter been referred to as *O.R.*, in common with the practice of most historians. This key work was produced at the direction of the United States government, shortly after the war, who ordered the compilation of the Official Records from the documentation from both sides of the conflict, and it has been essential to every Civil War researcher.

Historiography on Southern leadership at Vicksburg

Leadership in the Civil War in the West, from a Southern viewpoint, has not received much attention from historians. It was some sixty years after the end of the

⁶ United States of America, War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 volumes, Government Printing Office, (Washington D. C., 1880-1901).

Civil War before leadership as a topic began to be addressed. Many historians have referred to Southern leadership briefly, within works that have a wider perspective, within works detailing particular campaigns, or in biographies, where the central focus was the life of the individual concerned. There was an extensive gap in time between the works of Thomas Robson Hay, who wrote some sixty years after the war ended on the topic of Southern leadership at Vicksburg, and the point at which others began to return to the subject, after more than another thirty years had elapsed.

The earliest analysis of Southern leadership at Vicksburg was in 1925 when, in an early seminal article, Hay argued that Pemberton and Davis differed from Johnston because they thought that their primary objective was to save Vicksburg, whereas Johnston thought that securing his army was the most important objective.⁷ Hay discussed Pemberton's previous command in South Carolina, suggesting that his performance there would not bode well for the future.⁸ His essay pointed to areas of further inquiry.

Ulysses S. Grant III (1958),⁹ the grandson of the Union commander during the Vicksburg Campaign, has considered the key aspects of military strategy for the Civil War. He concluded that: possession of the railroads and rivers, keeping armies mobile rather than defending fixed points, speed of movement, properly trained armies, the destruction of opposing armies and avoidance of confused leadership, were the important war strategies that conferred advantages to the North. These key strategies were all exhibited during the Vicksburg Campaign and warranted an examination of the Confederate response.

⁷ Thomas Robson Hay, "Confederate Leadership at Vicksburg", *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 11, No. 4. (Mar., 1925), p. 558.

⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 546-7.

⁹ Ulysses S. Grant, III, "Military Strategy for the Civil War", *Military Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 1. (Spring, 1958), pp. 13-25.

Archer Jones (1961)¹⁰ considered the whole Southern war strategy from Shiloh in April 1862, until the loss of Vicksburg in July the following year. Later, he collaborated with Thomas L. Connelly (1973)¹¹, to develop further understanding by considering the political influences on Confederate strategy for the whole war. Jones has produced a leading account of how Confederate strategy for the war evolved into the departmental system that was well developed by the time of the Vicksburg Campaign. Subsequently, Connelly and Jones have concluded that those who influenced Davis needed to be studied as they had a bearing on his decision-making. They asserted that Davis placed too much responsibility on local commanders, who were then allowed to become parochial in their outlook because of the lack of a strong central direction, whilst the President then failed to provide the co-ordination that was needed to get the best out of this departmental system of command.¹² Their examination of these factors specifically in relation to the Vicksburg Campaign is expanded in this thesis.

Thomas L. Connelly (1970) challenged the accepted view of Hay and other historians that the loss of Vicksburg cut the Confederacy in half, preventing the flow of much-needed supplies from the Trans-Mississippi to the Cis-Mississippi.¹³ He suggested that this east-west flow of goods was a fiction and that the real issue was the propaganda value of the opening of the Mississippi River, to gain support from disaffected northerners for the Union government at a crucial time. He argued that Davis had made defence of Vicksburg a central issue in his speeches, which exaggerated the importance of the city to the Southern cause. Connelly did not challenge the record of the Southern

¹⁰ Archer Jones, *Confederate strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1961).

¹¹ Thomas L. Connelly and Archer Jones, *The politics of command, factions and ideas in Confederate strategy*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1973).

¹² *Ibid.* p. 189.

¹³ Thomas L. Connelly, "Vicksburg: Strategic Point or Propaganda Device?", *Military Affairs*, Vol. 34, No. 2. (Apr., 1970), pp. 49-53. *Military Affairs* is currently published by Society for Military History.

leadership at Vicksburg, except to refer to Davis' insistence that the geographical command structure remain intact on either side of the Mississippi River. This thesis has examined Davis' reasoning further, including his actions to defend the geographical command structure and its effect on the Vicksburg outcome.

There have been general studies of the Civil War from a Confederate perspective, which included the study of the Vicksburg Campaign by Beringer et al. (1986), and, most important, by Woodworth (1990), who examined the western Confederate leadership.¹⁴ Beringer and his colleagues argued that the primary reason for the loss of the war was that the South lost the will to fight, despite sufficient military resources to continue. Woodworth's study of Confederate command in the West included a review of the Vicksburg Campaign. However Woodworth's wider work did not review in depth the Southern leadership during the Vicksburg Campaign. Woodworth argued that it was a failure of command that was the prime cause of Confederate defeat and, in relation to Vicksburg; he added that failure of the generals to co-operate contributed. In looking at the whole western command, Woodworth criticised Davis, but concluded that he fell short by only a small margin. Examination of these leaders and their leadership issues indicated that further work could be pursued, to understand how the Confederacy lost this city that was so critical to their cause.

In a review of the two books by Beringer et al. and Woodworth, Brooks D. Simpson (1994) argued that Union successes caused the ultimate defeat at Vicksburg, and that it was unreasonable to expect Davis or any of his commanders to have never made an

¹⁴ Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones and William N. Still, Jr., *Why the South lost the Civil War*, The University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1986. Steven E. Woodworth, *Jefferson Davis and His Generals: The Failure of Confederate Command in the West*, University Press of Kansas, (Lawrence, 1990).

error.¹⁵ He believed that the reason for a lack of Southern will was a succession of battlefield defeats. Simpson concluded that Grant and Sherman took, as their objective, the destruction of the Confederacy, through the elimination of its forces in the field. Simpson argued that it was possible to point to similar mistakes by the northern commanders, but the North's success came from superior resources and took place on Southern soil, helping to destroy Southern morale. This thesis has considered the loss of civilian morale in the South that occurred through the defeat at Vicksburg.

Woodworth (1990) identified four major mistakes that Davis made in relation to Vicksburg.¹⁶ He categorised these mistakes into either appointments or strategy. The appointees he identified as wrong were Johnston and Pemberton. The strategic errors were the geographical command structure in the West and the approval of the Gettysburg Campaign. Of these, Woodworth argued that allowing Lee to advance to Gettysburg, instead of reinforcing Vicksburg with a division while the rest of Lee's force remained well-entrenched in front of Richmond, would not have changed the outcome at Vicksburg.¹⁷ Woodworth has conducted a study of the Western Theatre and these conclusions in relation to Vicksburg are valid, but there was considerable room to build on this existing work, through detailed analysis that focused on this campaign.

Ryan P. Toews (1991)¹⁸ has reviewed the Confederate departmental system throughout the Civil War. He concluded that Davis did not provide sufficient direction to his department commanders, and gave them too much latitude, thereby allowing them to function as they thought best rather than ensuring that they contributed to the larger goal

¹⁵ Brooks D. Simpson, "Review: Why the Cause Lost", *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 22, No. 1. (Mar., 1994), pp. 73-81. *Reviews in American History* is currently published by The Johns Hopkins University Press.

¹⁶ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, p. 219.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220.

¹⁸ Ryan P. Toews, *The departmental system and Confederate strategy in the West*, M. A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, (1991).

in the West of defence of the Confederacy against the major Union threats. Toews' work illuminated the departmental structure issue, specifically as it affected the Vicksburg Campaign.

Brian Holden Reid (2006)¹⁹ has commented on the 2001 translation of the works by the Prussian observer, Captain Justus Scheibert, who witnessed the Civil War siege operations in 1863. Holden Reid argued that eyewitnesses often concentrated on tactics and that Scheibert was probably the most astute of the European observers. Scheibert believed in the importance of: rifled siege guns, earthen bomb-proof forts, temporary field fortifications in battles, the logistical advantages of the rivers and railroads and co-ordination with naval operations. Scheibert also argued that brick and masonry forts were superseded and fortified cities led to excessive reliance on defence. Each of these aspects was evidenced in the Vicksburg Campaign and warranted further examination.

Vicksburg Campaign historiography

The first comprehensive account of the Vicksburg Campaign was by Carter (1980).²⁰ The campaign has been covered in extensive detail in three volumes by Bearss (1985-6).²¹ Since then, single-volume accounts have each examined the campaign from slightly different perspectives (Martin, 1990),²² (Fullenkamp et al. (eds.), 1998),²³ (Grabau, 2000),²⁴ (Shea and Winschel, 2003),²⁵ (Ballard, 2004)²⁶ and (Groom, 2009).²⁷

¹⁹ Brian Holden Reid, "A Signpost That Was Missed? Reconsidering British Lessons from the American Civil War", *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 70, No. 2. (Apr., 2006), pp. 392-3.

²⁰ Samuel Carter III, *The Final Fortress: The Campaign for Vicksburg 1862-1863*, St. Martin's Press, (New York, 1980).

²¹ Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign*, Three Volumes, Morningside House Inc., (Dayton, 1985-6).

²² David Martin, *The Vicksburg Campaign: April 1862 – July 1863*, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1994).

²³ Leonard Fullenkamp, Stephen Bowman and Jay Luvaas (eds.), *Guide to the Vicksburg Campaign*, University of Kansas Press, (Lawrence, 1998).

²⁴ Warren E. Grabau, *Ninety-Eight Days: A Geographer's View of the Vicksburg Campaign*, The University of Tennessee Press, (Knoxville, 2000).

²⁵ William L. Shea and Terrence J. Winschel, *Vicksburg is the Key: The struggle for the Mississippi River*, University of Nebraska Press, (Lincoln, 2003).

Another account has centred on the Battle of Champion Hill (Smith, T.B., 2006).²⁸

Winschel (2004 and 2006), the current National Park Historian at Vicksburg, has completed two volumes of essays concerning various aspects of the campaign, which provide some useful further information.²⁹

Carter's work was the scholarly standard until superseded by the later works. Bearss, as a predecessor to Winschel as the National Park Historian at Vicksburg, has concentrated on a detailed narrative of the entire campaign from Grant's first faltering steps. He tracked the movements of every unit on a daily basis. The work was invaluable in understanding how the campaign evolved. Bearss rarely passed opinion on the leadership issues and concentrated on what happened on the ground. Fullenkamp and colleagues have collaborated as part of a series called "The U. S. Army War College Guides to Civil War Battles." This guide was invaluable in understanding the developing campaign on a day-to-day basis. The works by Martin and Groom have been well-produced but do not contain references to sources and so are not useful to scholars for research, although a number of important points have been made. Groom, for instance, has identified some of the reasons for Pemberton's leadership problems in South Carolina. Grabau has produced a unique insight into the Vicksburg Campaign, concentrating on the terrain. Not only was the low-lying wetland a problem, along with the various rivers and bayous, but the sharply undulating landscape around the city brought further difficulties in using large armies in the field. Grabau explained extremely well the features that hampered the attackers and helped the defenders.

²⁶ Michael B. Ballard, *Vicksburg: The campaign that opened the Mississippi*, The University of North Carolina Press, (Chapel Hill, 2004).

²⁷ Winston Groom, *Vicksburg 1863*, Alfred A. Knopf, (New York, 2009).

²⁸ Timothy B. Smith, *Champion Hill: Decisive Battle for Vicksburg*, Savas Beattie, (New York, 2006).

²⁹ Terrence J. Winschel, *Triumph & Defeat: The Vicksburg Campaign*, 2 vols., Savas Beattie, (New York, 2004 and 2006).

Ballard widened the scope of his study of the Vicksburg Campaign to detail the effects on the local populace as well as the military situation. He was not critical of the southern leadership, but he did record that such criticism existed, including making reference to the fractious relationships that Johnston had with Davis and Pemberton. Ballard believed that Johnston was right, despite his defeatist attitude, to give up places and pick the correct locations for his battles.³⁰ Ballard's well-received work is the current scholarly standard and has superseded the excellent work by Shea and Winschel. Ballard's book has been reviewed by Grimsley (2006),³¹ who concluded that it was an advance on the works of Bearss and Shea and Winschel. Grimsley noted that one of the important aspects of the book was the attention given to the effects of the campaign on civilians, who were caught up in the first Northern hard war developments in the Civil War.

The title of Smith's book suggested that the central feature was the Battle of Champion Hill, but despite this he covered the preliminaries to the battle, including the problem of Southern leadership, but was brief in his coverage of the siege and surrender. Smith suggested that the campaign was won and lost at Champion Hill because afterward, once Pemberton was trapped, the result of the siege was certain. Smith was more critical of the Southern leadership than either Bearss or Ballard, mentioning the problems Pemberton had with Major-Generals William W. Loring and John S. Bowen. Smith was also critical of Davis for requiring Pemberton to report to the War Department as well as reporting to Johnston, which caused conflicting orders to be given. He further examined the performance of Johnston and the dispute with Davis that produced a life-

³⁰ Ballard, *Vicksburg*, p. 412.

³¹ Mark Grimsley, "Review: Vicksburg, The Campaign that opened the Mississippi by Michael B. Ballard", *American Historical Review*, Vol. 111, No. 1. (Feb., 2006), p. 182.

long animosity between the two men. Smith did not examine the adoption of the geographical structure, nor did he detail the performances of the key participants before they arrived at Vicksburg. Nevertheless, his account of the Vicksburg Campaign revealed many insights into the personnel involved. Smith claimed that his perspective was from the viewpoint of a military historian rather than an examination of the wider effects of the campaign, as examined by Ballard. This thesis has explored the direct instructions given to Pemberton that prevented Johnston from exercising full command. Understanding the campaign fully required an understanding of each of the key individuals involved. Pemberton, Johnston and Davis were most directly involved and each has been studied.

Pemberton

Lieutenant-General John C. Pemberton, the commander at Vicksburg during the campaign, has been examined from a number of sources. He has been defended in his own 1881 edited manuscript (Smith, D.M., 1999)³², by his grandson (Pemberton III, 1942)³³, by Ballard (1991)³⁴ and by Woodworth (2008).³⁵ Ballard has produced a well-balanced account that concluded that Pemberton was a field commander lacking in experience for such a vital role. He argued that Pemberton had difficulty in admitting his mistakes and was aloof, whilst being prone to bouts of uncertainty, when under pressure. Ballard had some sympathy with the additional strains under which Pemberton was placed because of his Northern birth and the timing of the surrender on 4th July 1863: American Independence Day. He admired Pemberton for applying for a demotion in

³² David M. Smith, (ed.), *Compelled To Appear In Print: The Vicksburg Manuscript of General John C. Pemberton*, Ironclad Publishing, (Cincinnati, 1999).

³³ John C. Pemberton III, *Pemberton: Defender of Vicksburg*, The University of North Carolina Press, (Chapel Hill, 1942).

³⁴ Michael B. Ballard, *Pemberton: The General Who Lost Vicksburg*, University Press of Mississippi, (Jackson, 1991).

³⁵ Steven E. Woodworth, "Unsupported and Outmatched", *America's Civil War*, Vol. 21, No. 3. (Jul., 2008), pp. 50-55.

order to stay in the war, when further high-level command was not forthcoming. John C. Pemberton III, the general's grandson, has produced a defence of his grandfather that continued what has been alleged to be the Pemberton "trait" of refusing to acknowledge mistakes. Both of these books were written based on Pemberton's campaign report, written shortly after the surrender, along with available personal correspondence. A further book on Pemberton was edited by David M. Smith from an incomplete manuscript, discovered in 1995, having been prepared by Pemberton after the publication of General Joseph E. Johnston's memoirs.³⁶ The title, *Compelled To Appear In Print*, was a quotation from Pemberton's manuscript, and it implied that Pemberton would have remained quiet, but Johnston's book forced him to respond to defend himself. Pemberton's manuscript refuted a number of the claims made by Johnston, in that Pemberton was accused of disobeying orders; of losing an army, as well as Vicksburg; of incompetence; and of being wholly to blame for the campaign. Pemberton's manuscript denied all allegations and established the view adopted by his grandson: that Johnston was incompetent. Neither Ballard nor Pemberton's grandson had use of this manuscript when their own books were published. Pemberton did not write clearly. His often convoluted and incomplete arguments were difficult to follow, and Smith's editorial skill has reduced the opacity. Woodworth has supplemented his earlier work on Confederate Western leadership dating from 1990, with additional insights of Pemberton in a recent article. Woodworth noted that Pemberton: did not give due credence to Bowen's reports from Grand Gulf, was distracted by Grant's diversions, suffered from a lack of cavalry that led to Gregg's defeat at Raymond, was not supported by Loring, had used the terrain in the Delta and at Chickasaw Bayou to good advantage and was subjected to conflicting

³⁶ Johnston, *Narrative*.

orders from Johnston and Davis. This short article contained a good summary of the difficulties Pemberton faced.

Key members of the Southern leadership at Vicksburg disliked Pemberton or did not believe in his capabilities. Critically, Pemberton had poor relations with Loring and Bowen, two of his division commanders at Champion Hill. These disputes with Pemberton had their roots in earlier issues involving both Loring and Bowen, which required further examination. Loring and Bowen have had recent sympathetic biographers: (Raab, 1996)³⁷ and (Tucker, 1997),³⁸ respectively. Loring, as Pemberton's second-in-command, had a difficult relationship with his commander and, after Champion Hill, refused to have his division trapped in Vicksburg. His biography gave useful insights into this complex person. Bowen's biographer has evaluated the extent of this exceptional talent to the Southern cause, whose qualities needed to have been used more extensively in the Vicksburg Campaign. The consequences of these disputes have been explored further in this thesis, having received limited attention in the above works.

Johnston

The commander of the Western Theatre was General Joseph E. Johnston, who has defended himself (Johnston, 1874)³⁹, but has been heavily criticised for being the centre of opposition to Davis and therefore the entire Confederacy (James, 1927).⁴⁰ James asserted that Johnston was the focal point for politicians, such as Louis T. Wigfall and Alexander H. Stephens, and for General Beauregard, all intensely disliked by Davis. On

³⁷ James W. Raab, *W. W. Loring: Florida's Forgotten General*, Sunflower University Press, (Manhattan, Kansas, 1996).

³⁸ Phillip T. Tucker, *The Forgotten "Stonewall of the West": Major General John Stevens Bowen*, Mercer University Press, (Macon, 1997).

³⁹ Johnston, *Narrative*.

⁴⁰ Alfred P. James, "General Joseph Eggleston Johnston, Storm Center of the Confederate Army", *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 14, No. 3. (Dec., 1927).

the other hand, he had support from his young relative, who wrote an early biography and summarised his opinions in a biased address published in an historical journal (Hughes, 1933).⁴¹ Johnston also had support from his most recent biographer (Symonds, 1992).⁴² Symonds' book has been reviewed by Winschel, (1993),⁴³ who argued that the author did not properly review the Vicksburg Campaign. Johnston had a well-publicised disagreement with Davis concerning his rank, which was covered in Symonds' book. From that moment neither got on with the other and communication was often terse, non-existent or, when time permitted, defensive and very detailed. Symonds' biography was the standard account that dealt with Johnston in an even-handed manner, noting his faults and his strengths, but this work did not give sufficient treatment to the Vicksburg Campaign. Johnston appeared as a complex character capable of brilliance on the one hand and, like Pemberton, unwilling to accept blame for his reverses on the other. The debate concerning the relative abilities of the two men has created one of the great controversies of the Civil War that has continued to this day.

Davis

Apart from Pemberton and Johnston, the third part in the triangle of command at Vicksburg concerned the political leadership from Richmond. The President, Jefferson Davis, dominated the government and was supported by George W. Randolph and, later, James A. Seddon, as Secretaries of War during the campaign. The earliest biography of Davis was a vehement account from someone who spent the whole war in Richmond,

⁴¹ Robert M. Hughes, "Joseph Eggleston Johnston: Soldier and Man", *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine*, Vol. XII, No. 2. (Apr., 1933). This Journal is currently published by the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture.

⁴² Craig L. Symonds, *Joseph E. Johnston: A Civil War Biography*, W. W. Norton & Company, (New York, 1992).

⁴³ Terrence J. Winschel, "Review: Joseph E. Johnston: A Civil War Biography by Craig L. Symonds", *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 79, No. 4. (Mar., 1993), p.1620.

frequently having contact with the President (Pollard, 1869).⁴⁴ Pollard accused Davis, in relation to the western command, of having “pets”, including Pemberton, Holmes and Bragg.⁴⁵ Pollard, a newspaper editor, wrote in that style and the sensational claims in his work received the greatest attention. This led to his work being discounted by those scholars having a more sympathetic view of the Confederate President. However, when the sensationalism was set aside, Pollard produced an insightful account of his contact with Davis, as only an eyewitness can. Throughout the work are assessments of Davis that covered his good points as well as his bad, in a well-balanced series of observations.

Davis has defended himself in a turgid two-volume account of his tenure in the Confederacy. The second volume contains details of the Vicksburg Campaign (Jefferson Davis, 1881).⁴⁶ This work was valuable because it provided some insights into Davis’ thinking and his opinions on the main leaders involved in the Vicksburg Campaign. Varina Davis produced a two-volume biography of her husband that added further useful background (Varina Davis, 1890).⁴⁷ She provided reflections about her thinking, and observations on Davis’ philosophy, on some important events, and she, at times, noted her husband’s strengths and weaknesses.

Dodd’s biography was much kinder to Davis than Pollard, in common with many later historians (Dodd, 1907).⁴⁸ Davis’ influence extended into virtually every event that

⁴⁴ Edward A. Pollard, *Life of Jefferson Davis, etc.*, National Publishing Company, (Philadelphia, 1869), reproduced by University of Michigan Library, (Ann Arbor, 2007).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, referring to: Pemberton p. 297, Holmes, p.300 and Bragg, p.301.

⁴⁶ Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, Volume II, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1990). This is an unabridged republication of the 1881 original.

⁴⁷ Varina Howell Davis, *Jefferson Davis, Ex-President of the Confederate States of America, A Memoir by his wife*, Belford Company, (New York, 1890). Volume I reprinted by Books for Libraries Press, (New York, 1971) and Volume II digitally printed from the original by Kessinger Publishing, (Whitefish, Montana, 2007).

⁴⁸ William E. Dodd, *Jefferson Davis*, Bison Books edition, University of Nebraska Press, (Lincoln, 1997). Reprinted from the original edition published by George W. Jacobs & Company, (Philadelphia, 1907).

confronted the South, a point argued by Gipson (1918).⁴⁹ A more recent work examining Davis was a standard biography that has been well-received by the academic world (Eaton, 1977)⁵⁰, which concluded that the President was an exceptional man. The book acknowledged his faults and concluded that he was flawed.

William C. Davis' extensive study was the standard scholarly biography that criticised Davis, because of his personality deficiencies, but concluded that he was a good man and stated that whatever he did, the North would have won (Davis, W.C., 1991).⁵¹ He believed that Union superiority in resources made the fall of Vicksburg almost certain, and that the President's real error was losing an army, by persevering with Johnston and by failing to issue direct orders.⁵² W. C. Davis' final chapter evaluated the President, which was the latest assessment showing how aspects of his personality either enhanced or detracted from his leadership.⁵³ Crawford (2000),⁵⁴ in a chapter that contributed to a collection of essays in memory of Professor Peter J. Parish, has examined Jefferson Davis' role in the Confederacy. He argued that Davis was innately conservative in his approach and identified, through the words of Howell Cobb, that the Confederacy was, uniquely, a revolution based on conservative principles.⁵⁵ Crawford concluded that Davis sought to maintain his opinions of how Southern society should be conducted, but that these were out of step with the views of the rest of the modern world. The current standard scholarly work is by Cooper (2001),⁵⁶ which did not attempt to assess Davis' political leadership, but sought to place his actions in a different context.

⁴⁹ Lawrence H. Gipson, "The Collapse of the Confederacy", *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4. (Mar., 1918), p. 438.

⁵⁰ Clement Eaton, *Jefferson Davis*, The Free Press, (New York, 1977).

⁵¹ W. C. Davis, *Davis*.

⁵² W. C. Davis, *Davis*, pp. 689-706.

⁵³ W. C. Davis, *Davis*, pp. 689-706.

⁵⁴ Susan-Mary Grant and Brian Holden Reid, (eds.), *The American Civil War*, Longman, Harlow, 2000, pp. 98-118.

⁵⁵ Grant and Holden Reid, *The American Civil War*, p. 108.

⁵⁶ Cooper, *Davis*.

Cooper asserted that Davis was a nationally respected politician and a war hero prior to the Civil War, who was capable enough to have stood for President of the United States. Because of this initial assessment, Cooper has not attempted to evaluate the aspects of Davis' personality that affected his leadership.⁵⁷

The latest book on Davis was by Hattaway and Beringer (2002).⁵⁸ This publication referred extensively to the books of W. C. Davis and Cooper, with equal prominence, thereby demonstrating that both writers had approached their works with different goals, both having made a substantial number of observations that did not overlap with the work of the other. Hattaway and Beringer stated that their objective was to ensure that a clearer understanding of Davis' role as Confederate leader was achieved, but mostly the book does not advance beyond the insights provided by the two excellent biographers.

A lengthy research project has been in progress at Rice University that has catalogued and verified all the available correspondence from and to Jefferson Davis. This work has had a number of different editorial teams as it has progressed over many years. Many personal letters not in the *O.R.* are included and many inaccuracies in the *O.R.* are noted and corrected. This was an invaluable project for researching the Confederate President. Volume 8 (Crist et al., 1995)⁵⁹ covered the whole of 1862 and provided a helpful insight into the build-up of the Vicksburg Campaign. Volume 9 (Crist et al., 1997)⁶⁰ ran from January to September 1863 and covered the whole Vicksburg Campaign period. At the time of researching, there were eleven volumes available

⁵⁷ Cooper, *Davis*, pp. xviii-xix.

⁵⁸ Herman Hattaway and Richard E. Beringer, *Jefferson Davis, Confederate President*, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, 2002.

⁵⁹ Lynda L. Crist, Mary S. Dix and Kenneth H. Williams, (eds.), *The Papers of Jefferson Davis: Volume 8*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1995). This has been referred to hereafter as *Davis papers, Vol. 8*.

⁶⁰ Lynda L. Crist, Mary S. Dix and Kenneth H. Williams (eds.), *The Papers of Jefferson Davis: Volume 9*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1997). This has been referred to hereafter as *Davis papers, Vol. 9*.

covering Davis' correspondences until May 1865, the end of the Civil War. Four further volumes were planned, the first three covering the post-war period and the final volume comprising a comprehensive index and bibliography. Apart from the President, there were others directly involved in the political situation in Richmond or who were closely involved as observers.

Richmond politics

Directly involved in the attempts to co-ordinate defence of the Mississippi River Valley was Secretary of War George W. Randolph. The circumstances surrounding his resignation in November 1862 warranted examination. A key supporter of Johnston, Randolph advocated common defence of the Mississippi River Valley. Jones (1960) argued that Randolph had influence over Davis and that military ideas, such as conscription, were his rather than the President's.⁶¹ Jones concluded that Randolph, who was ill, did not tolerate Davis' interference in his sphere of operations.

Other insights into the political situation in Richmond needed examining and the memoirs of Robert G. H. Kean, Head of the Bureau of War (Younger (ed.), 1957)⁶², provided useful additional information concerning the workings of the government and contemporary opinions on the campaign as it unfolded. Similarly, John B. Jones, a clerk in the War Department, gave an important account of the major issues and day-to-day concerns as they unfolded (Jones, 1866).⁶³

⁶¹ Archer Jones, "Some Aspects of George W. Randolph's Service As Confederate Secretary of War", *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 26, No. 3. (Aug., 1960).

⁶² Edward Younger (ed.), *Inside the Confederate Government: The Diary of Robert Garlick Hill Kean*, Oxford University Press, (New York, 1957).

⁶³ John B. Jones, *A Rebel war clerk's diary at the Confederate States capital*. J. B. Lippincott & Co., (Philadelphia, 1866).

Judah P. Benjamin did not have a biographer until recent years (Evans, 1988)⁶⁴.

This was a difficult project, because Benjamin destroyed all of his personal papers at the end of the war and left for Europe, never to return. Evans' biography gave an additional insight into the government, through Benjamin's close association with Davis, first as Secretary of War and then as Secretary of State. Benjamin became Davis' closest associate as the war drew to a close, but was not well-liked in Richmond. Yet Davis remained, as he always did, intensely loyal to the friends who stood by him. In this case, Davis seemed to have had a good point, as Benjamin was an able cabinet officer blessed with a sharp brain. Davis has often been criticised for supporting those who were less than competent, but only in this instance was he criticised for appointing someone with competence. This criticism arose because Benjamin was generally disliked, at least in part because of the anti-Semitic attitudes of the time.

Leadership in Tennessee

The army in Tennessee did nothing of substance to assist in the Vicksburg Campaign, but unresolved leadership problems diverted Johnston from Mississippi. General Braxton Bragg, who led this army, has been the subject of a two-volume biography, the second volume of which is relevant to the Vicksburg Campaign (Hallock, 1991).⁶⁵ Bragg was a harsh disciplinarian and a good organiser of his army, but his leadership was found wanting in combat. Bragg's corps commanders were Major-Generals Leonidas Polk and William J. Hardee. Hardee's biographer described his bravery, his understanding of his own limitations and his unwillingness to be promoted

⁶⁴ Eli N. Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate*, The Free Press, (New York, 1988).

⁶⁵ Judith L. Hallock, *Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat: Volume 2*, The University of Alabama Press, (Tuscaloosa, 1991). Grady McWhiney completed volume 1 which pre dates the Vicksburg Campaign, with the same publisher.

further (Hughes, 1965).⁶⁶ Polk's life was recently researched thoroughly by Robins (2006).⁶⁷ Polk was well-liked by the leading generals in Tennessee, but had limited military capabilities. He had a close friendship with Davis and he used that friendship to undermine Bragg. The unresolved command problem in Tennessee diverted both Johnston and Davis away from concentrating on the developing situation at Vicksburg. An examination of how this command problem remained unresolved during the campaign has been included in this thesis.

Leadership in the Trans-Mississippi

The adjacent department of the Trans-Mississippi was ineffective during the Vicksburg Campaign, failing to assist in the defence by taking no action on the western bank of the Mississippi River until it was too late. Holmes, to whom this responsibility was delegated as the highest-ranking officer in Arkansas, has not been the subject of a biography. Hindman, his key subordinate and the commander of his field army, has been recently examined, yielding insights into the performance of Holmes (Neal & Kremm, 1993).⁶⁸ Edmund Kirby Smith, the commander of the Trans-Mississippi department and Holmes' superior, has been the subject of a biography by Parks (1954)⁶⁹ and the focus of a wider work examining the Trans-Mississippi department during his period of command by Kerby (1972).⁷⁰ Lieutenant-General Richard Taylor, another key subordinate of Kirby Smith's, wrote memoirs describing him as having been given a promotion too far

⁶⁶ Nathaniel C. Hughes Jr., *General William J. Hardee: Old Reliable*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1992). This is a paperback edition of the 1965 original.

⁶⁷ Glenn Robins, *The bishop of the Old South, the ministry and Civil War legacy of Leonidas Polk*, Mercer University Press, (Macon, 2006).

⁶⁸ Diane Neal and Thomas W. Kremm, *Lion of the South: General Thomas C. Hindman*, Mercer University Press, (Macon, 1993).

⁶⁹ Joseph H. Parks, *General Edmund Kirby Smith C. S. A.*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1992). This book is a reprint of the 1954 original.

⁷⁰ Robert L. Kerby, *Kirby Smith's Confederacy: The Trans-Mississippi South, 1863-65*, The University of Alabama Press, (Tuscaloosa, 1972).

(Taylor, 1879).⁷¹ As someone who knew Davis and Johnston, Taylor also had some valuable opinions on their relationship.⁷² Taylor was insightful in his views on the defence of the Trans-Mississippi and of how Kirby Smith should have assisted at Vicksburg. Major-General John G. Walker was transferred from Holmes to Taylor, and was close to Vicksburg at a critical time, but was prevented by his orders from contributing. Walker has been examined, as has the division named after him (Lowe, 2004).⁷³ Walker was critical of the decision not to assist at Vicksburg and agreed on this point with Taylor. Prushankin (2005) has evaluated the conflict between Kirby Smith and Taylor and the effect that their dispute had on military affairs in the Trans-Mississippi.⁷⁴ The unresolved command problems in the Trans-Mississippi led to a lack of focus on the defence of the west bank of the Mississippi River opposite Vicksburg. An examination of how this lack of focus was allowed to happen has been included in this thesis.

Diaries and memoirs

Members of the public have provided insightful comment on the southern leadership during the Civil War. Foremost amongst these was the extensive diary kept by Mary Chesnut (C. Vann Woodward (ed.), 1981),⁷⁵ which gave a unique insight into the senior personnel in the government, both in Montgomery and following the subsequent

⁷¹ Richard Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction. Personal Experiences of the Civil War*, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1995), p.127. Unabridged reprint of original published by D. Appleton, (New York, 1879).

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 27 and p. 44.

⁷³ Richard Lowe, *Walker's Texas Division C. S. A.: Greyhounds of the Trans-Mississippi*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 2004).

⁷⁴ Jeffery S. Prushankin, *A Crisis in Confederate Command: Edmund Kirby Smith, Richard Taylor and the Army of the Trans-Mississippi*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 2005).

⁷⁵ C. Vann Woodward, (ed.), *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, Yale University Press, (New Haven, 1981).

move to Richmond, plus many of the leading personalities in South Carolina and Virginia.

Mary Webster Loughborough, trapped with a young child in Vicksburg during the siege, has provided a vivid account of what it was like to be forced to dwell in a cave whilst under heavy bombardment (Loughborough, 1866).⁷⁶ Her husband, Major James Loughborough, was also within the Vicksburg siege lines.

The Balfours lived in the house next door to Pemberton's headquarters, regularly meeting him and members of his staff. The diary kept by the wife, Emma (Balfour, 1863),⁷⁷ has been published in a booklet that contains her entries from 16th May 1863 to 2nd June 1863, being all that survived of the document. After the siege was over, the Balfour House became the Union headquarters. Pemberton regularly visited the Balfours and this small, but important, work gave views on him and a number of his senior officers.

William H. Tunnard was a soldier participating in the Vicksburg Campaign, who gave a first-hand account, including the daily tribulations during the manning of the siege works (Tunnard, 1866).⁷⁸ His regiment, the Third Louisiana, occupied the redoubt, which was mined and detonated on 1st July 1863, shortly before the surrender.

In a similar vein, Samuel R. Watkins, a soldier who fought in Tennessee, shed light on that campaign and the character of service under Bragg and then Johnston

⁷⁶ Mary Webster Loughborough, *My Cave Life in Vicksburg*, D. Appleton & Co., (New York, 1864). The copy obtained is a 2003 facsimile reproduction of the original purchased at the Vicksburg National Military Park and the author was originally identified as "by a Lady". Mary Loughborough was the wife of Major James M. Loughborough who was fighting on the lines and she has been identified in a short note added about the author. The 2003 edition is printed by the Vicksburg and Warren County Historical Society from a copy of the original provided in 1951 by a member of the Loughborough family.

⁷⁷ Emma Balfour, *Vicksburg A City Under Siege, Diary of Emma Balfour*, Phillip C. Weinberger. The diary in the form of a booklet was purchased at the Vicksburg National Military Park. The publisher is not identified but the copyright holder is Phillip C. Weinberger, who is the publisher.

⁷⁸ William H. Tunnard, *A Southern Record, The History of the Third Regiment Louisiana Infantry*, The University of Arkansas Press, (Fayetteville, 1997). This is a reprint of the 1866 original, self published by W. H. Tunnard, Baton Rouge, with typographical corrections for consistency made by the University of Arkansas.

(Watkins, 1882).⁷⁹ A detailed account of the factors affecting the common Confederate soldier has been produced and is excellent for understanding their daily lives (Wiley, 1943).⁸⁰ The Mississippi Department of Archives and History, has published a centennial collection of documents pertaining to the Civil War, edited by Betterworth (1961).⁸¹ This work included many contemporary papers relating to the Vicksburg Campaign. One author included quotations from many eyewitness accounts and detailed the siege on a daily basis (Hoehling, 1969).⁸² Because the daily events were each recorded from several different sources, a unique account was given of the siege. These books help to add background to the military campaign, passing opinions on events as they unfolded and adding the vividness of firsthand accounts to the research.

Northern leadership

Studies of the campaign have been made from the Union perspective: Miers (1955),⁸³ Catton (1960),⁸⁴ and Arnold (1997).⁸⁵ All of these focus on Grant's leadership. The authors took slightly different views of the campaign, but all agreed that the campaign conducted by Grant was exceptional. There are insights into the Southern leadership, mostly concentrating on the campaign itself, but these books gave a useful insight into Grant's strategy, as pitched against Confederate strategy.

The Southern military command did not operate in a vacuum. Johnston and Pemberton were opposed by the generally aggressive Grant, who was ably supported by

⁷⁹ Samuel R. Watkins, *Company Aytch, or a Side Show of the Big Show*, Plume, (New York, 1999). This edition has typographical errors corrected from the first edition published by Cumberland Presbyterian Publishing House, (Nashville, 1882).

⁸⁰ Bell I. Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1978).

⁸¹ John K. Betterworth, (ed.), *Mississippi in the Confederacy: as they saw it*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1961.

⁸² Adolph A. Hoehling, *Vicksburg: 47 Days of Siege*, Stackpole Books, (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, 1996). This is a reprint of the original published by Prentice-Hall, Upper Saddle River, (New Jersey, 1969).

⁸³ Earl S. Miers, *The Web of Victory: Grant at Vicksburg*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1955).

⁸⁴ Bruce Catton, *Grant Moves South*, Little, Brown and Company, (Boston and New York, 1960).

⁸⁵ James R. Arnold, *Grant Wins the War: Decision at Vicksburg*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., (New York, 1997).

Major-General William T. Sherman. The Union commander completed his autobiography just before his death (Grant, 1885).⁸⁶ Sherman, Grant's second-in-command, wrote a two-volume history, subsequently revised into a second edition, because of the challenging responses he received to the first edition (Sherman, 1886).⁸⁷ Both Grant's and Sherman's memoirs detailed the campaign from the opposition perspective. Pemberton was thought by both to be tenacious, but cautious and predictable. Grant and Sherman noted that Johnston was a formidable adversary, but working with fewer resources. They saw him as difficult to beat and of superior ability to Pemberton. Grant and Sherman detailed the hard war developments in the Vicksburg Campaign from the need to live off the land after Holly Springs, to the destruction of Jackson. The change in Union thinking as the campaign progressed has been evaluated in this thesis.

Political and military leadership

Confederate leadership capability and strategy needed to be evaluated for a greater understanding of the Southern leadership during the Vicksburg Campaign. Vandiver (1956) was the first to produce an analysis of Confederate political and military leadership.⁸⁸ He concluded that the South was torn between the need to modernise, thereby following a centralised approach to the war effort, or the alternative traditional approach of decentralisation based on the states. Connelly and Jones (1973) examined the political and military relations of the Civil War, and only briefly discussed the

⁸⁶ Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, Modern Library, (New York, 1999). Reprint of the original published by C. L. Webster, (New York, 1885).

⁸⁷ William T. Sherman, *William Tecumseh Sherman: Memoirs*, Penguin Books, (New York, 2000). Reprint of the second edition by D. Appleton, (New York, 1886). The first edition, also published by D. Appleton but in 1875, was edited by Sherman and has not been used in this thesis, because of the greater insights given by the additions to the second edition.

⁸⁸ Frank E. Vandiver, *Rebel Brass*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1956).

Vicksburg Campaign in the context of the command problems in the West.⁸⁹ They suggested that Davis exhibited stubbornness, refusing to change his mind when it was obvious to his contemporaries that a change of direction or a change of general was needed.⁹⁰ They believed that Davis allowed this latitude to develop and that he persevered, sometimes because of friendship, with commanders who were not performing.⁹¹ By more specifically concentrating on these issues for the Vicksburg Campaign, further contributions to the Confederate failure have been identified.

Escott (1978)⁹² looked at the failure of Confederate Nationalism during the war and argued that after the twin defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in July 1863, the civilian population believed that defeat was inevitable. He did not examine the Vicksburg Campaign in great depth, but he did assess Davis as a political leader. Escott identified the problems inherent in Davis' relationship with Johnston and his over-assessment of Pemberton's capabilities. Escott assessed Davis' leadership as creative and far above average. He believed that the President's leadership was undermined by the ruling planter classes, who failed him by concentrating on petty issues that obstructed the building of a Confederate state.

Glatthaar (1994)⁹³ examined the relationships between various groups of leaders, North and South, during the Civil War. Chapter Four reviewed the relationship between Davis and Johnston, but it did not cover the Vicksburg Campaign in depth. Glatthaar argued that Johnston had personal charisma, but lacked strategic vision, whereas Davis' Western strategy was undone by simultaneous Union campaigns that prevented the

⁸⁹ Connelly and Jones, *The Politics of Command*.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁹² Paul D. Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1978.

⁹³ Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Partners in Command: The Relationships Between Leaders in the Civil War*, The Free Press, (New York, 1994).

movement of troops between his armies. Since this was Davis' main requirement for Johnston in his role as theatre commander, he could not comply with the President's wishes. Glatthaar identified most of the main causes of the breakdown in the relationship in the Eastern Theatre between these two men, but attributed most of the leadership failings to Johnston, in that he failed to meet Davis' expectations. Holden Reid (2000)⁹⁴ has evaluated the concepts of command and leadership in the Civil War. He has defined the distinction between the roles of the leader and the commander of an army and has argued that these roles were confused throughout the Civil War. He identified that good leadership did not guarantee that good command would result. He cited McClellan and Rosecrans as Northern examples of good leaders who were unable to effectively command their forces. From the Southern standpoint, he believed that Johnston and Bragg had similar performances. All four were militarily trained and knew how to prepare and organise an army, but they were unable to effectively utilise the armies under their command in battle. This was an interesting perspective that warranted further examination for the Vicksburg Campaign.

Through comparing the performance of successful civilian leaders in various conflicts, common characteristics have been established that set apart good leaders from the average. Eliot A. Cohen (2003), at Johns Hopkins University, has produced an excellent study of leadership in wartime.⁹⁵ Cohen argued that the political leaders did not dictate to their military subordinates, but they constantly questioned and probed all the way through their leadership, displaying a high degree of persistence.⁹⁶ Cohen suggested that each was prepared to work with military leaders who had differing opinions from

⁹⁴ Grant and Holden Reid, *The American Civil War*, pp. 142-168.

⁹⁵ Eliot A. Cohen *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime*, Simon & Schuster, (New York, 2003).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

their own.⁹⁷ The central questions, in examining Davis in relation to the Vicksburg Campaign, related to assessments of whether he was dictatorial to his military subordinates, how persistent he was in challenging the actions of his generals, and how he handled their opinions when they differed sharply from his own point of view.

Sometimes generals had to be dismissed: nearly always a difficult task for a politician, not just because yesterday's military leader could become tomorrow's political opponent.⁹⁸ On both sides of the Civil War, top-level military commanders were a scarce resource and the alternatives were often few. As the leadership for the Vicksburg Campaign was assembled, Davis' decision-making in the appointments of his generals needed to be examined in this light.

One of the established characteristics in great political leaders was persistence during the relentless questioning of subordinates, but it was underpinned by the courage to see the conflict through. Cohen (2003) believed that this was translated into an iron will, and that the best-performing political leaders were able to communicate this effectively.⁹⁹ Having considered political leadership, the characteristics of good military leadership also needed to be understood.

Military leaders took orders from their political superiors and turned them into campaign plans, within the strategic framework provided. A collection of essays by leading generals, edited by Robert L. Taylor of the University of Louisville and William E. Rosenbach of Gettysburg College, explored this topic.¹⁰⁰ Taylor and Rosenbach (2005) believed that leaders must have a vision for the future and that they then

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

¹⁰⁰ Robert L. Taylor and William E. Rosenbach (eds.), *Military Leadership: In Pursuit of Excellence*, 5th Edition, Westview Press, (Cambridge MA, 2005).

communicated this vision so that it became shared amongst their followers.¹⁰¹ When this vision or aspects of it were communicated, it became the strategic framework for Confederate field operations. The shared vision of the Confederacy warranted examination, in relation to the importance placed on the Vicksburg Campaign. Taylor and Rosenbach noted that leaders had to take risks, but that timing was also important, with those who were slow to react often failing.¹⁰² The Vicksburg Campaign gave a number of examples of decisive action, mostly on the Union side, and many examples of hesitation, mostly on the Confederate side. Analysis of these has given further insights into the military leadership. Lastly, Taylor and Rosenbach suggested that effective leaders had a bond with their subordinates based on mutual trust.¹⁰³ The Vicksburg Campaign has provided several instances in the Southern leadership where lack of mutual trust caused further failings that needed to be understood. The authors concluded that, despite a leader possessing all of these characteristics, there was no guarantee of success.¹⁰⁴ The lack of overall success by the Confederacy during the Vicksburg Campaign has hidden a number of examples of leadership successes that are worthy of further work.

Confederate leadership at Vicksburg was shaped by the previous careers of the participants. Woodworth examined what these participants achieved in a study of the wider Western command.¹⁰⁵ He dealt with Davis' shortcomings in the context of the whole Civil War, and he did identify some of the specific failures of the President at Vicksburg. There was scope to expand this work in an examination of Southern

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*.

leadership during the Vicksburg Campaign, in order to understand whether any of the Confederate commanders involved exhibited any of these characteristics or whether failure to develop these leadership requirements was a contributing cause to the loss of the city and the Mississippi River navigation.

Southern Culture

Southern culture emanated from the politicians, who had concepts of honour that were different from those in the North. The first writer to explain how this came to dominate national politics in the ante-bellum period was Pollard (1869).¹⁰⁶ His contemporary description of the aristocratic and ambitious nature of those in public office in the South, who often viewed their offices as a hereditary right, illuminated this class of person.¹⁰⁷ However, Wyatt-Brown (1982) has produced the standard work examining this topic, with a much wider perspective than Pollard's observations.¹⁰⁸ His work has been structured into three parts to examine primal honour, family and gender behaviour, then rivalry and social control. It gave insights into the behavioural constraints on those in political and military roles in the South that influenced how they were able to carry out their functions.

Hard War

The Vicksburg Campaign saw the Union develop its first steps toward hard war. There has been debate amongst historians, because the early writing on this subject categorised the Civil War as the first modern conflict where total war tactics were

¹⁰⁶ Pollard, *Davis*.

¹⁰⁷ Pollard, *Davis*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁸ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1982.

introduced. However, by twentieth century standards the First and Second World Wars showed that total war meant much more than the limited level of devastation to civilian resources seen in the Civil War. Consequently, later writing has redefined the level of destruction seen in the Civil War as hard war, because of the much reduced scale compared with the later conflicts. Hard war meant extending the scope of conflict away from purely military objectives toward the destruction of any means that could assist the South in maintaining its war effort.

The first writer to explore total war in relation to the Civil War was Walters (1948).¹⁰⁹ He examined the performance of Sherman, who when commanding in Memphis in mid-1862, destroyed the town of Randolph in reprisal for attacks on Mississippi River shipping. He detailed Sherman's total war development during the Vicksburg Campaign, covering the partial destruction of Jackson during the campaign and the extensive destruction of Jackson and Meridian after the siege ended. Neely (1991 and 2004)¹¹⁰ challenged the accepted norms and redefined total war in the Civil War by reclassifying it as hard war in a seminal article. Neely argued that total war broke down the distinctions between soldiers and civilians and concluded that this did not happen in the Civil War. However, Janda (1995)¹¹¹ stayed with the definition of total war, when he examined the concept from 1860 to 1880, including the subsequent Indian Wars. He identified that Grant believed that Major-General Don Carlos Buell had to move slowly through Tennessee, whilst attempting to intercept Bragg during the invasion of Kentucky, because he was in hostile countryside and forced to protect his vulnerable supplies.

¹⁰⁹ John Bennett Walters, "General William T. Sherman and Total War", *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 14, No. 4. (Nov., 1948, pp. 447-480).

¹¹⁰ Mark E. Neely, Jr., "Was the Civil War a Total War?", *Civil War History*, Vol. 50, No. 4. (Dec., 2004), pp. 434-458. Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865*, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge, U. K., 1995) – quoted an earlier version of this article on p. 222, published in Vol. 37, No. 1. (1991).

¹¹¹ Lance Janda, "Shutting the Gates of Mercy: The American Origins of Total War, 1860-1880", *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 59, No. 1. (Jan., 1995), pp. 7-26.

Bragg and Kirby Smith, on the other hand, were able to live off the countryside in Kentucky and were free to move rapidly. Janda believed that the invasion of Kentucky introduced total war to the North. Janda argued that Grant developed his thinking toward total war in 1862 after Shiloh and the later invasion of Kentucky convinced him of the rationale. Janda noted that this change in military thinking did not happen in the Eastern Theatre in 1862, whilst the forces were under the command of Major-General George B. McClellan.

The hard war definition was returned to by Grimsley (1995)¹¹² in a thorough examination of Union actions toward the Southern non-military population. Grimsley argued that Union soldiers were making war in a civilized era where restraint was shown toward the hostile civilian population in the South. Neely (2007)¹¹³ used a series of case studies from the Mexican War onward to examine how destruction developed in the Civil War. Unfortunately, he did not examine the Vicksburg Campaign, but his conclusions are still valid. He argued that there were limits to the extent of destruction in the Civil War and that it could not be classified as a total war on those grounds.

Paskoff (2008)¹¹⁴ approached the subject matter from a different perspective, but supported Grimsley's central theme that the North waged a limited war of destruction. He conducted a quantitative analysis of the physical destruction in the South during the Civil War. He argued that the destruction by the North within the Confederacy was not extensive. The first destruction of a city on a large scale during the Civil War occurred at Jackson, Mississippi during the Vicksburg Campaign. Paskoff has identified that the war tended to follow the routes of the South's railroads and waterways. He demonstrated that

¹¹² Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, (Cambridge, U. K., 1995).

¹¹³ Mark E. Neely, *The Civil War and the Limits of Destruction*, Harvard University Press, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2007).

¹¹⁴ Paul F. Paskoff, "Measures of War: A Quantitative Examination of the Civil War's Destructiveness in the Confederacy", *Civil War History*, Vol. 54, No. 1. (Mar., 2008), pp. 35-62.

the destruction in these areas of the Confederacy was at its worst as the North denied access to these critical communication routes.

By late 1862, Vicksburg was sited at the last railroad crossing of the Mississippi River open to the Confederacy and it became the most critical communication point for the North to capture in the Western Theatre. During the campaign, Union efforts gradually evolved into hard war. Grant and Sherman realised that the Confederacy could not be defeated unless all means to wage war were attacked, not just the armies in the field. This thesis has explored the Confederate reaction to this change in Northern strategy, to determine whether the leadership issues that arose were addressed.

Summary

The historiography on the Vicksburg Campaign, like most other aspects of the Civil War, was extensive, but few scholars have examined the Southern leadership. Those historians examining the leadership from a Southern perspective have included the Vicksburg Campaign as part of a wider work, necessarily reducing the depth of analysis. Jones (1961) has examined Confederate strategy from Shiloh in April 1862, until the fall of Vicksburg in July 1863. Woodworth (1990) has analysed the failure of Confederate command in the West for the whole war and evaluated Jefferson Davis as Commander-in-Chief. Other historians have written about the Vicksburg Campaign, but have not specifically concentrated on Southern leadership: Bearss (1985-6) and Ballard (2004). Biographers of the leading Southern participants have generally commented on their leadership, covering their performances at Vicksburg in a limited way and always from the perspective of their subjects. The key biographies reviewed have been on the subject

of Davis (Davis W. C., 1991 and Cooper, 2001), Johnston (Symonds, 1992), Pemberton (Ballard, 1991), Kirby Smith (Parks, 1954 and Kerby, 1972), Bragg (Hallock, 1991) and Bowen (Tucker, 1997). This thesis has examined the wider aspects of how Southern leadership for the Vicksburg defence was assembled, commencing with an examination of the leaders' roles and interactions before the campaign commenced in earnest. This provided insights into the leadership capabilities of the Southern participants that exposed their strengths and weaknesses during the campaign. Many of the weaknesses were not acknowledged and those that were identified were often not addressed, remaining to affect Southern performance adversely. Furthermore, some of the strengths identified went unrecognised, and those that were recognised were often not exploited to improve Southern performance. This analysis of the Vicksburg Campaign, from the Southern leadership perspective, has revealed missed opportunities that could have prolonged the war in the West, through a successful defence of the city.

To defend Vicksburg successfully required harmony in the high command of the Southern armies in the West, but this was not achieved. Davis had the ultimate responsibility for making the top-level appointments and only he could reassign generals where harmony did not exist. In the Trans-Mississippi, there were fractious relationships involving Kirby Smith, Taylor, Holmes and Walker. In Tennessee there was conflict at the top of the army between Bragg, Polk and Hardee. At Vicksburg, there was division at the top of the army between Pemberton, Loring and Bowen. The difference of opinion that Johnston had with Davis and Pemberton has been well documented by other scholars. Nevertheless, there were further elements of historical understanding to be gained from studying these relationships, when examined in more depth. The command

problems in the Trans-Mississippi, in Tennessee, and in Vicksburg, led to the development of a number of arguments in this thesis, from an examination of how these issues affected the Vicksburg Campaign.

The Vicksburg Campaign was a catastrophic loss for the Confederate cause. Many lessons were learnt by both sides as the campaign moved through its phases. The Confederacy was exposed to the beginnings of the development of hard war by the Union. The Confederate reaction to this change in the way the Civil War was prosecuted by the North commenced at Vicksburg. By examining how the Southern leadership coped with this change, this thesis contributes to understanding this aspect of the larger problem.

Substantial scholarship has been produced on Davis, detailing his poor judgement of the capability of his friends when holding high military positions, and agreeing that once he made his mind up, he rarely changed it. Whilst accepting these personality traits, no writer has focused on Davis' critical decisions during the Vicksburg Campaign, through an examination of the performance and interactions of his senior subordinates as they defended against Grant's protracted and determined offensive. Consequently, this thesis has been structured to examine the early experiences of the Southern leaders in the East, followed by a review of the activities in the West that detracted from the defence of Vicksburg, before assessing the Southern leadership during the Union campaign and, finally, considering some issues giving further insight after the loss of the city.

After Chapter One has introduced the thesis and reviewed the literature, Chapter Two has examined the early Civil War careers of the Southern leaders as they developed their experiences in the East. Chapter Three has covered the extent of the diversions in

the West that prevented much-needed resources from participating in the Vicksburg Campaign. Chapter Four has looked at the early defence of Vicksburg by the Confederates that provided their leaders with a false assessment of their own capabilities, as Grant tried to gain a foothold in Mississippi. Chapter Five has reviewed the Confederate defensive efforts to combat Grant's overland campaign, once he crossed to the east bank of the Mississippi River. Chapter Six has examined the siege of Vicksburg both from inside and outside of the city, culminating in the surrender on 4th July 1863, and has assessed some relevant events in the aftermath of the loss of Vicksburg. Conclusions have been drawn in the final Chapter, concerning the effectiveness of overall Southern leadership during the Vicksburg Campaign.

This thesis has expanded the historiography on Southern leadership in the West, where examination of the Vicksburg Campaign has been included within wider works, and it has extended the historiography on Southern leadership within works that were specifically concerned with the Vicksburg Campaign. The method used has enabled the key capabilities of the Southern leaders involved to be established from their early Civil War performances. From this research, it was important to analyse the extent to which President Jefferson Davis was aware of both the good and the bad capabilities of his military subordinates when his critical decisions were made, and to establish whether his decision-making was blemished or enhanced as a result. Davis' performance has also been scrutinised, to establish whether each of his own capabilities enhanced or hindered the Vicksburg Campaign. Davis presided over unresolved conflicts between his leading generals, he persevered with weak appointees, he did not co-ordinate a defensive plan, he allowed priority to be given to local issues and he ensured there was rigid adherence to

his departmental structure. These were the key factors in the crushing defeat and it was important to establish how all of these shortcomings in Southern leadership interacted to affect the outcome of the Vicksburg Campaign.

Chapter two

The eastern training ground

Introduction

Many of the Confederate leaders, who took part in the Vicksburg Campaign, in the first half of 1863, had early Civil War experience in the Eastern Theatre in 1861 and 1862. The relationships they shaped there and the experience they gained influenced the outcome at Vicksburg. Sometimes these relationships and experiences contributed to better performance in the West, but in many cases, the outcomes in the East were demonstrations of leadership failings that were not corrected, sometimes with quite different results. In the East, the most important cities to defend were Richmond, Virginia and Charleston, South Carolina. The command appointments that Davis made to defend these cities were the most crucial. President Jefferson Davis was mostly supportive of all of his appointees, to varying degrees, but his relationship with General Joseph E. Johnston was the most strained.

By May 1862, Johnston was in command of the defence of Richmond. Davis and Johnston had much in common, having attended West Point together and having subsequently served together in the United States Army, where they both participated in the Mexican War. As the Civil War commenced, there existed the benefit of a long-term friendship between them. The causes and effects of their breakdown in friendship, whilst Johnston was in command in Virginia, had implications for how top-level command was carried out during the Vicksburg Campaign.

As a Northerner, Major-General John C. Pemberton's first experience of departmental command was in the hot-bed of Southern secessionist politics in South Carolina. He attended West Point and participated in the Mexican War, the main

attributes Davis looked for in his commanders. Pemberton was known to and was respected by Davis. Although he was of Northern birth, he had developed Southern sympathies and was married to a Virginian. He had to deal with the conflicting policies of dispersing his forces to defend the coastline, whilst keeping sufficient troops available to defend the key port of Charleston. Davis had a good relationship with Pemberton and believed in his background, capabilities and Southern loyalty.

Confederate strategy in the East was based on defence of the capital at Richmond and the important port of Charleston. These fixed points were considered by Davis to be vital to the interests of the Confederacy. Richmond, as the Confederate capital, and Charleston, as the city where the Civil War commenced, were both symbolically important to the South. Davis believed that defence of these strategic cities was of paramount importance to the politics of the Confederacy.

In May 1862, South Carolina was not under direct threat, but there were many troops posted in the state. With major campaigns in progress in Tennessee and on the Peninsula in Virginia, South Carolina was seen as one of the main sources of reinforcements for the rest of the Confederacy. This antagonised local politicians, who were concerned about the increasing vulnerability of Charleston. Having had his first taste of departmental command in the midst of this controversy, Pemberton was promoted in October 1862 to one of the most critical commands for the Confederacy at Vicksburg, reflecting Davis' belief in his chosen commander.

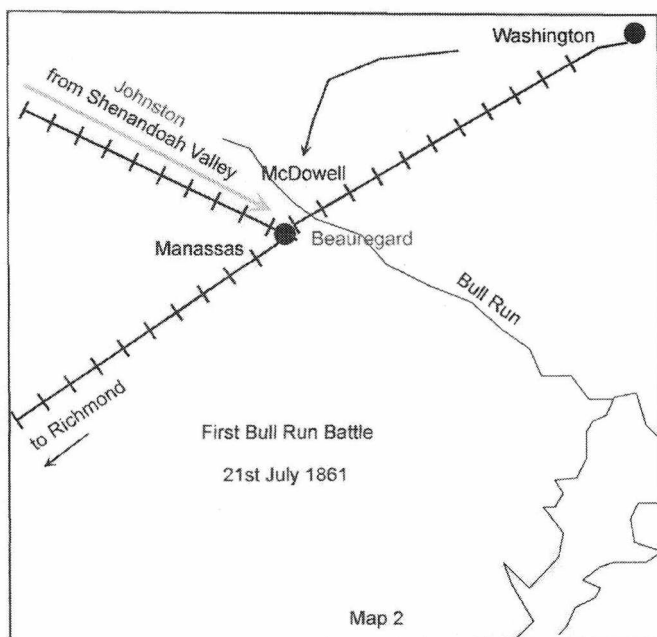
The President was the architect of the departmental system in the Confederacy, where he devolved most of the military authority to his appointed commanders. Davis believed his departmental command structure was sacrosanct. He expected that his chosen departmental commanders would voluntarily co-operate toward the overriding goals of the Confederacy. In the West, the most important

boundary between departments was the Mississippi River. Davis promoted Johnston to command the Department of the West in November 1862, but needed to resolve how co-ordinated command was to be implemented in the Mississippi River Valley.

Lieutenant-General Theophilus H. Holmes, and subsequently Lieutenant-General Edmund Kirby Smith, supported by Holmes, were charged with defending the Mississippi River from the west bank during the Vicksburg Campaign. They were supported by Major-General Richard Taylor and Major-General John G. Walker in field commands. These four generals all had experience in the East prior to their appointments in the Trans-Mississippi. None of them came under the control of Johnston, but he was expected to co-operate with them for the defence of Vicksburg. However, the most important consideration, east of the Mississippi River, was that Johnston had to have a good relationship with Davis, as his commander-in-chief.

The breakdown in friendship between Johnston and Davis

Davis and Johnston had a good relationship at the start of the Civil War, but this was soon to decline into a more formal relationship between them, as a series of



incidents in Virginia tested their earlier friendship. Their first sizeable battle together demonstrated how a successful partnership between the politicians and the military ought to work. At First Bull Run on 21st July 1861, the relationship

between Johnston and Davis was at its best. The Union forces threatening Virginia were divided, so to gain an advantage, part of that force needed to be isolated, to improve the chances of a Confederate victory. Johnston was ordered by Cooper in Richmond to move his army from the Shenandoah Valley, just in time, using the railway to unite with the army of Brigadier-General Pierre G. T. Beauregard.¹ This combining of the two armies was not on the initiative of the field commanders. Davis took a risk by ordering the temporary abandonment of the Shenandoah Valley and the consolidation of two armies in the field to gain an advantage that was successfully exploited. Johnston did not have the authority to abandon the Shenandoah Valley on his own initiative. The resulting narrow victory stemmed from the advantage gained by obedience to the overall plan. Co-ordination from Richmond was desirable to ensure that adjacent field commanders acted in concert. Davis, Johnston and Beauregard had gained first-hand experience of operating to a central plan and it had worked. Neither Johnston nor Beauregard had the authority to abandon the territory that their armies were protecting. Only Davis could make this decision. Davis had given an example to his generals, that he would consolidate forces to gain an advantage and that he would consider the option of temporarily giving up territory to win a battle, by taking the military responsibility of co-ordinating orders from Richmond.

In early September 1861 Johnston discovered, when five full generals were appointed, that three others had been placed ahead of him in the ranking order. With only Beauregard having less seniority, he was bitterly disappointed. He protested to Davis that he had been placed fourth rather than first and that “this action was

¹ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. II, p.478, Cooper to Johnston, 17th July 1861.

altogether illegal.”² He could not contain his anger and elevated the dispute into a personal wrangle with the President. Twice during this dispute Davis endorsed Johnston’s correspondence with the word “insubordinate”.³ Major-General Richard Taylor, who knew both, summarised the collision between Davis and Johnston, believing that, “the breach, once made, was never repaired. Each misjudged the other to the end.”⁴ Davis was not given to changing his decisions and did not even consider a reversal, especially after the way Johnston had conducted his protest. Johnston lost the argument and, from that moment, communications with the President lost the element of friendship and became more formal.

Instead of working to repair the breach between himself and Johnston, Davis became embroiled in another dispute. In atrocious weather conditions in December 1861, Stonewall Jackson marched his army to the northern end of the Shenandoah Valley, causing great hardship amongst his men. One of his division commanders, Brigadier-General William W. Loring, produced a petition signed by his officers that recommended retreat that Jackson endorsed as “disapproved”, but he forwarded it to Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin in Richmond.⁵ Davis blamed Johnston’s shortcomings in failing to attend personally to resolve the problem between Jackson and Loring.⁶ Johnston had received a rebuke from Davis on how to deal with command problems in his department. This was a different type of criticism from that arising during the emotional dispute over rank. Davis, in a new area of complaint, was now criticising Johnston’s military leadership capability. This dispute did

² Joseph E. Johnston, *Narrative of Military Operations During the Civil War*, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1990) p. 71, unabridged reprint of original published as *Narrative of military operations directed during the late War Between the States*, D. Appleton, (New York, 1874).

³ William C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis, The man and his hour*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1996), quoted on page 357. This was a paperback edition of the 1991 original.

⁴ Richard Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction, Personal Experiences of the Civil War*, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1995), p. 44. Unabridged reprint of original published by D. Appleton, (New York, 1879).

⁵ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. V, pp. 1046-8, Loring’s officers to Benjamin, 25th January 1862, via Loring who endorsed it 26th January 1862 and via Jackson who endorsed it 4th February 1862.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1071-2, Davis to Johnston, 14th February 1862.

nothing to heal the breach between them, and began the process of converting a bitter difference over rank into a loss of friendship.

In mid-February 1862, Johnston was called to Richmond to discuss concerns about the exposed position of his army in northern Virginia, because there were indications that the Union army was beginning to move after the winter. The possibility existed that Union forces could be landed by sea behind his lines further south and so he sought to retreat to the Rappahannock River, where there was a better defensive position. Johnston attended a cabinet meeting in Richmond where the possibility of this retreat was discussed.⁷ At his hotel he was asked about the proposed retreat that the cabinet had been discussing, and on the train back to his army the topic was raised with him again.⁸ Johnston wrote to Davis outlining his security concerns.⁹ He was concerned that one or more cabinet ministers had been lacking in secrecy. He was sure that important military information would leak to the Union if it was freely being discussed in Richmond. Johnston was appalled at this security breach and he decided that he would be cautious with the amount of detailed information that he submitted to Richmond concerning his future plans.

Johnston's sudden retreat from Northern Virginia across the Rappahannock River, in March 1862, when he realised that there was the potential for Union forces to use amphibious operations to outflank him, caused the President concern, because of the loss of supplies. The speed at which the retreat was executed caused Davis to question Johnston: "I have had many and alarming reports of great destruction of ammunition, camp equipage, and provisions, indicating precipitate retreat; but, having heard of no cause for such a sudden movement, I was at a loss to believe it."¹⁰

⁷ Johnston, *Narrative*, p. 96.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

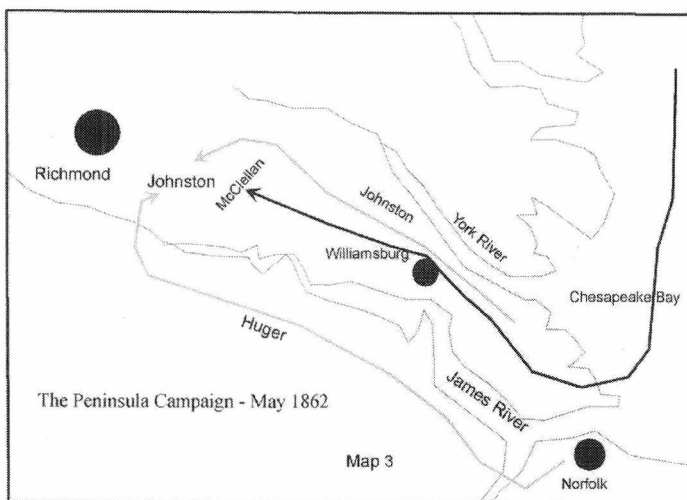
⁹ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. V, p. 1079, Johnston to Davis, 23rd February 1862.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 527-8, Davis to Johnston, 15th March 1862.

Johnston had decided to move promptly because of the security breach. His position in northern Virginia was vulnerable and so he wanted to retreat without attracting a Union response. Davis was warned that Johnston would move for his own military reasons and would not care too much about the consequences in lost supplies.

Although discussion had taken place about the retreat during the February cabinet meeting, Davis expected it to take place slowly, so that the supplies could be moved too. The quick retreat, without communicating to Richmond, shocked Davis. This difference continued to erode the friendship between them.

Another swift retrograde movement in May 1862, during the Peninsula Campaign, caused Davis great alarm. Davis expected Johnston to contest the advance



of the Northern forces along the Peninsula every step of the way and, if Norfolk had to be abandoned, to create time for the withdrawal from the port to be carried out in good order. Johnston summarised the situation

and recorded his interpretation of McClellan's intentions, which amounted to an immediate need for the Confederate armies to abandon Norfolk and the Peninsula so as to combine close to Richmond for its defence.¹¹ Davis managed a simple response the next day, requesting: "Your announcement to-day that you will withdraw to-morrow takes us by surprise, and must involve enormous losses, including unfinished gunboats. Will the safety of your army allow more time?"¹² Johnston ignored him,

¹¹ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XI, Part III, p. 473, Johnston to Lee, 29th April 1862.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 484-5, Davis to Johnston, 1st May 1862.

leaving Lee to write, on the President's behalf, on 3rd May 1862: "He is also anxious to receive a reply to his dispatch to you of the 1st instant, and as it may not have reached you I inclose a copy."¹³ Another week passed with Davis and Lee kept in the dark, before eventually, Johnston confirmed that he had ordered the evacuation of Norfolk.¹⁴ Davis wrote to his wife with his concerns for Richmond complaining that, "If the withdrawal from the Peninsula and Norfolk had been with due preparation ... I should be more sanguine of a successful defence of this city."¹⁵ Johnston's lack of information alarmed the President. He had retreated along the Peninsula, leaving the defences near Yorktown on 3rd May and fighting the battle of Williamsburg on 5th May 1862.¹⁶ Johnston had been occupied, but there was no excuse in taking ten days to respond. He had a staff for exactly the purpose of providing orders and communications in the field. He had not kept Davis informed of his intentions, announcing, a long time after the fact, that he had gone ahead with the rapid abandonment of Norfolk, and only then confirming the considerable losses of shipping and supplies. The speedy retreat to the proximity of the city left Richmond vulnerable to capture, hence Davis' alarm. This was well short of the level of communications Davis was entitled to expect as the chief executive.

Because of his concerns and the proximity of the enemy, Davis decided to take a look at the dispositions close to Richmond. Riding out with Lee, in late May 1862, they met two generals, who did not have orders and were not aware of Johnston's defence plans. Davis communicated his acid displeasure to Johnston, noting that there was no operational plan, that neither general knew the location of the enemy and that the road was open to a Union advance, so he concluded that neither general could

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 493, Lee to Johnston, 3rd May 1862.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 506, Johnston to Lee, 10th May 1862.

¹⁵ *Davis papers, Vol. 8*, Davis to Varina Davis, 13th May 1862, p. 174.

¹⁶ Johnston, *Narrative*, p. 119.

possibly have been in command at that location.¹⁷ This was a direct attack on Johnston's organisation and communication skills that was difficult for him to defend, as his superiors had witnessed the situation. Johnston was economical with the information he provided to Richmond about his plans. Davis' latest complaint demonstrated that he wanted to prove himself right rather than attempt to rebuild their fractured relationship. Even if Davis was justified, he ought to have exhibited some diplomatic skills to get the best out of Johnston. There was little chance of him warming to the President after another attack on his leadership.

The breakdown in friendship, having commenced with the dispute over rank, was increased by the criticisms of: command problems in the Shenandoah Valley, the retreat across the Rappahannock, the abandonment of Norfolk and the absence at Richmond of plans and orders for generals in the field. Relations had steadily worsened from September 1861 to May 1862. At the battle of Seven Pines on 31st May 1862, Johnston was severely wounded, bringing his command of the Army of Northern Virginia to an end. Edward A. Pollard, editor of one of the South's most important newspapers, the Richmond *Examiner*, recalled: "No one but Mr. Davis doubted that Johnston was a commander of first-class ability and knowledge. ... Unfortunately Mr. Davis had an inveterate dislike of Johnston."¹⁸ Davis, despite his criticism of Johnston, was pleased that he was recovering from his wound and wished that, "he was able to take the field. ... he is a good Soldier, knows the troops, ... and could at this time render most valuable service."¹⁹ Johnston had objected to his treatment over his rank, in an unseemly way. His animosity to Davis stemmed from this dispute, rather than there being a long-standing division between them. The

¹⁷ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XI, Part III, p. 536, Davis to Johnston, 23rd May 1862.

¹⁸ Edward A. Pollard, *Life of Jefferson Davis, etc.*, National Publishing Company, (Philadelphia, 1869), reproduced by University of Michigan Library, (Ann Arbor, 2007), p. 296.

¹⁹ *Davis papers*, Vol. 8, Davis to Varina Davis, 23rd June 1862, pp. 264-5.

President did not try to rebuild their relationship and his continued criticism of Johnston resulted in further deterioration between them. Johnston's security concerns contributed to reduced information reaching Richmond. Their co-operation at the battle of First Bull Run had demonstrated the results that could be achieved when Davis and Johnston worked in harmony. After his wounding, Johnston was immediately replaced by Lee, who was in attendance from South Carolina, where Pemberton had been appointed his successor.

Pemberton's political shortcomings in South Carolina

Pemberton was promoted to departmental command in mid-March 1862 for the first time, to a level where it was important to have good relationships with state politicians.²⁰ The South Carolina seaboard was close to Washington and it was fairly easy for Union shipping to reach the coast and deliver substantial forces at a chosen point. Previous dispositions to guard against that eventuality meant that there were small detachments garrisoning many points. Pemberton believed that he did not have enough troops to defend the key ports of Charleston and Savannah, so he wanted to withdraw troops from these outlying areas. He intended to have consolidated numbers for defence near Charleston, but he acted without understanding the need to explain his strategy to the Governor and other leading South Carolina politicians, who were already suspicious of those of Northern birth.

There was prejudice against a Northerner taking command within the Confederacy, as there was suspicion concerning the motivations of anyone without Southern roots and a belief that there was a lack of understanding of the way of life. In March 1862, Lucy Pickens, wife of the governor of South Carolina, "inveighed

²⁰ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. VI, p. 407, Special orders No. 59, by command of the Secretary of War from the Adjutant and Inspector General's office, Richmond, issued by an Assistant Adjutant-General (name not provided), 14th March 1862.

against Mr. Davis's wickedness in *always* sending men born at the North to command at Charleston."²¹ Mary Chesnut, wife of Colonel James Chesnut Jr., one of Davis' aides and a former leading South Carolina politician, held these views and wrote: "Yankees are awfully unlucky statesmen and commanders for the Confederacy. ... They believe in the North in the way no true Southerner ever will. They see no shame in surrendering to Yankees. They are halfhearted clear through."²² The governor's wife and a leading politician's wife were representative of political opinion in South Carolina. These opinions were expressed in March and April 1862, during Pemberton's tenure, and could only have been directed at him. Pickens and Chesnut believed that Northerners performed badly when appointed in the South, because they lacked conviction to the cause. In South Carolina, the politicians were a key part of the secession movement that caused the outbreak of the Civil War. Davis was aware of this prejudice against Northern-born commanders, but believed that this would not impair Pemberton's usefulness in South Carolina. Pemberton, however, quickly came into open conflict with the Governor.

Cracks began to appear in the relationships that Pemberton needed to have with the key politicians in South Carolina within two weeks of taking command. Pemberton's first action as commander was to try to remove heavy guns from Charleston's outer defences, against the wishes of Governor Francis W. Pickens. He created consternation when he confirmed their withdrawal.²³ Embarrassingly for Pemberton, this order was challenged in a rebuke from Lee, suggesting that he should confer with Pickens if he wanted to change any of his defensive arrangements.²⁴ Pemberton wanted to concentrate the South Carolina forces, but in failing to consult

²¹ C. Vann Woodward, (ed.), *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, Yale University Press, (New Haven, 1981), 20th March 1862 entry, pp. 316-7.

²² *Ibid.*, 29th April 1862 entry, p. 332.

²³ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. VI, p. 420, Pemberton to Cooper, 27th March 1862.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 424-5, T. A. Washington (Major and Assistant Adjutant-General) to Pemberton, 4th April 1862.

Pickens, there was an absence of any attempt to persuade him of the merits of this action. At the time there was no urgent enemy military activity drawing away his attention from communicating properly with Pickens.

Pemberton thought he had done enough to improve relations with the Governor. However, he did not achieve a common understanding of the defensive requirements with Pickens and merely assumed that explaining himself would be sufficient. He reported in early April 1862 on his improved relations with Pickens, concluding, “that perfect harmony exists.”²⁵ It would have been wiser if Pemberton had discussed the defensive arrangements with Pickens and he had attempted to reach consensus on the merits of his defensive strategy.

Pemberton did not understand the extent of the problem with Pickens and made another attempt, in April 1862, to weaken the defences at Georgetown, this time by removing troops. After the defeat at Shiloh, Lee ordered Pemberton to send reinforcements to Corinth, Mississippi.²⁶ There was firing on Fort Pulaski near Savannah, so to accommodate Lee, he decided to transfer the troops from Georgetown to meet this new threat further south.²⁷ Pickens was also requested to reinforce Corinth, so he arranged for newly-mustered Confederate troops to be sent. This bypassed Pemberton, but Pickens telegraphed for him to confirm the troop transfer to Brigadier-General Roswell S. Ripley, the commander of Confederate forces in Charleston, ending a terse message abruptly: “Let Ripley have your orders.”²⁸ As Ripley reported to Pemberton, this interference with one of his subordinates further demonstrated the developing friction between them. The next day Pickens flatly stated, “it is not necessary to withdraw the troops from Georgetown.”²⁹ Pemberton,

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 429–430, Pemberton to Washington, 8th April 1862.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 432, Lee to Pemberton, 10th April 1862.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 432, Pemberton to Lee 10th April 1862, 6.30 p.m.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 433, Pickens to Pemberton, 10th April 1862.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 434, Pickens to Pemberton 11th April 1862.

for the second time, had failed to get his own way, whilst simultaneously widening the rift. Pickens had moved, in a short space of time, from attempting to talk with Pemberton to complaining directly to Richmond, because that was the only way to get local decisions reconsidered. Pemberton had not understood the political dimension to his role, having attempted to operate independently from the Governor. Davis became concerned, not because of the worsening relationship with Pickens, but because Pemberton did not seem to understand the importance to the Confederate cause of defending Charleston. At the same time, Davis was already wondering whether Johnston would defend Richmond.

Davis advocates defence of strategic cities

The President took it upon himself, in May 1862, to stress the importance to Pemberton and Johnston of the need to defend the strategic cities of Charleston and Richmond. These cities were important to the morale and politics of the South and this policy was one of the cornerstones of Confederate strategy. Earlier in the Civil War, the loss of both New Orleans and Memphis had been body blows to the Confederate cause. In the North, Washington was considered to be a critically important point of defence, because of the effect on morale and the disruption of orderly government that would have arisen from the loss of the capital city. Similarly, Richmond, the capital city of the Confederacy, was symbolic to the whole Southern cause and its loss would have been catastrophic in terms of morale, government and armaments. Further south, Charleston was an important port and the centre of the secession movement that had contributed largely to the formation of the Confederacy. Charleston was also symbolic to the Southern cause, because that was where the Civil War had started with the shelling of Fort Sumter. Davis was faced, in May 1862, with

the political need to reiterate the importance of the defence of both of these strategic cities to his commanders, irrespective of the consequences to Confederate military operations.

There was concern, in May 1862, that Johnston would retreat and by-pass Richmond, pursued by the larger Union forces under McClellan. Davis pointed out that any defence must take place outside of the city and, for the first time, he attempted to persuade Johnston to his point of view by a change of tack in his communication. He wrote in conciliatory terms that, “my design is to suggest, not to direct, recognizing the impossibility of any one to decide in advance; and reposing confidently as well on your ability as your zeal, it is my wish to leave you with the fullest powers to exercise your judgment.”³⁰ Davis was adopting a mollifying tone at last, realising that his previous antagonism had led to Johnston refraining to report his actions, and, worst of all, retreating without putting up a fight. Johnston did not believe that Davis had suddenly changed his attitude and interpreted the President’s conciliation as a thinly-disguised attempt to have his wishes carried out through flattery. Johnston saw nothing wrong with his actions, but Davis was alarmed for the safety of the capital. The same month, Davis discovered, to his further alarm, that another key strategic city might be at risk.

In May 1862, Pemberton had indicated to some South Carolina politicians that he might weaken the Charleston defences, causing them to protest to Richmond. Lee alerted Davis to the problems in Charleston, as Lee had become concerned over the consideration of the removal of Confederate troops from the city, leaving the local militia as the only defenders. To those in South Carolina, Charleston had a special significance and any weakening of its defences was a highly-charged symbolic act. It

³⁰ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XI, Part III, pp. 523-4, Davis to Johnston, 17th May 1862.

was unthinkable for them to consider risking the loss of this monument to the Southern cause. Controversy arose when Confederate Congressman and Chairman of the Military Affairs Committee William Porcher Miles, and South Carolina Secretary of State Andrew G. Magrath, wrote to Pemberton requesting clarification of his intentions for the defence of Charleston.³¹ Pemberton responded that he would defend the city, but he could not guarantee that Confederate troops would remain to do this, leaving only state militia in place.³² Lee wrote to Pemberton on 29th May 1862 telling him that, “Charleston and Savannah are to be defended to the last extremity. ... the cities are to be fought street by street.”³³ Lee’s orders met the political situation. Pemberton had received a sharp lesson that political considerations would, almost always, outweigh military considerations. Davis had made his political and strategic requirements for the defence of these important Eastern cities known to Pemberton and Johnston. Pemberton had endured the interference in military matters by the governor and other politicians in the defence requirements for Charleston, but he was also faced with orders from Richmond that he found disagreeable.

Pemberton refuses to obey orders from Richmond

Pemberton was determined to concentrate on his own command and resist orders from Richmond. The loss of Charleston would have been grave and the primary focus of Pemberton’s command was to retain control of the port, as there were some Union forces in the vicinity. To achieve this goal it was important that Pemberton had a good relationship with Ripley, his immediate subordinate commanding in Charleston. This was not the case and Ripley applied for a transfer,

³¹ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, p. 513, Porcher Miles and Magrath to Pemberton, 22nd May 1862.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 514, Pemberton to Porcher Miles and Magrath, 22nd May 1862.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 523-4, Lee to Pemberton, 29th May 1862.

but Pemberton turned down the request.³⁴ In mid-May 1862, Lee wrote to Pickens in response to a letter from a group of prominent state politicians, consisting of Porcher Miles, Magrath, and the President of the South Carolina Senate, William Dennison Porter.³⁵ These men recommended that Charleston remain under Ripley reporting directly to Richmond and that Pemberton lost his responsibility for the city. Lee informed Pickens that it was impossible to comply with the request to have two separate commands in South Carolina but stated: “One or the other must be removed.”³⁶ Lee then separated them by requesting Pemberton to send a brigade under Ripley to Richmond, as a way of removing Ripley from South Carolina and gaining reinforcements in Virginia.³⁷ Pemberton promptly refused two days later, “unless positively directed”, citing the defence of Charleston as a necessity.³⁸ Lee, for the second time, ordered Pemberton to comply.³⁹ Richmond was under pressure from huge Union forces during the Peninsula Campaign and the Confederate field forces were substantially outnumbered, so reinforcements were being drawn urgently from elsewhere in the Confederacy. The Peninsula Campaign was the major focus for Union and Confederate operations in May 1862. Whilst Pemberton had to defend Charleston, Lee badly needed reinforcements. Most orders from Richmond given to field commanders had to be advisory, because of the distances involved and the changing local situation. For this reason, field commanders had to use their discretion when deciding whether or not to obey. In this case, however, the Peninsula Campaign created a pressing necessity for troops and Pemberton was not faced with a pressing need of his own. Furthermore, Pemberton was determined to retain the hostile Ripley,

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 484, Pemberton to W. H. Taylor, (Captain and Assistant Adjutant-General), 28th April 1862.

³⁵ Full name given to avoid confusion with Union Naval Officer William D. Porter, serving at the same time in the locality.

³⁶ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, pp. 503-4, Lee to Pickens, 15th May 1862.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 505-6, Lee to Pemberton, 19th May 1862.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 509-510, Pemberton to A. L. Long, (Colonel, Military Secretary to Headquarters Commanding General), 21st May 1862.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 518, Lee to Pemberton, 23rd May 1862.

despite Charleston not being under threat, and in disobedience of Lee's attempt to separate them.

Pemberton needed to retain enough troops to man the defences along the key sectors of the South Carolina and Georgia coastlines, sufficient to meet the threat of an invasion by sea. In late May 1862, he refused to send troops to Lee before Richmond "unless positively ordered".⁴⁰ Davis wrote to Pemberton twice in early June requesting troops, because the Peninsula Campaign was reaching a climax and he stressed the urgency of the situation.⁴¹ Pemberton ordered troops forward, but stressed the risk to Davis when, referring to Charleston and Savannah, he added: "I may have to abandon one city or the other."⁴² On the other hand, Davis was unwilling to risk the loss of either port, so he accepted Pemberton's description of the risks, allowing the troops to be sent later.⁴³ Pemberton was willing to question orders and was unwilling to provide troops. As the Peninsula Campaign dragged on, another major campaign further south was unlikely, but diversionary attacks were possible. Pemberton had used the usual discretion allowed field commanders to question the first order from Richmond. However, the Peninsula Campaign was making the defence of Richmond the highest priority in the Confederacy and it took the intervention of Davis for a second and a third order, to ensure that Pemberton sent reinforcements. Pemberton knew the situation at Richmond, but still refused Lee and Davis. In the early days of his command, he was stubborn in his resistance to higher authority and needed multiple orders to be issued before complying.

Pemberton returned to the issue of the number of troops required for the defence of the major city under his command. Later in June 1862, Randolph joined

⁴⁰ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XI, Part III, p. 536, Pemberton to Lee, 22nd May 1862.

⁴¹ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, p. 534, Davis to Pemberton, 2nd June 1862, and *O.R.* Series I, Vol. XI, Part III, p. 572, Davis to Pemberton, 4th June 1862.

⁴² *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, p. 539, Pemberton to Davis, 4th June 1862, 7 p.m.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 540, Davis to Pemberton, 4th June 1862.

the debate, requesting that reinforcements be sent to the Peninsula.⁴⁴ Pemberton was exasperated and refused to send any troops, stating: “I not only cannot spare any more troops from this department, but there is danger here unless I am re-enforced.”⁴⁵

Pemberton requested North Carolina reinforcements for South Carolina.⁴⁶ As the troops in North Carolina were closer to the Peninsula and had been engaged already in the campaign, it was unreasonable to assume that any troops closer to Richmond would be available for the retrograde movement. Pemberton had, within the normal discretion for a field commander, questioned the order from Randolph, but he had also, yet again, refused to understand the pressing problem near Richmond. This exchange of correspondence with both requesting reinforcements from each other bordered on the ridiculous, but Pemberton had again revealed his stubbornness by refusing to comply.

Davis judged that the missing guns, removed by Pemberton, in the outer defences of Charleston and at Georgetown, needed replacement. Pemberton did not believe that they were a military necessity, but for Davis they were a political necessity. In June 1862, Cooper tried to get Pemberton to return the guns, but Pemberton was having none of it, and refused to consider the order.⁴⁷ Cooper confirmed that these instructions came from the President and that they must be carried out.⁴⁸ Pemberton, for the second time, refused to comply with the order even though Cooper had reiterated that Davis wanted the guns returning.⁴⁹ Pemberton underscored his stubbornness during this incident, believing that he was right and defying his superiors. He did have a threat against which to defend, but it was small in relation to the massive pressure on Richmond. He insisted his own area of

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 558, Randolph to Pemberton, 11th June 1862.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 559, Pemberton to Randolph, 11th June 1862.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 558, Pemberton to Randolph, 11th June 1862.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 579, Cooper to Pemberton, 5th July 1862 and *Ibid.*, pp. 579-580, Pemberton to Cooper, 5th July 1862.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 582, Cooper to Pemberton, 9th July 1862.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 583, Pemberton to Cooper, 10th July 1862.

operations took priority, even when those orders came from his superiors in Richmond, who could better evaluate overall Confederate strategy. Because of his political shortcomings and his stubbornness, the clamour for Pemberton's removal increased.

Davis delays replacing Pemberton

The pressure to have Pemberton replaced gathered momentum after his early difficulties in Charleston, but met significant resistance from Davis. Davis never doubted Pemberton's abilities, because he believed that his commander was competent, so he consistently defended him against demands for his removal. Pickens and several other leading South Carolina politicians wanted Pemberton removed. The first to write, in June 1862, was Porcher Miles, whose letter to Lee detailed his shortcomings: "General Pemberton does not possess the confidence of his officers, his troops, or the people of Charleston. ... I believe that almost anyone whom you could select would be better for us than General Pemberton."⁵⁰ Lee forwarded the letter to Davis on 25th June, adding, "I hardly see how the removal of Pemberton can be avoided."⁵¹ The tone of the letter was respectful of Pemberton's abilities but focused on his lack of skills in dealing with people, including his own officers and men and the politicians in Charleston. Reinforcing the opposition to Pemberton, Davis had also received copies of two June resolutions of the Governor and Council of South Carolina, sent by James Chesnut Jr. on 14th June 1862, requesting a change in the conduct of affairs for the defence of Charleston.⁵² Davis did not accept this situation at face value, deciding to investigate, so General Samuel Cooper was sent to

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 560, Porcher Miles to Lee, 11th June 1862.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 560, Lee to Davis, 25th June 1862.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 566, Chesnut to Davis, 14th June 1862.

Charleston under the guise of examining the defences.⁵³ On 21st June 1862, Cooper reported from Charleston concerning the complaints against Pemberton,

... the chief of which is the want of confidence by the authorities and the people generally in the ability and capacity of the present incumbent. These, in my judgment, are sufficient of themselves to impair his usefulness, and I think it would not be doing justice to that officer to retain him in his present position against such a weight of opposition. ... I desire to add that I have great confidence in the zeal and untiring efforts of General Pemberton to do all that lies in his power ... but with such an opposition as constantly surrounds him it would be difficult for any commander situated as he is to effect much.⁵⁴

Cooper recognised the extensive opposition to Pemberton, noted it affected the exercise of his command, but diplomatically concluded, in accordance with Davis' own judgment, that he was a capable officer. Pickens believed that Pemberton was carrying out a role beyond his capabilities and that, "in command of a brigade or Division he might act his part as a brave and good officer, ... [he] is sensitive and petulant, as if he feared to accept a suggestion because ... he might create a doubt as to his standing ability."⁵⁵ After Cooper's report and Pickens' clarification, it would have been sensible to remove Pemberton, but the President opposed any change. This level of opposition, during June 1862, should have prompted Davis to find a swift resolution to this command problem. Davis did not see the issue in this light and persevered with Pemberton, despite Cooper's carefully-worded recommendation.

Davis wanted to continue with Pemberton in command in South Carolina and was determined to ignore the objections from the politicians. After Cooper's visit, Davis wrote to Pickens with his verdict in early August 1862. Pickens was dismayed by the contents of the letter, which revealed that Davis' confidence "in General Pemberton is such that I would be satisfied to have him in any position requiring the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 568, Davis to Pickens, 19th June 1862.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 569-570, Cooper to Davis, 21st June 1862.

⁵⁵ *Davis papers, Vol. 8*, Pickens to Davis, 12th June 1862, pp. 239-244.

presence of an able general.”⁵⁶ Davis for the first time explicitly expressed his support of Pemberton to Pickens, and so demonstrated his own strong loyalty to his chosen commander. Later in August, Davis’s position had hardened and he again wrote to Pickens:

I do not now find it practicable to send in his place another general who would equally well answer for the command. ... I hope, after a conference with General Pemberton and when you are more fully acquainted with his plans, that you may have the same confidence in his ability and good judgment that has made me willing to intrust him with so important a command.⁵⁷

Pickens responded on 20th August 1862, insisting that Pemberton had not wanted to defend Charleston until ordered by Lee, and within the month Beauregard was placed in command.⁵⁸ When Pemberton received the news he wrote to Cooper requesting field command.⁵⁹ He was ordered to report to Richmond in mid-September 1862, thus bringing the South Carolina episode to an end.⁶⁰ The President’s backing had continued long after Pemberton had lost the support of the South Carolina politicians, and reflected Davis’ stubbornness in refusing to take earlier action. Despite the complaints from South Carolina, Davis strongly reaffirmed his support for Pemberton, appointing him in October 1862 to the command of the Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana, with responsibility for defending Vicksburg, the city he had determined was the most important point in the western Confederacy. Davis had a firm opinion on the method of defence of the Mississippi River Valley and he had entrusted Pemberton to control the Confederate forces on the east bank, within the new Department of the West that was created the month after he took up his new command.

⁵⁶ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, pp. 593-4, Davis to Pickens, 5th August 1862.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 597-8, Davis to Pickens, 16th August 1862.

⁵⁸ *Davis papers. Vol. 8*, Pickens to Davis, 20th August 1862, p. 350.

⁵⁹ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, p. 601, Pemberton to Cooper, 31st August 1862.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 603-4, Special Orders No. 218 from Jonathan Withers (Assistant Adjutant-General), 17th September 1862.

Davis insists on Mississippi River as the departmental boundary

The concept of an overall commander in the West emerged in Richmond in November 1862, because the distance from Virginia made co-ordination difficult. Johnston was appointed to the command of the new Department of the West in mid-November 1862, but this did not include responsibility for any territory beyond the Mississippi River. The defence of the Mississippi River Valley was one of the most important objectives in the Confederacy, and Secretary of War George W. Randolph was determined to provide co-ordination without interference from the President. Randolph had taken up his appointment in March 1862, but Davis' military background and previous Federal experience as Secretary of War led him to continue with his direct involvement in the strategy and tactics of the prosecution of the war. Friction built up between the two men because of Davis' involvement in the detail of the running of the War Department.⁶¹ This was a constant problem for the new Secretary of War, who desired the freedom to run his department as he saw fit. Matters came to a head over the issue of co-ordination of the defence of the Mississippi River Valley.

In northern Mississippi in mid-November 1862, Union forces under Grant were pressing Pemberton. Davis, Cooper and Randolph all wanted Holmes to consider moving troops across the Mississippi River to aid him. Cooper requested that Holmes should reinforce Vicksburg with 10,000 men from Arkansas, urging that Davis wanted this to happen.⁶² Holmes refused, with the exchange of letters showing that the President supported the transferring of the troops, but that he would only

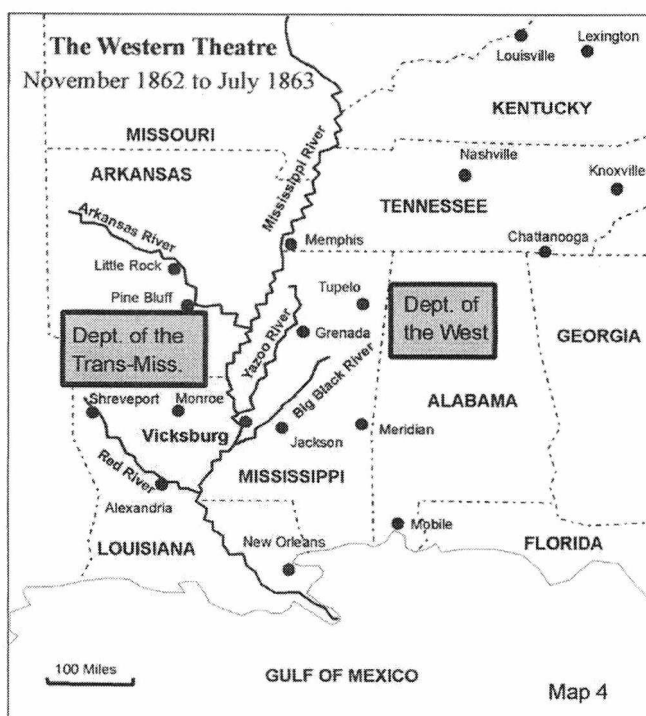
⁶¹ Edward Younger (ed.), *Inside the Confederate Government: The Diary of Robert Garlick Hill Kean*, Oxford University Press, (New York, 1957), pp. 28-31 for details of how Davis dealt with the Secretary of War and his department.

⁶² *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XIII, p. 914, Cooper to Holmes, 11th November 1862 and p. 921, Cooper to Holmes, 19th November 1862.

make suggestions rather than issue peremptory orders.⁶³ Holmes and Pemberton could transfer troops between either of their armies as the need arose, demonstrating flexibility in the way the geographical command structure was implemented at a local level, but it depended, crucially, on the voluntary agreement of both commanders. Davis advocated that the commanders of the geographical departments could not cross the Mississippi River themselves, having to remain in command in their own territory, but they could transfer troops.

Randolph made the mistake of making a proposal that by-passed the President and did not meet Davis' strict view as to how his geographical command structure was intended to operate. Randolph suggested to Holmes that "when necessary you can cross the Mississippi with such part of your forces as you may select, and by virtue of your rank direct the combined operations on the eastern bank."⁶⁴ Davis required Randolph to countermand this order.⁶⁵ Robert G. H. Kean, Head of the

Bureau of War, noted in his diary that the President had not involved Randolph sufficiently in the functions normally associated with the War Department and had reduced the role to that of a clerk.⁶⁶ Davis was offended by Randolph's actions, and Randolph promptly resigned,



⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 926, Holmes to Cooper, 22nd November 1862.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 906-7, Randolph to Holmes, 27th October 1862.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 914-5, Davis to Randolph, 12th November 1862 with endorsement to Holmes, 13th November 1862.

⁶⁶ Younger, *The Diary of Robert Garlick Hill Kean*, pp. 30-31.

because he could not operate with this level of interference. Davis was very sensitive and reacted aggressively in his response to Randolph's slight to his authority. He had put the need to prove he was right above the political and military considerations, and so he admonished Randolph publicly. The result was that Davis proved even more determined to preserve the dividing line between the departments, leaving only Johnston as the only promoter of an alternative point of view.

The combination and co-ordination of command on either side of the Mississippi was something Johnston strongly advocated, in November 1862. He believed there should be combined Confederate command in the Mississippi River Valley, to combat the Union forces that already had unified command.⁶⁷ By moving the Trans-Mississippi armies to the east of the Mississippi, Johnston was sure that Grant's defeat was possible. Johnston had lost an ally, but he fervently agreed with Randolph's attempt to unify command either side of the Mississippi River. The resignation of the Secretary of War isolated him and meant that his own opinions were even less likely to prevail. Because Davis created this situation, he would either need to provide direct co-ordinating orders, a course of action that he did not favour, or he had to rely on the commanders in the Trans-Mississippi department voluntarily undertaking the responsibility to assist in the defence of Vicksburg, based on his suggestions to them. Davis had faith that the top-level commanders he appointed to the Trans-Mississippi would co-operate, because he knew them personally.

Early development of the Trans-Mississippi commanders

⁶⁷ Johnston, *Narrative*, pp. 147-8.

Each of the key commanders in the Trans-Mississippi department during the Vicksburg Campaign had early Civil War experience in the Eastern Theatre, where they had contact with Davis and Johnston. Kirby Smith, the Trans-Mississippi commander during the Vicksburg Campaign, was wounded during the battle of First Bull Run in July 1861, shortly after having arrived on the field, and was not able to demonstrate any real command capability, beyond his initial bravery, so there was no indication from that as to how he would perform in the Trans-Mississippi. After recovering, the following year he was appointed to command in the West in the small department of Eastern Tennessee.⁶⁸ Davis appeared to be justified in making the first promotion, because Kirby Smith had performed well in Virginia, but within a short time he took a greater risk by promoting him again to the Trans-Mississippi, with a vast increase in responsibilities.

The commander in Little Rock, Arkansas, during the Vicksburg Campaign, was Holmes, the former commander of the whole Trans-Mississippi department. Holmes had not had any combat experience, but he had been criticised, in a limited way, after the battle of Malvern Hill on 1st July 1862. Holmes had been at West Point with Davis, and being a personal friend who did not pose any challenges to the President's authority, he was virtually guaranteed security in a senior position.⁶⁹ His early performance in the East, meant he was sent westwards with little valuable experience to his name, with concerns over lack of dynamism. Holmes was aware of his own lack of ability, writing to Davis during the Peninsula Campaign: "This field is entirely too comprehensive for my capacity and I beseech you at once to send G. W. Smith to supercede me or someone more able to relieve me."⁷⁰ One contemporary

⁶⁸ Discussed in the next chapter.

⁶⁹ Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government, Volume 2*, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1990) p. 123. This is an unabridged reprint of the original published in 1881.

⁷⁰ *Davis papers, Vol. 8*, Holmes to Davis, 4th May 1862, p. 163.

remarked acidly that if “General Holmes be not in his dotage, the English language possesses no synonym to indicate his stupidity and inertia.”⁷¹ Holmes was a long-serving officer, being fifty-seven years old at the outbreak of the Civil War, but was pedestrian in the way he carried out his duties in comparison with Lee, for example, who was three years younger. Holmes commanded a reserve brigade at the battle of First Bull Run and then was placed in command of the North Carolina coastal defences, in the State of his birth. He was at the battle of Malvern Hill, during the Peninsula Campaign, but was not actually involved in the fighting, save for an artillery engagement.⁷² Rumours of his ineffective performance at Malvern Hill persisted, noted by Davis in relation to tardiness he showed when ordered to advance by Lee.⁷³ Holmes was an old friend of the President, who was moved to say: “I, who ... was intimately acquainted with his whole career... bear testimony to the purity, self-abnegation, generosity, fidelity, and gallantry which characterised him as a man and a soldier.”⁷⁴ The years had dimmed his capabilities, so this assessment by Davis did not reflect his capabilities at the time he was required to be dynamic in the defence of Vicksburg. His Civil War experience, before transferring to the West, meant he had not managed large bodies of troops under fire. Holmes doubted his own abilities and, when promoted to Lieutenant-General, believed that he was “deficient in many of the elements necessary to a large command.”⁷⁵ Holmes was sent to the West, arriving at the beginning of August 1862, because he had failed to inspire faith in his recent leadership in the East, which did not augur well for Vicksburg or anywhere else under his command. The President took a large gamble promoting Holmes to such an extensive area, as overall commander of the Trans-Mississippi, before Kirby Smith

⁷¹ Pollard, *Davis*, p. 300. Pollard did not identify the source of his quotation.

⁷² *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XI, Part II, pp. 906-8, Holmes to Lieutenant-Colonel R. H. Chilton, Assistant Adjutant-General, 15th July 1862.

⁷³ Jefferson Davis, *Confederate Government*, Vol. 2, p. 122.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁷⁵ *Davis papers*, Vol. 8, Holmes to Davis, 9th November 1862, p. 484.

took over command. Davis should have had some reservations concerning Holmes that would have warranted a close examination of his performance in the Trans-Mississippi.

The commander in Louisiana, reporting to Kirby Smith, was Major-General Richard Taylor, who was the son of former United States President Zachary Taylor. Davis had been married to Richard Taylor's sister, before her death a few months after their marriage. At the commencement of hostilities he was elected a colonel of a Louisiana regiment that was then posted to Virginia.⁷⁶ Taylor was a successful brigade commander under Stonewall Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley and again during the Seven Days battles in June 1862. After a severe illness he was posted back to Louisiana.⁷⁷ He had demonstrated his capabilities as a commander of men in the field. Davis was justified in making this appointment because of Taylor's fine record.

The division most capable of being used at Vicksburg was under the command of Major-General John G. Walker, who was born and educated in Missouri. He was an able commander who had served in the east at Harper's Ferry, Malvern Hill and Antietam, and Lee did not want to lose him. Walker was posted to the Trans-Mississippi and ordered to report to Holmes in November 1862.⁷⁸ Lee had protested that "I feel that I am much weakened by the loss."⁷⁹ Davis offered to rescind the order but Lee relented.⁸⁰ Walker took command, in late December 1862, of a division of Texas troops at Pine Bluff, some forty miles south-east of Little Rock on the Arkansas River, and the troops became known forever as Walker's Texas Division. Walker had demonstrated his capabilities as a division commander in the East: his loss was regretted by Lee and much would depend on whether he was used in the

⁷⁶ Taylor, *Personal Experiences of the Civil War*, p. 16.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁷⁸ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XIX, part II, p. 731, Special Orders No. 264 from Jonathan Withers, Assistant Adjutant-General, Adjutant and Inspector-General's Office, Richmond, 11th November 1862.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 697-8 Lee to Davis, 6th November 1862.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 703, Davis to Lee, 7th November 1862 and Special Orders No. 235, 7th November 1862.

defence of Vicksburg. Davis was wholly justified in making this appointment, because of Walker's fine record in action.

Conclusion

President Davis could have drawn some conclusions concerning the capabilities of his generals from their performances in the East, in what became, in effect, a training ground for their potential performances in the West. However, Davis was unable to assimilate the importance of many of these lessons, particularly where these shortcomings conflicted with aspects of his own personality.

Davis had made good decisions with most of his appointments in the Trans-Mississippi, from those who had early experience in the East, with the exception of Holmes. Woodworth (1990) agreed that Davis had an unrealistic belief in Holmes' ability, promoting him to the Trans-Mississippi despite Lee's adverse assessment of his capabilities.⁸¹ W. C. Davis (1991) and Cooper (2000) were also unable to explain the reasoning for Holmes' appointment beyond Davis' undue faith in an old friend and both biographers agreed that Davis had made a mistake.⁸² Davis' support could have been interpreted as admirable, but a substantial promotion for a general, who was already beyond his dynamic years, was one of the worst appointment decisions Davis made in the Civil War. In the East, Holmes had failed to demonstrate command capability of his division, which did not augur well should he be called on to again lead troops in battle. Furthermore, he had never been placed in a position where top-level leadership skills were required and he was now expected to control and co-ordinate his forces over a vast area.

⁸¹ Steven E. Woodworth, *Jefferson Davis and his generals, The failure of Confederate command in the West*, University Press of Kansas, (Lawrence, 1990), pp. 121-3.

⁸² William C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis, The man and his hour*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1996), p.410. This was a paperback edition of the 1991 original. William J. Cooper Jr., *Jefferson Davis, American*, Vintage Books, New York, 2001, p. 442. This was a paperback edition of the 2000 original.

Kirby Smith was promoted to command the Trans-Mississippi Department in March 1863. Historians have refrained from evaluating Kirby Smith's initial capabilities for command, relying on evidence of his subsequent performance to demonstrate that he was a good choice.⁸³ However, Davis took a degree of risk with this double promotion, initially in Eastern Tennessee, before sending him to the much larger department of the Trans-Mississippi in March 1863. Kirby Smith was wounded too early in the battle of First Bull Run to determine whether he was an effective commander of a brigade of troops. His undoubted enthusiasm and bravery when first arriving on the field improved his standing. This was arguably enough for Davis to promote him, as the number of available candidates was low. At this early stage of the Civil War virtually all new appointees had very little experience of the next level of command and so Davis, rightly, made the initial promotion to Eastern Tennessee, where he would be exercising departmental command for the first time. Kirby Smith's performance during the invasion of Kentucky, whilst in command in Eastern Tennessee, is covered in the next chapter. Kirby Smith inherited two impressive subordinates in the Trans-Mississippi, in Walker and Taylor, who came to their western commands with fine combat records in the East. Both had proven that they could handle troops in battle and so Davis had a nucleus of excellent field officers in the Trans-Mississippi, with the notable exception of Holmes.

Davis made six further errors, before the end of May 1862 that eventually affected the leadership in the Vicksburg Campaign. Two of these errors were identified by Woodworth (1990)⁸⁴ and did not warrant further analysis. First, Davis' need to always prove he was right has generally been accepted as an unfortunate

⁸³ See: Joseph H. Parks, *General Edmund Kirby Smith C. S. A.*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1992). This book is a reprint of the 1954 original. Robert L. Kerby, *Kirby Smith's Confederacy: The Trans-Mississippi South, 1863-65*, The University of Alabama Press, (Tuscaloosa, 1972). Jeffery S. Prushankin, *A Crisis in Confederate Command: Edmund Kirby Smith, Richard Taylor and the Army of the Trans-Mississippi*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 2005).

⁸⁴ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, p. 315 on Davis' need to prove he was always right and pp. 219-220 concerning the lack of unified command in the Mississippi River Valley.

personality trait. Second, Davis insisted on the Mississippi River, as the rigid boundary line between the two major geographical departments in the West that prevented unified command in the Valley. This was one of Davis' major errors in the defence of Vicksburg and, because he refused to change his mind, voluntary co-operation from the Trans Mississippi was all that could be expected. Davis' remaining four errors have not been sufficiently explored by other historians in relation to the effect they had during the Vicksburg Campaign.

First, Davis advocated the defence of Charleston from a political perspective, above the military considerations in South Carolina, directly causing a change to the way the defence of the city was being conducted, a new perspective that Pemberton took with him to Vicksburg. Pemberton believed that it was better to concentrate his forces away from the city of Charleston, so as to be able strike at weak points of any Northern offensive. Davis, taking an opposing view, stressed the political importance of defending the key cities of Richmond and Charleston, whilst dispersing troops sufficiently to provide local defence and keep the support of local politicians. Because Johnston was wounded, this instruction was never tested at Richmond under his command. The instruction to Pemberton that Charleston must be defended was also not tested, because of his replacement. Vicksburg became the most important Confederate city in the West by mid-1862 and Pemberton saw it as a base that must always be defended. Pemberton accepted the Presidential principle of defending this strategic city, based on the instructions he received to defend Charleston. Johnston, on the other hand, did not accept this principle and this created the fundamental difference of opinion with Pemberton and Davis that divided the leadership in the West during the Vicksburg Campaign.

Second, Davis defended Pemberton, far beyond a reasonable period of time, refusing to replace him, when he had lost the support of many important politicians in South Carolina and his key subordinate in Charleston. Woodworth noted that Davis' support remained strong despite these problems, but he did not identify the extraordinary lengths that the President took to try and keep Pemberton in position.⁸⁵ Davis was fully aware of the cultural difficulties faced by Pemberton, who had to deal with the Fire-Eaters of South Carolina and their prejudices against anyone born in the North. Lee and Cooper both supported Pemberton, noting that the attitudes he encountered reduced his performance, and they refrained from directing any personal criticism. Understandably, Davis took little notice of the complaints against Pemberton in the early period of his command. However, he attempted to resist the rising tide of complaints, exhibiting an extended degree of stubbornness in delaying the reassignment of his favoured general. The problems in South Carolina were more deep-seated than Davis realised and the attitude of the politicians hid from view the true aspects of Pemberton's performance. Davis tried to keep him in his position, against widespread opposition, for three months longer than was reasonable given the strength of complaints in June 1862. Davis was extremely loyal to his chosen commander, initially ignoring the complaints, but eventually he bowed to the pressure, when he realised that the clamour for Pemberton's removal would not die down. Davis could not be accused of favouritism toward an old friend, as in Holmes' case, because his relationship with Pemberton commenced with the Civil War. His faith in Pemberton was undiminished, because he believed the South Carolina politicians were unjust in their judgement of his chosen commander and that he had made the right appointment. Davis had demonstrated extraordinary stubbornness in

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

persevering with Pemberton, a personality trait that had the potential to blight the Vicksburg Campaign.

Third, Davis assessed Pemberton's leadership capabilities based on his West Point training, his junior service in the Mexican War and their face-to-face meetings. Woodworth commented that Pemberton had made a blunder over Fort Sumter and had offended the Rhett family, but he did not pursue any further reasons why Pemberton had failed in South Carolina.⁸⁶ Pemberton had additionally: tried to move guns and troops from the outer Charleston defences and from Georgetown, disagreed with Ripley and failed to forge a relationship with Governor Pickens and other leading politicians. Davis ignored the clamour for Pemberton's removal that arose from these actions in South Carolina and he appointed him to Vicksburg based solely on his own judgement, rather than on an objective analysis of the reasons why his command had failed. Pemberton gave due deference to the office of President, but when he dealt with the politicians in South Carolina; he pursued his own ideas for the defence of Charleston and its environs. The Governor and several other leading South Carolina politicians believed that Pemberton was out of his depth and that any suggestions for improvements to the Charleston defences were taken as challenges to his authority, rather than as points for discussion and eventual resolution. Pemberton could not assimilate the ideas of others into his own plans. He could not communicate with the politicians and his subordinates to ensure that there was harmony. Pemberton also exhibited a degree of stubbornness with his superiors in Richmond that should have alerted Davis to his shortcomings. Pemberton's first action was to refuse orders, whoever they came from, for his own reasons. He demonstrated his stubbornness by refusing, several times, to obey a second order on the same subject without

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

considering the consequences elsewhere in the Confederacy. Davis, though, respected the right of his local commander to do the best job in his department and his support for Pemberton did not waver. He was unlikely to change his personality and he left for Vicksburg with the risks that he would again quickly offend the local politicians and that he would again ignore orders from his superiors. Pemberton had never been an effective commander in South Carolina. He was untried in combat and he had been unable to handle the political demands placed on top-level commanders. There was an inherent risk that this would happen again in Mississippi.

Fourth, Davis did not take action in the East to remove Johnston, even when there was every reason for the President to believe that failure would result from the way he conducted his leadership. Woodworth reviewed Johnston's career in the East and reached the conclusion that Davis had not lost faith in him despite the problems between them: after First Bull Run, over Johnston's rank, when he retreated without reason, when he lost valuable supplies and when he failed to fight.⁸⁷ Woodworth argued that Davis should have had action from Johnston or had him replaced.⁸⁸ However, the root cause of all of the above has not been identified by other historians. Johnston's performance in the East was marred by continued insubordination. He made decisions in the field that were contrary to Davis' wishes, he did not communicate his plans, he was unnecessarily antagonistic and he did not willingly cooperate. Johnston was cautious and not imaginative enough to take the initiative. He was admired by his troops as a commander, but was unable to use an army aggressively. Johnston's one success in the East came, when Davis had exhibited good leadership in commanding him to merge his army with Beauregard's in Northern Virginia, which led directly to the victory at First Bull Run. During the

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 173-8.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

battle, Johnston demonstrated good command skills in reacting to the situation into which he was thrust. He had not used his own initiative. The order to consolidate and beat one of the two Union armies came from Richmond and the commanders of the two Confederate armies were obliged to respond to this central control. This success proved that Theatre-style co-ordinated command could provide the strategic framework and that armies under local commanders could operate effectively together, provided there was clarity in the leadership of the combined armies. The subsequent quarrels with Johnston in the aftermath of the battle prevented the positive leadership aspects of the victory from being realised during further operations in Virginia. Davis had taken risks that were acceptable and good strategic political decisions had been made in Richmond to ensure that the central command was effective. Davis trusted Johnston's military capability during the whole of their time together in Virginia and the breakdown in their friendship was not seen from the same perspective by the President. However, because of Johnston's attitude, their relationship had already reached a level where it was unworkable, being at its worst during the Peninsula Campaign in May 1862. The President had a case for Johnston's removal when he failed to respond, to the point of insubordination, to his and Lee's enquiries concerning the fate of Norfolk. W. C. Davis agreed that Johnston's nature was close to insubordinate during the Peninsula Campaign and that Davis should have acted, but by then the pressing problems in front of Richmond made it too dangerous to consider a change of command.⁸⁹ The President rated him as a capable general and Johnston's failings could not break that assessment. Davis had seen what Lee could achieve by transferring troops between armies in front of the enemy to best advantage. The President wanted to achieve similar results in the Western Theatre, so

⁸⁹ W. C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, p. 423.

he needed a senior commander whose primary task was to co-ordinate the armies in the newly-styled Department of the West. Davis took a risk by promoting Johnston because of his caution and his insubordination. Davis had few others to choose from and he was gambling that Johnston would develop from a weak army commander in the East into a successful Theatre commander in the West. However, having decided that the list of alternative candidates was bare, Davis went ahead with Johnston's appointment, but to improve the chances of success in the defence of the Mississippi River Valley, co-ordination from Richmond was still needed.

Davis' objective should have been to provide strategic direction in the Mississippi River Valley, so that the military and political leadership worked together under a common plan, in a similar way to their achievement at First Bull Run. Davis realised that he needed a military theatre commander to implement his need for strategic political direction in the West, but he was concerned about Johnston's performance, as demonstrated in Virginia. Furthermore, because Davis trusted Pemberton, he had in place a commander at Vicksburg who had assimilated the key Presidential message that was to defend the city at all costs, with the unspoken risk of losing an army if the objective was not reached. Davis believed that this structure, based on the capabilities of the personnel who had developed experience in the Eastern Theatre, was the best that he could attain from the limited number of options at his disposal. This structure was about to be challenged by Grant. Davis' expectation of co-ordination between his western armies in the defence of Vicksburg was also about to be tested, because the local issues in the adjacent departments, in the Trans-Mississippi and in Tennessee, provided diversions in the West.

Chapter three

Diversions in the West

Introduction

The defence of Vicksburg could only be realistically assisted, from December 1862 until early May 1863, by the co-ordination and use of troops from armies already in the West, because of the great length of time it took to transfer troops from the East. The only forces in the West large enough to provide meaningful assistance to Vicksburg were in central Tennessee and the Trans-Mississippi.

By December 1862, in General Joseph E. Johnston's new Department of the West, the forces on each side had grouped into two major armies. Lieutenant-General John C. Pemberton was facing Major-General Ulysses S. Grant in Mississippi and General Braxton Bragg was facing Major-General William S. Rosecrans in central Tennessee. When he visited either army in the Department of the West, Johnston was ordered to take command. The main objective President Jefferson Davis set for his new commander was to transfer troops between these two armies as the need arose, but the rail route, via Mobile, prevented rapid movements. Johnston did not believe that it was possible to move troops, because both of his armies were outnumbered and the North enjoyed the advantage of interior lines, so they could always make a faster counter movement. In December 1862, Bragg had an army of 45,000 facing a Union army of 70,000 in Tennessee. At the same time, Lieutenant-General Theophilus H. Holmes had 31,000 troops comprising of, a 20,000 field army in north-western Arkansas, 6,000 troops in winter quarters at Pine Bluff and a garrison of 5,000 at the Post of Arkansas. Holmes was focused on defending Little Rock and, if the opportunity arose, on invading Missouri, whilst Bragg was concerned in case

Rosecrans advanced. The defence of Vicksburg was not uppermost in the plans of either Bragg or Holmes.

In late December 1862, Grant threatened Vicksburg during the Central Mississippi Campaign, so reinforcements were needed there. The source of these reinforcements was a problem for President Jefferson Davis and General Joseph E. Johnston to resolve. Davis and Johnston needed to agree on the strategy for the defence of Vicksburg and the opportunity to achieve just that was presented when the President visited the Department of the West at the end of December 1862.

After Davis returned to Richmond, from January 1863 until early May 1863, Johnston remained mostly in Tennessee overseeing Bragg's army and did not take an active part in the preparations for the defence of Vicksburg. During this period, Johnston, who was the Theatre commander given the responsibility for defending the most important city in the West, did not visit Mississippi. Strategic focus in the Confederate high command was essential to the defence of Vicksburg and the Mississippi River Valley and it was dissipated on other, less-pressing, matters.

The defence of the Mississippi River Valley required strategic leadership from Davis, who needed to provide co-ordinating orders from Richmond that required co-operation by Johnston, in the Department of the West, with the commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department. This department was led by Holmes from August 1862 until March 1863 and, thereafter, for the rest of the Civil War, by Lieutenant-General Edmund Kirby Smith. These commanders, in the first half of 1863, were diverted on to other issues, rather than the defence of Vicksburg. Johnston was diverted from direct involvement in the preparations to defend the Mississippi River Valley by command problems in Tennessee. Holmes was diverted by Union activity at the Post of Arkansas and a desire to focus on Missouri. Kirby Smith was diverted,

once he took command, by Union activity in the Red River Valley. When he arrived in the Trans-Mississippi, Kirby Smith had the benefit of recent experience in departmental command, albeit in a much smaller territory. Whilst in East Tennessee, Kirby Smith received valuable leadership lessons that were important to his development as a departmental commander and his new role in the Trans-Mississippi.

Kirby Smith's disillusionment in Kentucky

The Southern occupation of Columbus, in September 1861, broke the Kentucky attempt at neutrality in the Civil War, opening the door to a Union occupation. As a slave state and because of its geographical position at the centre of the Upper South, Kentucky was considered to be politically important as a potential member of the Confederacy. Kirby Smith was first promoted to departmental command in East Tennessee, arriving in Knoxville in March 1862. After early Union pressure on his new command, he sought to invade Kentucky as a way of taking the fight to the enemy and rallying Confederate support. The August 1862 invasion plan was approved by Davis, because the President sought the political benefit of a victory in Kentucky.¹ Kirby Smith believed that there were many Southern sympathisers who would volunteer to join the army, and that an invasion would gain these troops.

In July 1862, Kirby Smith instigated the Kentucky Campaign and pressed a reluctant Bragg into leading the advance. Bragg was inexperienced as an army commander, having only recently been promoted. Kirby Smith needed assistance, as his field army numbered only 12,000, so he persuaded Bragg to lead the invasion with his much larger army of 30,000 from Mississippi.² Bragg was faced by the main

¹ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVI, Part I, p. 711, Davis to Bragg, 4th September 1862.

² *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVI, Part II, pp.775-6, Kirby Smith to Bragg, 24th August 1862 for Kirby Smith's strength. Grady McWhiney, *Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat*, Volume I, reprinted by University of Alabama Press, (Tuscaloosa, 1991), pp

Union force in Tennessee that was led by Major-General Don Carlos Buell, who was based at Nashville with an army that grew to 58,000 by the time the Louisville garrison was added to his strength.³ Kirby Smith also placed pressure on General Samuel Cooper, in Richmond, to issue orders.⁴ A few days later, he was forcefully pressing for a summer campaign, offering to place his own army under Bragg's command.⁵ Kirby Smith reasoned that the Union objective was to gain the mountainous region of eastern Tennessee before the winter, where there were many Northern sympathisers.⁶ In eastern Tennessee, Kirby Smith feared a Union advance, so the alternative of considering a Confederate advance gained credence with him, as a way of countering this threat. Kirby Smith was trying to protect his own department from invasion by pressing Bragg to join him.

Kirby Smith met with Bragg in Chattanooga to consider a plan for the invasion of central Tennessee and Kentucky, but he believed that the campaign was slow to commence. On 1st August 1862, Bragg passed this plan to Richmond.⁷ Kirby Smith was frustrated at the tardiness in starting the campaign, so he decided to marshal further support by writing to the President, complaining about a recent response from Bragg that “sanctions my move on Kentucky; but the delay which it necessitates is to be regretted.”⁸ Kirby Smith was circumventing Bragg, because he now regarded him as being slow to respond to their agreed invasion plan. He was lining up support from the President by using his political skills, to ensure that the campaign went ahead on time.

274-5. Original published by Columbia University, (New York, 1969). McWhiney quoted Bragg's strength from aggregating various returns within the *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XVI, Part II, pp. 772, 782, 784, 877, 886, 890, 893, 896 and 900, noting it was impossible to be exact.

³ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVI, Part I, p. 1028, Buell to General Lorenzo Thomas, Adjutant-General, U. S. Army, Washington, D.C., 4th November 1862.

⁴ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVI, Part II, p. 730, Kirby Smith to Bragg, 20th July 1862 and pp.730-1, Kirby Smith to Cooper, 21st July 1862.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 734-5, Kirby Smith to Bragg, 24th July 1862.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 734-5, Kirby Smith to Bragg, 24th July 1862.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 741, Bragg to Cooper, 1st August 1862.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 752-3, Kirby Smith to Davis, 11th August 1862.

Kirby Smith advanced rapidly into Kentucky. He saw Louisville as the point where the Confederate armies should merge for maximum impact in the campaign.⁹ By mid-September 1862, he suggested that the city was lightly defended and urged Bragg to capture it.¹⁰ He wanted Bragg, with his help, to defeat Major-General Don Carlos Buell before he had a chance to merge with the Union garrison.¹¹ The Union commander in Louisville, Brigadier-General Jeremiah T. Boyle, had worked out the Confederate's strategy and he detailed his concerns directly to President Abraham Lincoln:

They may form a junction and cut Buell off. I think the danger imminent. The enemy have a larger force of drilled troops in the field everywhere than we have. If Bragg and Smith execute the movement I apprehend they will of course move upon this city and scatter our raw recruits as chaff.¹²

Boyle deduced the correct strategy, but Bragg had not, even when Kirby Smith had made the same observation. Kirby Smith realised the important military advantage to be gained from merging all of the Confederate forces to attack, before Buell had any chance to consolidate his forces with the Louisville garrison. Bragg did not act upon Kirby Smith's suggestion to capture Louisville before Buell arrived and so they now faced the combined Union army.

Kirby Smith knew that the political success of the campaign could only come after a resounding military victory, but Bragg began to play politics, rather than concentrating on the Union army. Bragg announced, at the end of September 1862, that he would inaugurate a Confederate Governor, a move that diverted his attention away from the military campaign.¹³ Kirby Smith and his army were at Frankfort, where the inauguration was taking place, but he first wanted Bragg to defeat Buell at

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 830, Kirby Smith to Bragg, 15th September 1862.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 856, Kirby Smith to Bragg, 20th September 1862.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 866, Kirby Smith to Bragg, 23rd September 1862.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 496, Boyle to Lincoln, 7th September 1862.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 891-2, Kirby Smith to Bragg, 30th September 1862.

Louisville, located further to the west.¹⁴ Bragg's main army, under Major-General Leonidas Polk, the senior corps commander, was to the south-east of Louisville and was separated from Kirby Smith's army. Buell won the race to Louisville, because of this Confederate political diversion, but Bragg, whilst at the inauguration, wanted his army to attack, without taking command himself and without ensuring the consolidation of all of his forces. Whilst there was a political benefit from declaring the state as a gain for the Confederacy, it was short-lived, because militarily the state had not been secured. Kirby Smith had seen Bragg lose his lead over Buell in the race to Louisville, thereby allowing the Union forces to consolidate. He had the vision to understand that the political benefit of inaugurating a Confederate governor before the capture of Louisville was secured would only be short-lived, but Bragg did not act on his recommendation.

Kirby Smith had also become disillusioned, because the expected support from the local populace in Kentucky failed to materialise. He complained in mid-September 1862 that, "The Kentuckians are slow and backward in rallying to our standard. Their hearts are evidently with us, but their blue-grass and fat-grass are against us."¹⁵ Returning to the importance of a military victory, he insisted that until Buell was, "defeated we cannot hope for much addition to our ranks from Kentucky."¹⁶ Just as in East Tennessee, Kirby Smith was disappointed that very few Kentucky men rallied to the Confederate colours, a factor that defeated part of the object of the invasion.

Kirby Smith was not required to participate in the attack on Buell. He tried to get orders from Bragg to co-operate, and he suggested that "I will be in supporting

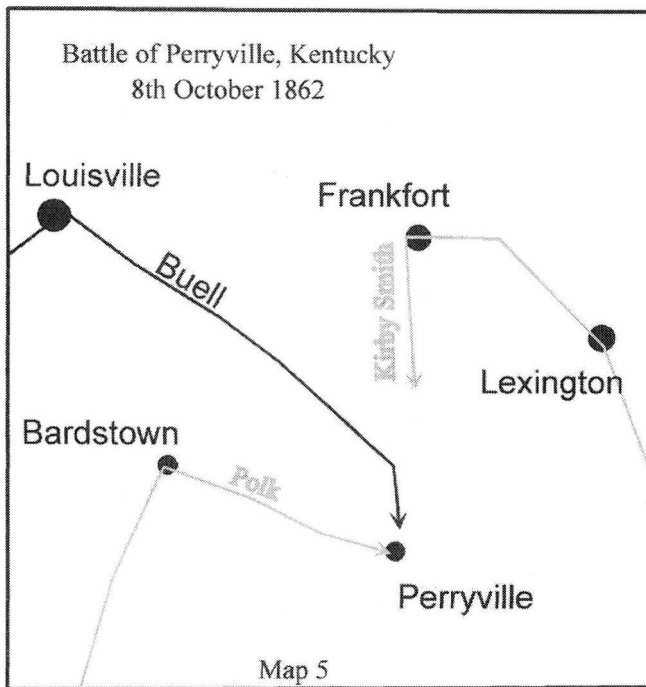
¹⁴ Joseph H. Parks, *General Edmund Kirby Smith C. S. A.*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1992). Kirby Smith to J. Stoddard Johnston, 31st October 1866, quoted on p.233. This book is a reprint of the 1954 original.

¹⁵ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVI, Part II, pp. 845-6, Kirby Smith to Bragg, 18th September 1862.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 866, Kirby Smith to Bragg, 23rd September 1862.

distance of you in your operations against Buell.”¹⁷ He was adamant that consolidation was necessary, requesting “I should like to have orders from you that my movements may be in accordance with the plan of operations you may adopt.”¹⁸

Bragg’s poor field intelligence meant that he thought that the Union army was not



consolidated and so he did not make an attempt to bring his force together. Polk twice declined to obey orders to attack, on both occasions with the support of a council of his generals, who thought that Bragg was unaware of the size of the Union forces they were facing.¹⁹ On the first occasion,

Polk made Bragg aware of the details of the changed situation, informing him that the Confederate army was moving away from Louisville toward Danville.²⁰ The problem with this retrograde movement was that it allowed Buell’s army, now much larger, to advance between the two Confederate armies. On the second occasion, the junior corps commander, Major-General William J. Hardee, tried to proffer advice that the Confederate armies should consolidate.²¹ Bragg failed to ensure that Kirby Smith’s army merged with his, so the Battle of Perryville took place on 8th October 1862 without his additional forces. Kirby Smith’s army, dangerously exposed, was now isolated from Bragg’s army. Kirby Smith, supported by Polk and Hardee, understood

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 866, Kirby Smith to Bragg, 23rd September 1862.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 915, Kirby Smith to Bragg, 5th October 1862.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 901, Polk to Bragg, 3rd October 1862 and *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVI, Part I, pp. 1101-3, Polk to Hardee, 17th April 1863.

²⁰ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVI, Part II, p. 901, Polk to Bragg, 3rd October 1862.

²¹ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVI, Part I, p. 1099, Hardee to Bragg, 7th October 1862.

the need to co-operate to beat Buell and this added to his concerns over Bragg's campaign leadership.

Kirby Smith was forced to retreat in October 1862, when Bragg turned the campaign into a humiliating defeat by ordering a withdrawal from Kentucky, in terrible weather conditions. As his desolate army retreated through eastern Tennessee, Bragg ordered troop movements that Kirby Smith refused:

The condition of my command now is such as to render any immediate operations with it impossible. The men are worn down from exposure and want of food. They are much in want of shoes, clothing, and blankets. There cannot now be more than 6,000 effective men left in my whole force. ... In its present condition it is impossible to move it.²²

The desperate condition of the men was revealed after their long retreat. Kirby Smith was disillusioned by the poor end to the campaign that had started with such optimism.

Kirby Smith complained about Bragg's poor leadership, so the President arranged to discuss the Kentucky Campaign with him in early November 1862 in Richmond. Kirby Smith's earlier letter elicited a sympathetic response from Davis: "when you wrote your wounds were fresh, your lame and exhausted troops were before you, I hope that time may have modified your pain."²³ This was part of a persuasive request to support Bragg and the Southern cause, by not making the situation worse.²⁴ Following their meeting, Kirby Smith accepted Davis' appeal and returned to his command. The western diversion into Kentucky had achieved little for the Confederacy, but it had given Kirby Smith field experience and contributed to his development as a departmental commander. As a field commander, Kirby Smith had demonstrated that he knew the benefit of consolidation to beat the separate elements

²² *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVI, Part II, p. 975, Kirby Smith to Bragg, 23rd October 1862.

²³ *Davis papers*, Vol. 8, Davis to Kirby Smith, 29th October 1862, pp. 468-70.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 468-70.

of the enemy forces and, therefore, he understood the benefit of the time advantage initially gained by the Confederate forces. As a departmental commander, Kirby Smith had used political skills to gain support for the campaign, and when Bragg was slow to begin, he again used political skills to ensure that he was pressed to start the campaign. At the close of the campaign, he had acceded to Davis' request not to pursue his complaint against Bragg and accepted that the bigger picture of the Confederate cause was, politically, more important, thereby demonstrating one of the further skills desirable in a department commander. Davis, however, realised that he needed to separate him from Bragg to get the best out of both generals. Kirby Smith was re-called to Richmond in January 1863 and promoted to the command of the Trans-Mississippi Department. The President decided to visit the Department of the West as a result of the command problems in Bragg's army and because Johnston, the newly appointed commander, had recently arrived in Chattanooga.

Davis' western visit to Tennessee and Mississippi

Johnston had not had time to familiarise himself with his new command before Davis arrived in December 1862, to see for himself the conditions in the West, starting with the Army of Tennessee. Johnston had already expressed the opinion in Richmond that both Bragg and Pemberton were outnumbered by their respective opponents, so moving troops from one army to the other would seriously endanger the other. His assessment was that both armies must, therefore, remain on the defensive. These armies had been on the defensive since the defeats at Corinth and Perryville in early October 1862, less than two months earlier. Johnston arrived in Chattanooga on 4th December 1862, the location of his new headquarters. He discovered that

Pemberton was under pressure from Grant.²⁵ A telegram from Cooper informed him that Pemberton was retreating before a large Union army under Grant in northern Mississippi, that Holmes was to provide reinforcements, and that Davis was urging the transfer of troops from Bragg.²⁶ Johnston immediately responded to Cooper that the troops near Little Rock could cross the Mississippi at Vicksburg and unite with Pemberton, as he retreated toward Vicksburg, far more easily than Bragg could reach Pemberton.²⁷ Johnston also pointed out that, as Pemberton retreated, he would be moving away from Bragg.²⁸ This would make joining their forces harder, especially as the presence of Grant's forces might force a circuitous route. Johnston was insistent that neither major army under his command should be weakened and it was natural for him to insist that reinforcements came from outside of his department.

Whilst Johnston thought that the requested reinforcements should come from Arkansas, Pemberton and Davis disagreed and Holmes was not interested in helping. Pemberton sent a lengthy report on 5th December 1862 to Johnston, detailing his current dispositions and ending with a postscript that disagreed with Johnston's assessment of where the reinforcements should be acquired: "I have no hope of any assistance from General Holmes."²⁹ This was reinforced by Holmes, whose opinion, after Pemberton's replacement of Van Dorn in Mississippi, was: "in my judgment [this] will not mend matters, as Pemberton has many ways of making people hate him and none to inspire confidence."³⁰ Given Holmes' strong personal dislike for Pemberton, it was unlikely that he would co-operate. Johnston was placed in an impossible situation, sandwiched between the strongly-held views of Davis as his

²⁵ Joseph E. Johnston, *Narrative of Military Operations During the Civil War*, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1990), p. 150, unabridged reprint of original published as *Narrative of military operations directed during the late War Between the States*, D. Appleton, (New York, 1874).

²⁶ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XX, Part II, p. 435, Cooper to Johnston, 3rd December 1862.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 436, Johnston to Cooper, 4th December 1862.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 436, Johnston to Cooper, 4th December 1862.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 440-1, Pemberton to Johnston, 5th December 1862.

³⁰ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIII, pp. 888-9, Holmes to Hindman, 18th October 1862.

superior and Pemberton as his subordinate, who agreed with each other. Unknown to Johnston at the time, the Trans-Mississippi commander was refusing to co-operate at all. Before he could take the matter further, Johnston was required to meet the President in Chattanooga.

In December 1862, the Confederate forces near Murfreesboro, under Bragg, totalled 45,000 troops and were outnumbered. If weakened, there was a risk of losing Tennessee and giving access to Atlanta through north-western Georgia. Johnston learned that Davis wanted to detach an infantry division under Major-General Carter L. Stevenson, from Bragg to Pemberton, expressly against his wishes. Davis issued the order, and on 15th December wrote to James A. Seddon, the new Secretary of War, informing him of the transfer of a division of about 8,000 men.³¹ Davis' was in the field and decided that he could be diverted from his "uniform practice never to do more than make a suggestion to a general commanding in the field."³² Bragg estimated that he faced 70,000 Union troops, more than double his own, after the loss of a quarter of his infantry, when this division was transferred.³³ Bragg did not agree with the transfer, writing to Johnston that Davis "was inexorable, and reduced me to the defensive."³⁴ The army left behind was, against Johnston's better judgement, weakened, facing a Federal force that was now even more superior in numbers than before Davis' intervention. The President's order was given after a few days in Tennessee, with little time for either Johnston or Davis to understand Bragg's dispositions. Davis had authorised Bragg to retreat if pressed and, for the first time, his actions and advice showed a preference for defending the Mississippi River Valley, ahead of defending middle Tennessee. Johnston was not aware of this until

³¹ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XX, Part II, pp. 449-450, Davis to Seddon, 15th December 1862.

³² Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, Volume II, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1990), p. 429. This an unabridged republication of the 1881 original.

³³ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XX, Part II, pp. 492-3, Bragg to Johnston, 11th January 1863.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 492-3, Bragg to Johnston, 11th January 1863.

receiving Bragg's letter in mid-January 1863. Davis and Johnston left Chattanooga for Jackson via Mobile, to continue their inspection tour in Mississippi, as there was no direct rail route westward.

The President and Johnston arrived in Vicksburg on 20th December 1862, where they remained for two days, examining the defences, but there was a difference of opinion as to their effectiveness. Johnston was dismayed, commenting that the entrenchments were extensive but very slight, and that:

The usual error of Confederate engineering had been committed there. An immense intrenched camp, requiring an army to hold it, had been made instead of a fort requiring only a small garrison. In like manner the water-batteries had been planned to prevent the bombardment of the town, instead of to close the navigation of the river to the enemy; consequently the small number of heavy guns had been distributed along a front of two miles, instead of being so placed that their fire might be concentrated on a single vessel. As attack was supposed to be imminent, such errors could not be corrected.³⁵

Johnston realised that the garrisons in Port Hudson and Vicksburg were not adequate to oppose Grant and suggested again, in writing, to Davis that Holmes' and Pemberton's troops ought to be consolidated in Mississippi to beat the Union army.³⁶ He argued this at length in a communication written in Vicksburg on 22nd December 1862.³⁷ Davis did not want change, either in the departmental structure, the Vicksburg defences, or the location of troops. He believed that the division ordered from Bragg was all that Pemberton needed, so there was no resulting change in the command structure or any further orders to move troops. Pemberton was north of Vicksburg, facing Grant, so the defensive line near Grenada was the next location for Davis and Johnston to visit.

³⁵ Johnston, *Narrative*, p. 152.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

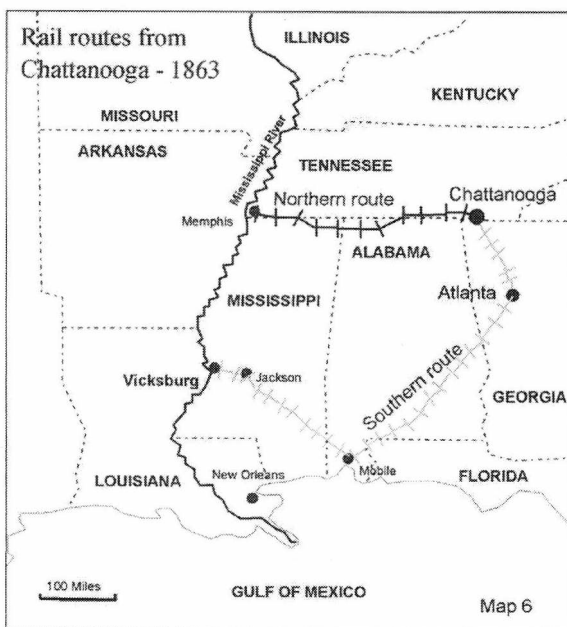
³⁷ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part II, pp. 800-1, Johnston to Davis, 22nd December 1862.

Johnston did not like what he saw of the lengthy line along the Yallahusha River that Pemberton was attempting to defend. Johnston commented after the war, concerning the defensive position established:

The front was so extensive, however, that it is probably fortunate that the practicability of defending it was never tested. In conversing before the President in relation to the defense of his department, Lieutenant-General Pemberton and myself differed widely as to the mode of warfare best adapted to our circumstances.³⁸

Pemberton disagreed with Johnston’s assessment and reported to Cooper that, “I have taken position behind the Yalabusha River. My left cannot easily be turned, and if attacked in front shall endeavor to hold the position.”³⁹ He did not mention his assessment of the defences on his right. There was no record of Davis’ opinion, but he supported Pemberton. Despite these assertions by Johnston, there was no change to Pemberton’s defences either in Vicksburg or in northern Mississippi.

Johnston and Davis returned to Jackson in time for Christmas 1862. In Jackson, Johnston again raised the question with Davis of his position being merely



nominal. He had seen, at first hand, Davis’ support for Pemberton and Bragg and he had objected to the movement of troops from Bragg to Pemberton. Johnston’s assessment was that all of the major decisions had been made and he could not influence anything, so he asked Davis to assign him to a different command.⁴⁰

³⁸ Johnston, *Narrative*, p. 153.

³⁹ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part II, p. 786, Pemberton to Cooper, 6th December 1862.

⁴⁰ Johnston, *Narrative*, p. 154.

Johnston reported that Davis required an officer in the West able to transfer troops quickly in an emergency.⁴¹ Johnston had refused to send troops from Bragg to Pemberton and was overruled by the President, who insisted on the move of Stevenson's division to Vicksburg, even though it took more than three weeks. Davis refused to reassign Johnston, insisting that he needed an overall commander in the West.

The President publicly committed Johnston to the defence of the Mississippi River Valley. In Jackson on 26th December 1862, Davis gave a speech acknowledging the importance of the defence of Vicksburg and the Mississippi River. He stated:

Vicksburg and Port Hudson are the real points of attack. Every effort will be made to capture those places with the object of forcing the navigation of the Mississippi, of cutting off our communications with the trans Mississippi department, and of severing the Western from the Eastern portion of the Confederacy. ... After Memphis and New Orleans had fallen... Vicksburg became the object of attack. ... Vicksburg will stand and Port Hudson will stand."⁴²

During this speech, he praised Johnston, who was present, reiterating his support and confirming that the two men were of a like mind in their determination to defend Mississippi.⁴³ In private, Johnston had expressed his reservations, but a united front was presented for public consumption. Crucially, Davis set out his opinions on the importance of holding Vicksburg and Port Hudson, which were to be the guiding principles in his future decision-making for the defence of the Mississippi River Valley. Johnston had been committed by the President to carrying out his wishes, but they were not of a like mind. In the Trans-Mississippi, Holmes had refused to become

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-5.

⁴² *Davis papers, Vol. 8*, Davis' speech at Jackson, Mississippi, 26th December 1862, pp. 572, 575 and 577.

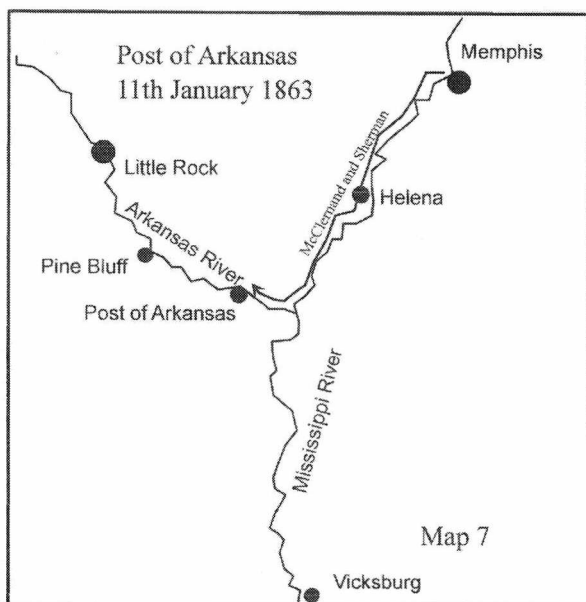
⁴³ *Ibid.*, 26th December 1862, p. 578.

involved in the defence of Vicksburg, but his departmental dispositions were about to be tested.

Holmes loses the Post of Arkansas

Holmes had 5,000 troops, in early January 1863, in a garrison protecting the lower reaches of the Arkansas River to prevent access to Little Rock. Davis was expecting good results from Holmes in his new role as commander of the Trans-Mississippi.⁴⁴ This belief was based on Holmes' whole career and their long-term friendship, rather than recent performance. Holmes had limited experience, as a departmental commander in North Carolina, and as a field commander in the Peninsula Campaign that had stretched his capabilities. His promotion to command of the vast Trans-Mississippi Department reflected the President's belief in his old friend, as there was no other basis for a promotion of that scale.

Holmes was concerned about Union troops at Helena, being able to move to Little Rock, if he sent reinforcements to Pemberton in December 1862. To counter



this threat, as part of his dispositions he maintained a large garrison in an inadequate fort called the Post of Arkansas. It was located on the Arkansas River fifty miles from the confluence with the Mississippi River. The campaign to capture the Post of Arkansas was

⁴⁴ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. LIII, p. 822, Davis to Lubbock, 15th August 1862.

a side-show to the Union efforts to capture Vicksburg, but Major-General William T. Sherman did not want to leave a large garrison intact that could harass Northern shipping, so he persuaded Major-General John A. McClernand to lead the attack.⁴⁵ Davis had warned that Holmes' earlier experience meant he underrated the importance of gunboats.⁴⁶ The fort was easily overcome by the fire power of the Union gunboats, ably supported by a huge force of 32,000 men.⁴⁷ The troops surrendered to McClernand and were lost to the Confederate war effort in January 1863. Holmes believed that the fort was essential to retaining control of the Arkansas River Valley, but he failed to understand the vulnerability of the garrison and took no effective action to prevent its capture. The loss of the Post of Arkansas had a devastating effect on Confederate manpower in the Mississippi River Valley, as 5,000 sorely-needed troops were lost that could have been sent to reinforce Pemberton. Holmes had refused to send 10,000 reinforcements to Mississippi, and now had lost by capture half of those he could have sent. The garrison had been left to its fate and was easily overcome in its isolation from any other Confederate troops.

Holmes did not immediately inform Davis that the Post of Arkansas had been lost. The defeat occurred on 11th January 1863, but Holmes did not mention it when writing to Davis on other matters on 22nd January.⁴⁸ Davis learnt of the defeat from Northern newspapers, writing to Holmes on 29th January and commenting, "as we have nothing from your army, I yet cling to the hope so great a disaster has not befallen us."⁴⁹ Holmes' response has been lost, with the subject matter of subsequent

⁴⁵ Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, Modern Library, (New York, 1999), p. 233. Reprint of the original published by C. L. Webster, (New York, 1885).

⁴⁶ *Davis papers, Vol. 8*, Davis to Lee, 5th July 1862, pp. 276-7.

⁴⁷ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, p. 233.

⁴⁸ *Davis papers, Vol. 9*, Holmes to Davis, 22nd January 1863, p. 38.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Davis to Holmes, 29th January 1863, pp. 42-44.

letters referring to later events.⁵⁰ Brigadier-General Thomas J. Churchill, the commander at the Post of Arkansas, produced a campaign report that was endorsed by Holmes: “It never occurred to me when the order was issued that such an overpowering command would be devoted to an end so trivial.”⁵¹ Holmes did not anticipate an attack, as he assumed that the Union would never amass a sufficient force to accomplish the task, and he did not appreciate the vulnerability of the garrison. Furthermore, he shied away from reporting the loss to Davis, who was entitled to be rapidly informed of the outcome of any significant military action.

Holmes, in January 1863, was the subject of numerous complaints, after the loss of the Post of Arkansas. He was seen as a weak leader, unable to manage his department. Robert W. Loughery and Augustus H. Garland both wrote to Davis, to bring their concerns directly to the President.⁵² Loughery had already predicted, not knowing of the defeat at the time of writing, that the Post of Arkansas “is doomed because there is no avenue of escape.”⁵³ Holmes was relieved to have Kirby Smith appointed as his superior, noting that he had not been involved in Texas and western Louisiana.⁵⁴ Kirby Smith’s orders required him to keep Holmes in the department and, therefore, a role commensurate with his rank had to be found.⁵⁵ Kirby Smith was obliged to keep Holmes in a senior level appointment, so he decided to keep him in Little Rock. Holmes was, therefore, given almost free rein to operate the department of Arkansas as he thought fit, with little change from the situation, as far as Vicksburg was concerned, that existed prior to Kirby Smith’s arrival in March 1863. The focus on Vicksburg was not achieved at the correct time, because of Holmes’ indifference to

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Holmes to Davis, 12th February 1863, p. 58 and Holmes to Davis 6th March 1863, p. 91.

⁵¹ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part I, pp. 780-2, Churchill to Cooper, 7th May 1863, with endorsement by Holmes dated 8th June 1863.

⁵² *Davis papers, Vol. 9*, Robert W. Loughery to Davis, 17th January 1863, p. 34 and 10th February 1863, p. 55, Augustus H. Garland to Davis, 30th January 1863, p. 46.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Robert W. Loughery to Davis, 12th January 1863.

⁵⁴ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXII, Part II, pp. 796-7, Holmes to Davis 6th March 1863.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 786, Cooper to Holmes 9th February 1863.

Pemberton's requests for reinforcements, followed by his catastrophic loss of the garrison at the Post of Arkansas. Davis dismissed the complaints in Arkansas and ensured that Holmes stayed in command despite the local opposition, and this reaction ensured that the lack of focus on the defence of the Mississippi River Valley remained. Johnston, who could make no difference to the defence of the Mississippi River Valley, either with Holmes or with Pemberton, had travelled to Mobile, in early January 1863, to inspect the defences.

Johnston sent to Tennessee to report on Bragg's command problems

After the battle of Murfreesboro over the New Year period of 1862-3, disaffection with Bragg's command erupted again. Johnston was ordered to Tennessee to investigate on 21st January 1863.⁵⁶ Bragg's corps commanders had expressed a lack of confidence in his leadership.⁵⁷ Davis continued to have full confidence in Bragg, but questioned why he had invited comments from his generals and wanted Johnston to leave Mobile and report on the situation.⁵⁸ Johnston began the investigation into the leadership question in Tennessee, but turned the exercise into a prolonged and painstaking process.

Johnston knew that the real power in the West lay with Davis, who had strong opinions on his appointees. He had a difficult problem to solve, because Bragg's main opponent was Polk, who was one of Davis' old friends from West Point. Johnston knew that any criticism of Polk would fall on deaf ears, so he was cautious in his response. By his own admission Johnston carried over the problem of Bragg's

⁵⁶ *Davis papers, Vol. 9*, Davis to Johnston, 21st January 1863, p. 35.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Davis to Johnston, 22nd January 1863, p. 36.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Davis to Johnston, 22nd January 1863, p. 36.

command for three weeks, replying to Davis on 12th February 1863.⁵⁹ According to Pollard, “General Johnston was appointed to command in the West with scarcely any other powers than those of an Inspector-General.”⁶⁰ Johnston was wary of his own role, having been countermanded in December 1862, and he continued to carry out his task without exercising the full powers Davis insisted he had given him. By delaying his response and remaining with the army, he was able to ensure by his presence that the generals worked together and that Davis was not antagonised. Because Johnston did not believe he had a position in the West where he could exercise effective command, he was content to oversee the high command of the army in Tennessee, thereby limiting his involvement in Mississippi.

Johnston downplayed the extent of the disaffection with Bragg to a level where it was difficult for the President to do anything. His report did not openly criticise anyone, but attempted to pacify the situation, whilst supporting Bragg.⁶¹ Johnston lessened the impact of the corps commanders previously expressed opinions.⁶² He gave insight as to his reasons in an earlier letter to Davis, in which he stated, “I respectfully suggest that should it then appear to you to be necessary to remove General Bragg no one in this army, or engaged in this investigation, ought to be his successor.”⁶³ Davis was generally pleased with Johnston’s support for Bragg and the contents of his report, but he expressed his regret that, “You limit the selection to a new man and in terms very embarrassing to me, object to being yourself the immediate commander.”⁶⁴ Bragg thanked Johnston, “for the support, personal and

⁵⁹ Johnston, *Narrative*, p. 162 and *Davis papers, Vol. 9*, Johnston to Davis, 12th February 1863, pp. 59-60.

⁶⁰ Edward A. Pollard, *Life of Jefferson Davis, etc.*, National Publishing Company, (Philadelphia, 1869), reproduced by University of Michigan Library, (Ann Arbor, 2007), p. 300.

⁶¹ *Davis papers, Vol. 9*, Johnston to Davis, 12th February 1863, pp. 59-60.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Johnston to Davis, 12th February 1863, pp. 59-60.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Johnston to Davis, 3rd February 1863, pp. 48-9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Davis to Johnston, 19th February 1863, pp. 66-8.

official, you have given me.”⁶⁵ Johnston could see that he was the logical choice for replacement of Bragg, as he was already with the army. He made sure in his report that he excluded himself from taking command, but he also excluded Polk and Hardee, thus upsetting the President, by limiting his options. Because of Bragg’s command problems and Johnston’s tardy, three-week-long investigation, the attention of the commander of the Department of the West was diverted from the defence of Vicksburg. Because of the problems in the command in Tennessee, Johnston was unable to spend time covering the full extent of his command in the Department of the West. He had made an interrupted attempt to inspect the defences at Mobile and he had been unable to re-visit Mississippi. Meanwhile, Kirby Smith was being faced with a Union advance toward Shreveport, a threat that required a response.

Kirby Smith concentrates on the Red River

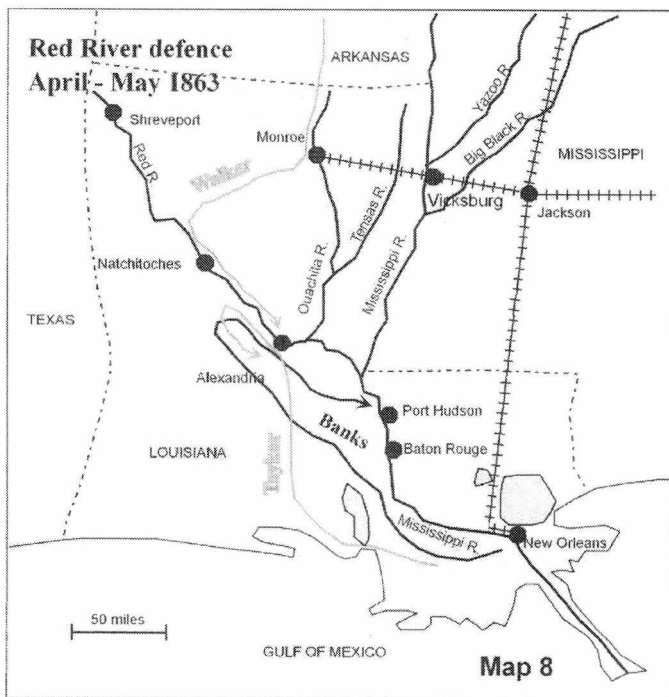
Kirby Smith arrived at Alexandria, in the Red River Valley, in mid-April 1863, to meet Major-General Richard Taylor, whose army had just been pursued from New Orleans to Alexandria. Taylor had been focused on the re-capture of New Orleans and, whilst approaching from the west, he was forced to withdraw to Alexandria, pressed by Union forces of 16,000 that outnumbered his own small army, by at least five-fold. In the retreat, his forces were reduced from disease, fatigue and straggling, to well under 2,000. Kirby Smith reported the details to Cooper in Richmond and was supportive of the results achieved.⁶⁶ The goal of re-taking New Orleans was beyond Taylor’s small army, even with substantial reinforcements.

Taylor and Kirby Smith conferred over the next steps for the army in late April 1863. At the top of their agenda was the nearby presence of the Union army

⁶⁵ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XX, Part II, pp. 492-3, Bragg to Johnston, 11th January 1863.

⁶⁶ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XV, pp. 386-7, Kirby Smith to Cooper, 23rd April 1863.

under Major-General Nathaniel P. Banks that significantly outnumbered Taylor's force. Kirby Smith retired to Shreveport, to leave Taylor in command in the field, after advising that he had ordered Major-General John G. Walker's division to march south to join with him.⁶⁷ Kirby Smith argued that he was assisting the Vicksburg



Campaign by occupying Banks' much larger force in the Red River Valley, thereby preventing it from becoming involved.⁶⁸ So Taylor was expected, once reinforced, to try and prevent Banks from reaching the Trans-Mississippi command headquarters. Kirby Smith now believed the defence of Shreveport would

assist the defence of the Mississippi River Valley and this was the major focus of his forces in Louisiana, so Taylor retreated to merge with Walker's division to consolidate the expanded defensive force in the Red River Valley.

Walker's division departed from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, in mid-April 1863, where it had been in camp for three months. The division was ordered to Monroe, Louisiana that was located at the western railroad terminus, eighty miles from the Mississippi River, with the eastern terminus being located at De Soto Point, opposite to Vicksburg. Kirby Smith had to write twice to Holmes, having initially requested Walker's division to move urgently on 14th April and needing to remind him five days

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1047, J. F. Belton, Assistant Adjutant-General to Taylor, 20th April 1863.

⁶⁸ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXII, Part II, pp. 839-40, Kirby Smith to Holmes, 16th May 1863.

later.⁶⁹ Once at Monroe, Kirby Smith had the choice of ordering Walker to move south to the Red River, or of ordering the division to assist at Vicksburg. The countryside, on the west side of the Mississippi, was low-lying and criss-crossed with bayous and lakes. The narrow routes through this maze gave substantial advantages to determined defenders. If Walker's division was used on the west bank with this terrain advantage, it would be capable of holding up substantial numbers of Northern troops. Similar tactics had disrupted Grant's earlier attempts to reach Vicksburg from the east bank through the Mississippi Delta region, which was countryside of the same nature. Instead of being an active force in the Vicksburg Campaign, Walker's division was left in camp. The division was wintered at Pine Bluff, leaving 6,000 sorely-needed men idle, when they were available to help combat an active Union campaign that was underway in the Mississippi River Valley.

Kirby Smith made sure that Walker's division marched to the Red River, north of Natchitoches, where he expected Taylor to retreat, so that the combined force stood a better chance of defeating the Union army as it stretched its communications.

However, when Walker arrived on the Upper Red River he found that the services of his division were no longer required to defend Shreveport. Although Banks had been advancing toward Shreveport, he had stopped for two weeks at Opelousas, because he had learnt that gunboats had successfully by-passed the river defence guns at Vicksburg and Admiral David D. Porter was on his way upriver to meet him.⁷⁰

Advancing to Alexandria by 7th May 1863, Banks then decided to go down river to support Grant by laying siege to Port Hudson, so that Confederate reinforcements

⁶⁹ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XV, p. 1041, Kirby Smith to Holmes, 14th April 1863 and *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXII, Part II, p. 828, Kirby Smith to Holmes, 19th April 1863.

⁷⁰ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XV, p. 312, Porter to Banks, 4th May 1863.

were prevented from reaching Vicksburg.⁷¹ Shreveport was then safe for the remaining duration of the Vicksburg campaign, with Taylor and Walker no longer required for the defence of the Red River Valley.

Walker believed that his division should have been used, when at Monroe in April 1863, to harass Grant, who was continuing to make attempts to approach Vicksburg. Walker was frustrated by his experience and lamented this decision after the war:

If Gen. Smith had thrown his whole force at this period upon Grant's communications from Millican's [sic] Bend to New Carthage, it would, undoubtedly, have forced the Federal General to open up his communications with the upper Mississippi at the expense of suspending operations against Vicksburg.⁷²

On 20th May 1863, Kirby Smith wrote outlining the vulnerability of Grant's lengthy communications route down the west side of the Mississippi, and suggesting that Taylor could affect Grant's campaign to "reduce him to starvation or a change of base."⁷³ His optimism still existed when he wrote again on 3rd June, "I have no fears for the result of either Port Hudson or Vicksburg, and believe General Taylor will arrive opposite the latter place in time to complete Grant's destruction."⁷⁴ Kirby Smith believed that Grant's supply route was "almost unprotected".⁷⁵ Grant was moving faster than Kirby Smith anticipated and the opportunity to use Walker in April was the only option that could have put pressure on Grant. Kirby Smith made the assumption that he had plenty of time to counter Grant's progress and that only a small force was needed to attack. Believing he still had time, after Banks' withdrawal, Kirby Smith needed to have reacted quickly to assist in the Vicksburg

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 314-5, Banks to Halleck, 12th May 1863.

⁷² John G. Walker, *The War of Secession West of the Mississippi River During the Years 1863-4 & 5*, (typescript) p. 26.

⁷³ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXVI, Part II, pp. 12-13, Kirby Smith to Taylor, 20th May 1863.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30, Kirby Smith to Major E. Surget (Taylor's adjutant-general), 3rd June 1863.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13, Kirby Smith to Taylor, 20th May 1863.

Campaign in mid-May 1863. He was no longer keeping Banks' army out of the attempt to win control of the Mississippi River Valley. Now the threat in Louisiana had receded, he did turn his attention to the situation at Vicksburg, but he did not use the whole force that he had available. Kirby Smith ordered Taylor and Walker to disrupt Grant's supply route along the west bank of the Mississippi, but Taylor's troops remained in southern Louisiana and were not sent with Walker's division, so the short-lived consolidation of the two armies was broken. Some focus on Vicksburg was at last a reality in the Trans-Mississippi, after the Red River diversion, but Johnston was still giving priority to events in Tennessee.

Johnston challenges the President over the scope of his command

Johnston was unhappy about the situation in Tennessee, in January 1863, where Bragg was requesting reinforcements, pleas that were ignored in Richmond. Johnston asked Davis for 20,000 troops.⁷⁶ Unable to force the President's hand, Johnston's response was to order Van Dorn to form a cavalry division from two-thirds of the 6,000 troops lying idle near Grenada and send it to Tennessee for foraging for Bragg's army.⁷⁷ This decision removed the major proportion of the cavalry from Mississippi. Pemberton was deprived of the ability to cover the countryside, the capability to harass the enemy and the capacity to gather essential intelligence. Johnston saw this as compensation to Bragg for the loss of Stevenson's division in December 1862. After this attempt to redress the balance of the armies, Johnston still could not visualise how any further troop movements would assist either army, without exposing the other to defeat.

⁷⁶ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XX, Part II, pp. 487-8, Johnston to Davis, 7th January 1863.

⁷⁷ Johnston, *Narrative*, pp. 160-1.

Defeat would mean either the loss of Mississippi or of Tennessee, so Johnston sought guidance on his priority from the President. He returned to his old theme, concerning the breadth of his command and his inability to secure co-operation between his two major armies. Johnston wrote three times in early January 1863, first suggesting that the role he had been given was beyond his capability.⁷⁸ Next he wrote that he could not be in charge in two different places because of the distances involved.⁷⁹ Then he asked the crucial question: “Which is more valuable Tennessee or Mississippi?”⁸⁰ After these three missives Davis permitted the return of Stevenson’s division to Bragg, he reiterated the importance of defending the Mississippi River, and he stated that the difficulty of distance between the armies could not be avoided.⁸¹ In mid-January 1863, Johnston learnt the answer to the question, when Bragg reported to him on 11th January 1863 that, when challenged over the loss of Stevenson’s division, Davis had said, “Fight if you can, and fall back beyond the Tennessee.”⁸² In late January 1863, Johnston, yet again, requested to be given another appointment.⁸³ Davis had stressed the importance of retaining the Mississippi River Valley to Johnston and he had permitted Bragg to retreat, if necessary, in Tennessee. Whilst he had not answered the question directly, when Bragg informed him of Davis’ permission to retreat, Johnston did have a complete answer, because the Mississippi River Valley was to be given the priority. In an about-turn, Davis had authorised the return of Stevenson’s division to Tennessee, if needed, whilst acknowledging the problems faced by Johnston. The distances involved and the poor condition of the railroad meant troops could not be moved

⁷⁸ *Davis papers, Vol. 9*, Johnston to Davis, 2nd January 1863, p. 4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Johnston to Davis, 6th January 1863, p. 16.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Johnston to Davis, 7th January 1863, p. 17.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Davis to Johnston, 8th January 1863, p. 18.

⁸² *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XX, Part II, pp. 492-3, Bragg to Johnston, 11th January 1863.

⁸³ *Davis papers, Vol. 9*, Johnston to Davis, undated but noted as written between 10th and 31st January 1863, p. 19.



quickly, so Johnston did not return Stevenson's division to Bragg and, in any case, he now knew that defence of the Mississippi River Valley was to be given priority. Moving troops swiftly across land could only be accomplished by rail, as the dirt roads quickly became quagmires in the frequent wet weather. Davis had a fixed opinion on how Johnston was to operate and so he stubbornly continued with his chosen path, refusing to consider any alternative point of view. Davis ignored Johnston's latest request to be reassigned and, whilst he stressed the importance of retaining the Mississippi River Valley, he did not directly answer the important question concerning Mississippi or Tennessee. Any weakness in his answer could have given Johnston the authority he sought to justify the loss of one or the other state, when both were vital to the Confederacy. In January 1863, Davis wanted Johnston to concentrate in Tennessee, but his priority was to be in Mississippi.

Johnston found Pemberton an unwilling subordinate, as he continued to send reports to Richmond without keeping his commander informed. Johnston was not aware of any urgency, noting that no events of importance took place in either Mississippi or Tennessee in February 1863.⁸⁴ In February he wrote to Davis, complaining of the lack of information from Vicksburg, as Pemberton was not keeping him informed.⁸⁵ The President suggested that Johnston ought to visit Vicksburg and apologised on Pemberton's behalf.⁸⁶ Johnston returned to the same topic with Davis at the beginning of March, recording that Pemberton's lack of information must mean that all was well in Mississippi.⁸⁷ A little over two weeks later he again insisted that Bragg and Pemberton were too far apart to assist each

⁸⁴ Johnston, *Narrative*, p. 162.

⁸⁵ *Davis papers, Vol. 9*, Johnston to Davis, 12th February 1863, pp. 59-60.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Davis to Johnston, 19th February 1863, pp. 66-68.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Johnston to Davis, 2nd March 1863, pp. 86-7.

other.⁸⁸ Johnston decided not to travel to Vicksburg, despite the President's suggestion. He was sure that his role as commander of the Department of the West carried little real authority and reiterated it at every opportunity. There were commanders in place in his two principal operational theatres and he was determined to keep hammering the point that he did not have real command, as the armies were too far apart to be mutually supportive. Johnson made the point that, as Pemberton reported directly to Richmond, he was not receiving vital communications and his command was being by-passed. Davis wanted Pemberton and Bragg to report directly to Richmond, because Johnston had reiterated that he did not believe that he had real command, particularly when it came to ordering troop movements from one army to the other. So, the President wanted to oversee Johnston's position closely. Davis created this situation and did not want to make any changes because, although Johnston had protested, he had developed this into a habit that always resulted in the President ignoring him. Davis required Pemberton to report directly to Richmond: an action that diluted Johnston's authority, but that was how the President wanted to monitor affairs in the Department of the West.

Johnston was ill throughout April 1863 and was unable to command his department effectively, but he was able to continue corresponding with Davis, complaining about the problems inherent in his command. In mid-April, Union iron-clad gunboats and a few days later transports, by-passed the Vicksburg batteries, enabling Grant, at the end of the month, to cross the Mississippi River with substantial forces. Johnston kept reporting to Richmond concerning his continuing incapacity and he chose two issues to raise with the President.⁸⁹ The first was the old issue of the problems inherent in his command, when he complained that Bragg and Pemberton

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, Johnston to Davis, 18th March 1863, p. 104.

⁸⁹ Johnston, *Narrative*, pp. 167-8.

were too far apart to assist each other.⁹⁰ The second concerned the Union military advantage of interior lines: he stated, "the enemy can transfer an army from Mississippi to Nashville before we learn that it is in motion. While an equal body of our troops could not make the same movement ... in less than six weeks."⁹¹ Johnston continued to register his concerns about his lack of flexibility in troop movements compared to the enemy. Grant outnumbered both of Johnston's main armies and could use the east-west railroad across Tennessee, to transfer troops rapidly between his armies, whereas Johnston's rail route between his armies was via Mobile. Whichever Union army provided reinforcements, it had sufficient troops to be able to hold the opposing Confederate army in place and it had the military advantage of interior lines. This was a major advantage for any commander, but when this was allied to greater forces, one Confederate army could be held in check, whilst the other was flanked with substantial reinforcements, secretly transferred. Johnston assessed his difficulties accurately, but Davis knew this already, because he had received similar communications several times. The President stuck rigidly with the Department of the West structure, regardless of Johnston's trenchant objections. Johnston had decided to remain in Tennessee as long as he could and, whilst he was there, he continued to challenge Davis on his lack of real authority in the West, rather than become directly involved in the defence of the Mississippi River Valley.

Conclusion

The diversions in the West between the beginning of October 1862 and the end of April 1863 detracted from the defence of Vicksburg. There was general acceptance amongst historians that Davis made an error by ordering a division of

⁹⁰ *Davis papers, Vol. 9*, Johnston to Davis, 18th March 1863, p. 104.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, Johnston to Davis, 10th April 1863, pp. 137-8.

troops from Bragg to reinforce Vicksburg in December 1862.⁹² However, Davis's leadership was tarnished by eight other issues that were inadequately addressed during this period. These failures eventually contributed toward the dissipation of the limited resources of the Confederacy away from the main Western objective of defending the Mississippi River Valley.

First, Davis did not order Bragg to take command of the invasion of Kentucky, expecting him to automatically lead by virtue of his rank. Woodworth (1990) blamed Kirby Smith for failing to co-operate with Bragg, but he also blamed Davis for failing to make it clear who was in command of the combined operation.⁹³ Cooper (2000) agreed that Davis had not clarified the leadership, relying on voluntary co-operation.⁹⁴ He argued that there was a breakdown in command and, whilst he noted that Bragg did not issue orders to effect a merger, he blamed Kirby Smith for not co-operating.⁹⁵ These observations have validity, but miss some of the most important points, because Kirby Smith advised Bragg that he should consolidate his forces and he advised him to defeat Buell before becoming involved in the inauguration of a Confederate Governor. He also understood that Confederate support in Kentucky would be cautious without the benefit of a military victory. This was sound advice that was ignored and, as a direct consequence of Bragg's actions, Kirby Smith was reluctant to co-operate with him. Kirby Smith had understood the political need behind the invasion of Kentucky. His part in the campaign was preceded by initial planning and then conducted vigorously. When he detected tardiness in Bragg's preparations, he ensured that political support pushed the invasion forward. Whilst he was devastated

⁹² Steven E. Woodworth, *Jefferson Davis and his generals. The failure of Confederate command in the West*, University Press of Kansas, (Lawrence, 1990), p. 185. William C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis. The man and his hour*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1996), pp. 483-4, (this was a paperback edition of the 1991 original).

⁹³ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, pp.160-1.

⁹⁴ William J. Cooper Jr., *Jefferson Davis, American*, Vintage Books, New York, 2001, p. 428. This was a paperback edition of the 2000 original.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

by the retreat and Bragg's poor leadership, he conferred with Davis and, setting aside his personal disappointment, he rallied politically, in the way the President requested. Kirby Smith emerged with credit and Davis, rightly, rewarded him by promoting him to command the Trans-Mississippi department in February 1863. Kirby Smith showed some of the qualities required of a departmental commander before, during and after the invasion. However, he was disillusioned by the failure in Kentucky and he was alerted to the problems inherent when command could be confused, which had implications for the defence of the Mississippi River Valley. Davis had again assumed that when two armies operated together, it was obvious that the senior in rank took overall command. However, each department commander received his appointment directly from the President and expected to only receive direct orders from the War Department. Davis did not realise that this would lead to confusion in the field and he continued with this dangerous policy that had also caused problems at Iuka.

Second, Davis refused to accept that the defeat at Corinth in October 1862 surrendered the military advantage of interior lines to the North, thereby making it harder to move troops between Tennessee and Mississippi. Woodworth (1990) agreed with Davis, because Bragg had accomplished that feat over three weeks in moving his army from Mississippi to Tennessee in the summer of 1862, prior to the Kentucky Campaign.⁹⁶ However, the situation had changed considerably by the end of the year. Bragg had not been opposed by a consolidated Northern army before the move and the loss of the rail junction at Corinth had not occurred. Pemberton and Bragg were now both outnumbered by their opposing Northern armies and the vulnerability in Davis' strategic orders occurred, because both armies were pressed

⁹⁶ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, pp. 181-2.

simultaneously. Furthermore, the Northern forces now had a significant advantage after gaining Corinth, because they also had the opportunity to bring overwhelming force to bear on one of the Confederate armies, whilst the other was held in check. By late October 1862 and for the rest of the war, the Confederates forces were forced to remain on the defensive. This point was not accepted by Davis, who unrealistically expected Johnston to move aggressively, even when both of his armies were directly opposed and heavily outnumbered. Johnston consistently disputed his ability to move troops between his armies, because the circumstances had changed since the feat had been accomplished by Bragg, so this expectation hampered the way he was able to carry out his theatre command during the Vicksburg Campaign.

Third, in October 1862, Davis insisted that Pemberton had the right to report independently to Richmond, bypassing Johnston, and he did not accept that this affected the latter's authority. Neither Woodworth nor Cooper commented on this issue, which was another reason for Johnston's lack of enthusiasm toward the command structure he was given. W. C. Davis (1991) argued that Davis may have done this because he wanted to have involvement in departmental affairs, because of concerns over Johnston's unwillingness to fight.⁹⁷ Ballard (2004) contended that the dual reporting structure diminished Johnston's position.⁹⁸ This structure meant that Johnston was often unaware of events in Mississippi during the period from January until early May 1863, because he was mostly based in Tennessee. Davis justified this step to avoid delays whilst Johnston's headquarters was mobile. This was a weak argument for public consumption, because Johnston spent virtually all of this time in Tennessee and was not mobile. The real reason was that Johnston had been secretive

⁹⁷ W. C. Davis, *Davis*, p. 476.

⁹⁸ Michael B. Ballard, *Vicksburg: The campaign that opened the Mississippi*, The University of North Carolina Press, (Chapel Hill, 2004), pp. 116-7.

with his communications in Virginia and Davis did not want to be kept in the dark. In Virginia, he had been concerned about Johnston's propensity to retreat and his lack of aggression. By encouraging dual reporting, he sought to ensure that he was informed directly, rather than having communications filtered through Johnston. However, the result contributed to Johnston's conviction that his authority was diluted, which had further implications for his conduct in leading the Department of the West.

Fourth, in December 1862, Davis supported Pemberton's dispositions in Mississippi, against Johnston's advice. This point has not been argued by other historians. Johnston's assessment of the defensive arrangements was at odds with Davis and Pemberton. Johnston, rightly, did not like the extensive deployment of troops to protect territory and, again rightly, he believed the gun locations along the Mississippi waterfront were ineffectively emplaced. Davis and Pemberton saw it as their duty to defend territory and were willing to risk the Vicksburg army to do it. There was no meeting of minds between Davis and Johnston, and when the President left Mississippi, there was little prospect of co-operation with Pemberton, who was wholeheartedly following Davis' strategy. Davis believed in Pemberton's capabilities and supported him in his new command, at Johnston's expense. Johnston was disillusioned and did not set foot in Mississippi until ordered there, against his will, in early May 1863. None of the problems he identified were addressed during the build-up phase that precluded the invasion of Mississippi by the North and so the benefit of Johnston's superior military intellect had little impact on the defence of Vicksburg.

Fifth, in December 1862, Davis did not issue mandatory orders to Holmes who refused requests for reinforcements from the Trans-Mississippi. Woodworth stated

that Davis should have ordered Holmes to provide reinforcements.⁹⁹ W. C. Davis agreed that Davis had ordered Bragg to move a division but had not ordered Holmes, giving him discretion on whether to comply.¹⁰⁰ Cooper argued that, whilst Davis had given Holmes some latitude, he was surely correct in his decision not to comply and that there were simply not enough troops in Arkansas.¹⁰¹ Ballard identified the personal animosity that Holmes held toward Pemberton and argued that Holmes had won the argument with Davis, so reinforcements did not come from the Trans-Mississippi.¹⁰² Holmes allowed this animosity to cloud his judgement. Union forces were active in Mississippi and they needed to be countered with every available soldier, whereas Holmes had no significant threats to face. Holmes managed to pull together a sufficient force to attack Helena in early July 1863 and this was despite the January 1863 loss of the Post of Arkansas garrison and the April 1863 transfer of Walker's Texas division. Holmes had both of these forces available to him in December 1862, which makes his decision all the more indefensible. He did not cooperate with Pemberton because he was persuaded that his focus should be on Missouri and he did not respect Pemberton. Davis should have ordered Holmes to cooperate in countering Grant's Central Mississippi Campaign, but his principles would not allow it. Davis made suggestions to commanders in the field, rather than giving peremptory orders, because distance prevented him from knowing all of the prevailing circumstances. This principle was generally sound, but there were occasions when direct orders were needed, especially at the strategic level. Davis challenged this strategic consideration, but peremptory orders for reinforcements for Mississippi were not issued. Davis accepted his friend's assessment that the troops could not be

⁹⁹ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, p. 185.

¹⁰⁰ W. C. Davis, *Davis*, p. 485.

¹⁰¹ Cooper, *Jefferson Davis*, pp. 448-9.

¹⁰² Ballard, *Vicksburg*, p. 169 for critical comments and pp. 115-8 regarding reinforcements.

released from Arkansas, a decision that was poor in the context of overall Western strategy and leadership.

Sixth, in February 1863, Davis did not appoint Johnston to command the Army of Tennessee, thus failing to resolve the leadership problem there. Woodworth believed that Bragg was a good commander and that Polk should have been replaced.¹⁰³ Cooper, correctly, believed that making no changes in the leadership of the army was a tragic error.¹⁰⁴ The argument that Johnston had to stay in Tennessee to maintain harmony, at the expense of taking a more active role in Mississippi was not developed by either historian. The leadership issues affecting the Army of Tennessee from January to early May 1863 took precedence for Johnston, by orders, and for Davis, by inclination, over the developing situation at Vicksburg. Davis and Johnston had both failed to resolve Bragg's command problem when it first flared up in January 1863, so Johnston had to devote more valuable time in Tennessee. Either Bragg or Polk should have been replaced after the failure in Kentucky, because they needed to be separated. Johnston did not resolve the situation in Tennessee because he knew that Bragg was the better commander, whom he did not want to replace, and Polk was strongly supported by Davis, so a recommendation for his replacement was unlikely to be heeded. In the process he alienated Davis by refusing to take direct command himself. Davis was being unrealistic expecting Bragg and Polk to work together. The President had the major responsibility to the Confederate cause to ensure that there was united leadership in Tennessee irrespective of his personal friendship. Davis displayed weak political leadership because he should have insisted on replacing Bragg with Johnston, an action that would have also resolved the problem between Pemberton and Johnston.

¹⁰³ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, p. 185.

¹⁰⁴ Cooper, *Jefferson Davis*, p. 433.

Seventh, Davis eventually took heed of the protests about leadership in the Trans-Mississippi, but his requirement in February 1863 that Kirby Smith had to retain Holmes, in a role commensurate with his rank, meant that the lack of focus toward the defence of Vicksburg from the west bank of the Mississippi River was maintained. Ballard noted that there was no change in Holmes' performance, with Davis still unwilling to issue mandatory orders.¹⁰⁵ Holmes demonstrated that he was short of the capabilities required of a field or departmental commander, when he had lost 5,000 valuable garrison troops at The Post of Arkansas. He failed to inform Davis of the defeat, an action that was unworthy of a commanding general. It would have been better if Davis had paid greater attention to the troop dispositions in Arkansas, rather than merely accepting Holmes' claims that he needed all of his men. Keeping Holmes in a senior role was a difficult matter to handle for the incoming commander, who had already encountered Davis' support for Bragg in his previous role and who knew that Holmes was another of the commanders whom the President would strongly support. Kirby Smith, therefore, had little option but to leave Holmes in command in Arkansas, which was a crucial decision that affected the defence of Vicksburg.

Eighth, the President did not order Kirby Smith to attack Grant's supply route on the west bank of the Mississippi River in April 1863. Woodworth acknowledged that Kirby Smith should have co-operated with Pemberton.¹⁰⁶ Ballard mentioned the attack by Walker's Texas division on Milliken's Bend in June 1863, noting that Grant afterward gave the west bank more attention.¹⁰⁷ Neither historian acknowledged that Walker was in position at Monroe in April 1863 and was able to attack at the right

¹⁰⁵ Ballard, *Vicksburg*, p. 167.

¹⁰⁶ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, p. 204.

¹⁰⁷ Ballard, *Vicksburg*, p. 391.

time and the right place. Attacks on Grant's supply route on the west bank of the Mississippi River during April 1863 could have yielded substantial rewards. Kirby Smith chose to give priority to the reinforcement of the Red River, ahead of defending the Mississippi River Valley. Kirby Smith was right in his belief that defending against the Union army in the Red River Valley kept Banks out of the Vicksburg Campaign, but he should have allowed Walker's division to attack Grant's supply route when it reached Monroe. Davis ought to have issued peremptory orders to ensure that Kirby Smith was not allowed to delay from assisting opposite Vicksburg. Kirby Smith was well aware of the importance of Vicksburg to the Confederacy, but he underestimated the strength and dynamism of the Union campaign, believing that time was still available. However, having commanded in the Trans-Mississippi for a matter of weeks, allowance needed to be made for Kirby Smith's learning process, as he gained experience in a vastly larger department. Davis failed to exercise the strategic direction necessary to ensure that the Trans-Mississippi leadership gave priority to the defence of the Mississippi River Valley.

Johnston protested in November and December 1862 about the command structure and the strategy in the West, but took no action to alter the defensive arrangements in Mississippi, shunning the opportunity to visit the state, despite Davis' suggestion that he did so, because he knew that the President would not change his mind on how the defence was to be conducted. Whilst Woodworth and Ballard separately argued that Johnston did not agree with the strategy in the West, these historians did not criticise him for failing to visit Mississippi on at least two occasions when he had the opportunity and on one of those occasions he ignored Davis' explicit

suggestion to conduct a visit.¹⁰⁸ Johnston did not believe that his command carried real authority. He was mostly correct in this assertion, but he could have made efforts to visit Mississippi. Johnston did not take up two opportunities to visit Vicksburg to begin to improve the defences: first when in Jackson, in the first half of January 1863, and second, when Davis suggested one month later that he visited. Because the political power was with Davis, all Johnston could do was protest that the structure within the Department of the West was not working. Davis wanted Johnston to be more dynamic in defending Vicksburg, but the role of commander of the Department of the West was being handled in a negative manner, because Johnston did not believe that he had real authority. Irrespective of Davis' belief in Johnston, if his commander had the wrong attitude, he needed replacing. Alternatively, Davis needed to give him real authority, because Johnston had made it clear that he would never carry out the role in the way the President demanded.

The wider strategic question of how to support Johnston in his new role as commander of the Department of the West was never addressed. Because the President countermanded him immediately, it demonstrated that Davis was aware that Johnston would not take this action. Johnston's opinion was previously expressed several times. However, Davis' action diminished Johnston's authority. The important strategic question concerning how to defend the Mississippi River Valley was also never addressed. The President needed to communicate the framework for his defensive plans and he had to ensure that the Trans-Mississippi forces co-operated. Davis' lack of direction from Richmond left a leadership vacuum, because the greater goals of the Confederacy were not articulated into strategic objectives for his western commanders and resources were dissipated away from Vicksburg.

¹⁰⁸ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, pp. 181-2 and Ballard, *Vicksburg*, p. 116.

Chapter four

Defending against early Union operations

Introduction

The Union goal of capturing Vicksburg developed from a need to defend against enemy actions in northern Mississippi. In September 1862, the Confederate forces were intent on severing the critical Memphis and Charleston railroad and then invading western Tennessee. A Union defeat anywhere along this railroad would cause the loss of the ability to move troops rapidly across southern Tennessee. For the Confederacy, possession of this railroad would make troop movements easier between their armies in northern Mississippi and in central Tennessee. The possessor of the railroad thus enjoyed the military advantage of interior lines. When Lieutenant-General John C. Pemberton and General Joseph E. Johnston took up their commands in late 1862, the Confederacy had been defeated in northern Mississippi at Iuka and at Corinth. The result was that they had already lost control of this vital railroad and were forced to use a new and much longer route, via Mobile on the Gulf coast. By mid-October 1862, the Union armies enjoyed the advantage of interior lines and this forced the outnumbered Confederate armies in Tennessee and Mississippi to remain defensive.

Having secured the railroad, the capture of Vicksburg became the key Union western objective in November 1862. This goal arose because Union-held territory in western Tennessee was still vulnerable to Confederate incursions, even after the victories at Iuka and Corinth. Grant realised that a Union attack was needed, so this resulted in the Central Mississippi Campaign that commenced in November 1862. This was the first

attempt by the Union toward the goal of opening the Mississippi River Valley. Grant used the railroad from Grand Junction on the Memphis and Charleston line, southward through Holly Springs, as his supply route, with the security of knowing that the east-west railroad at his back was in Union hands.

Although Pemberton thwarted the Union advance in December 1862, reinforcing his capabilities to Davis, Grant did not give up. Unlike Union commanders in the Trans-Mississippi, Tennessee and in the East, Grant realised that superior Union resources would eventually win and so he made his first moves toward hard war in western Tennessee and in Mississippi. He made several more attempts to reach Vicksburg, through the Delta region to the north of the Yazoo River and on the west side of the Mississippi River. Confederate military action was successful in the Delta region, but Confederate military action on the west side of the Mississippi River was negligible. Grant's early attempts to get below Vicksburg on the west bank failed because of falling water levels, rather than through military defeats. So, by mid-April 1863, Grant was no closer to his goal of capturing Vicksburg, but he was learning from his experiences. He turned his attention toward a west bank approach, having failed to close on Vicksburg from the east bank of the Mississippi River.

To combat this threat, Pemberton needed to extend his defence to the west bank and he needed co-ordination with the Trans-Mississippi forces to defeat Grant. He made appeals to Kirby Smith, Holmes, Johnston and Davis for reinforcements, but none was forthcoming between January and April 1863. Johnston wanted the Mississippi army to be fluid in its movements, rather than remain on the defensive waiting for Grant to arrive.

Johnston urged the concentration of the whole of Pemberton's force in order to defeat Grant, should he cross the Mississippi River to the east bank below Vicksburg.

In mid-April 1863, Grant created a more complex plan than he used in the Central Mississippi Campaign to ensure that Pemberton kept his forces dispersed. Grant concentrated his forces for the Mississippi River crossing. Pemberton's troops, totalling 49,000, that initially outnumbered Grant, were spread out, at Vicksburg, at Port Hudson, at Grand Gulf, at Jackson, at Haynes' Bluff, and were also dispersed in the interior of Mississippi.¹ Grant landed on the east bank of the Mississippi River unopposed at Bruinsburg, having arrived on ground that was suitable for a military campaign, where he could bring to bear the whole of the forces at his disposal. Grant succeeded in crossing the Mississippi River on 30th April 1863, which was a significant step in his latest plan to reach Vicksburg.

Pemberton and Johnston had to co-ordinate the campaign against Grant with the military resources at their immediate disposal, as little help could be expected from elsewhere in the Confederacy. It was thus vital that Johnston, as the commander, and Pemberton, as his subordinate, had a common strategy for the defence of Vicksburg. Davis was charged with providing the defensive framework for Confederate operations in the West, and he had left in place a command structure that was about to be severely tested by Grant. Davis and Pemberton were agreed that defence of Vicksburg and the Mississippi River Valley would be by garrisoning the city. This was at the expense of opposing Grant immediately with the whole Confederate force available, which was Johnston's preferred option. Grant, by crossing the Mississippi River aggressively and

¹ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, p. 702, return of troop numbers 31st March 1863 in Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana.

unopposed, was challenging the Confederate command structure that Davis still believed was capable of mounting a successful defence of Vicksburg.

Confederate failure in northern Mississippi

Any Union penetration into the interior of Mississippi depended on possession of the east-west rail line from Memphis, through Grand Junction and Corinth. There were railroads running southward from these two rail centres into the heart of the state. Confederate forces, in mid-September 1862, were hovering to the east of Corinth based at Iuka, under Price, and also to the south of Grand Junction at Holly Springs, under Van Dorn. Davis had failed to make a decision on command, because he believed that Price would advance into Tennessee and Van Dorn would remain in Mississippi. Price had been ordered by Bragg to advance, to prevent Rosecrans from reinforcing Buell, during the Confederate invasion of Kentucky. Price urged Van Dorn to join him and take command of their combined forces, but Van Dorn had part of his forces operating near Baton Rouge and did not want to comply until October.² Their respective armies were close together, but Grant knew that they were still four days' march apart.³ Grant saw this as an opportunity, whilst Price was still isolated at Iuka, and so planned his destruction.⁴ Van Dorn obtained Davis' approval to place Price under his command in mid-September 1862.⁵ Before Van Dorn could react, Price, with approximately 14,000 men, had encountered Union forces under Rosecrans, with approximately 17,000 men on 19th September 1862 at Iuka. The Confederate political leadership had failed to ensure

² *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part I, p. 120, Price to Van Dorn 31st July 1862 and on 4th August 1862 referred to in Price's Iuka report.

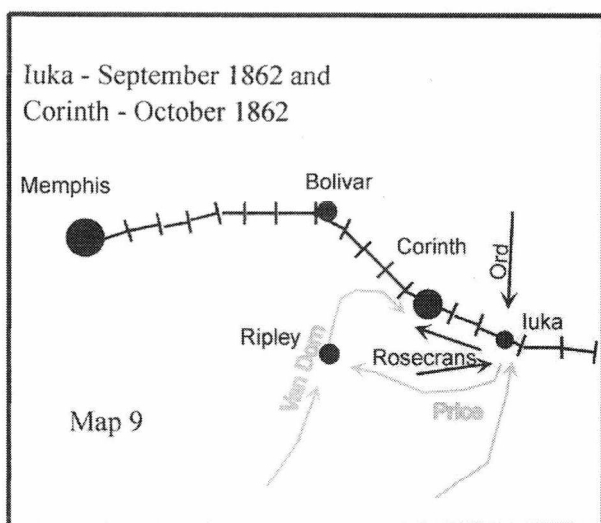
³ *Ibid.*, p. 65. Grant to Colonel J. C. Kelton, Assistant Adjutant General in Washington D. C., 22nd October 1862. This was Grant's official report on the planning and execution of his operations against Price at Iuka, Mississippi.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68. Grant to Kelton, 22nd October 1862.

⁵ *Davis papers*, Vol. 8, p. 384, Van Dorn to Davis, 9th September 1862 and p. 385, Davis to Van Dorn, 11th September 1862.

unified command in western Tennessee and had unnecessarily exposed part of its forces to a marginally larger Union army, when a combination would have resulted in numerical superiority.

Grant's plan to capture Price's army was imaginative and aimed at capturing the whole of the enemy army. He called for half of the force to approach Iuka from the north under Major-General E. O. C. Ord, and the other half, under Rosecrans, the overall Union commander, from the south, in a pincer movement.⁶ Only Rosecrans engaged Price, as Ord was ordered to wait for the sounds of battle before attacking, because he was warned that the southern half of the pincer movement would be late on the field.⁷ Ord could not



hear the sounds of battle because of the prevailing conditions, but matters were rectified the next morning after further orders from Grant.⁸ Grant had developed an innovative plan to trap Price, but the difficult terrain prevented its timely execution. His plan was a continuation of the

strategy to capture or destroy an enemy army that Grant first demonstrated at Fort Donelson. The Confederate political leadership were slow to realise that this was an important change in Union philosophy, despite the capture of virtually their entire garrison at Fort Donelson.

⁶ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part I, pp. 65-6. Grant to Colonel J. C. Kelton, Assistant Adjutant General in Washington D. C., 22nd October 1862.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67. Grant to Colonel J. C. Kelton, Assistant Adjutant General in Washington D. C., 22nd October 1862.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67, Grant to Ord, 20th September 1862, quoted in Grant's report to Colonel J. C. Kelton, 22nd October 1862.

Whilst the Confederate political leadership were slow to understand Union strategy in the West and slow to provide unified command, Price was quick to realise that he was in a potential trap and that merging his army with Van Dorn's made sense. He was able to slip away from Iuka during the night and enacted orders from Van Dorn for their forces to merge at Ripley for an advance on Corinth.⁹ Grant had been thwarted by the alertness of Price and by the failure of Ord and Rosecrans to block the line of retreat. Grant had tried to co-ordinate a pincer movement through difficult terrain, with communications between the two parts of the pincer being stretched, so Ord and Rosecrans were not immediately aware of each others' whereabouts or actions. These errors allowed Price the time to make good his escape and made him realise that consolidation of his force with Van Dorn was a military necessity.

Van Dorn assessed Corinth, at the eastern end of Union occupation of the railroad that ran from Memphis through Bolivar, as his target. Having met Price at the end of September, Van Dorn's plan called for their combined armies to advance on Corinth, where he estimated there were 15,000 defenders.¹⁰ He believed that an attack on Memphis would succeed, but reasoned that he could not hold the city because of the presence of gunboats in the Mississippi River. He also discounted Bolivar, as its location in the centre and slightly north of the Union line would allow advances from either Corinth or Memphis to approach his rear. Corinth was selected as the target, because Van Dorn believed it gave the best hope of support to the operations in eastern Tennessee and would by-pass the Union garrisons to his west that might be forced to retreat, by being outflanked.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 385-9, Price to Major M. M. Kimmel, Assistant Adjutant-General, Army of West Tennessee, 20th October 1862.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 376-382, Van Dorn to Pemberton, 20th October 1862.

Confederate planning for the battle involved a disguised approach with a sudden turn to the east. The idea was to divide the Union forces into keeping garrisons at a number of points, so that numerical superiority could be achieved at the point of attack. Time was of the essence in ensuring that the numerical advantage was maintained long enough to be effective. Rosecrans realised that he was outnumbered at Corinth, but he did not know where Van Dorn planned to strike, so he continued to protect his outlying fortifications. The combined Confederate force numbered 22,000 and Van Dorn predicted a reasonable chance of success.¹¹ On the first day of the battle, 3rd October 1862, the Confederates made good gains through the first line of defences, but failed to press home their advantage as nightfall arrived. However, Rosecrans called in outlying reinforcements and by the second day of the battle, he had slightly more men. As they were behind prepared fortifications, he had gained the advantage. The next morning, the Union forces had consolidated their positions and were able to repulse further assaults. Van Dorn had given away his time advantage that had ensured a numerical advantage, by prematurely ending fighting on the first day. Consequently, whilst his initial planning had been sound, he had failed to press home his advantage and he had given Rosecrans the time he needed to recover.

Van Dorn's army retreated, badly mauled, and then was faced with a lengthy rearguard action to avoid being trapped in the narrow area where they had to cross the Hatchie River. Rosecrans had an opportunity to inflict serious damage on the enemy, but was slow to react. Grant allowed Rosecrans to continue the pursuit but was concerned about him over-extending himself. Rosecrans reported that once the Confederate defeat

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 376-382, Van Dorn to Pemberton, 20th October 1862.

was obvious he quickly turned defence into pursuit.¹² Rosecrans insisted that Brigadier-General Stephen Hurlbut's forces cut the line of retreat.¹³ Later the same day he wrote aggressively to Grant, "I most deeply dissent from your views as to the manner of pursuing."¹⁴ Grant had wanted an immediate pursuit, but Rosecrans had not started until the next day, which left Hurlbut's much smaller force exposed, hence Grant's reluctance to commit it.¹⁵ Rosecrans was criticised, even though his pause to regroup had been short. Either in victory or defeat, East or West, the Union pattern had been for a lengthy pause to regroup. This was not Grant's style, as his change of tactics meant that the enemy had to be relentlessly pursued. He knew that pursuit was an important part of any victory, as it further reduced the beaten foe by capturing straggling troops and by capturing slower moving supplies and guns. Grant believed that the destruction of the opposing army was his goal, rather than mere occupation of ground after a victory.

Brigadier-General John S. Bowen, as commander of one of the brigades in Lovell's division, was placed in charge of the Confederate rearguard, exhibiting significant skill in protecting the army. Lovell reported that Bowen, during his action at the Tuscumbia, had "repelled the attack with great slaughter to the enemy and but little loss to his own command."¹⁶ Davis did not recognise Bowen's efforts, praising Van Dorn for extricating his army by quoting Brigadier-General Dabney H. Maury.¹⁷ Whilst credit was given to Van Dorn, he took no direct action other than to delegate the rearguard to Bowen. Lovell had been full of praise for Bowen's tenacity in executing the

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 166-173, Rosecrans to Major John A. Rawlins, Assistant Adjutant-General, 25th October 1862.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 163, Rosecrans to Grant, 7th October 1862.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-4, Rosecrans to Grant, 7th October 1862.

¹⁵ Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, Modern Library, (New York, 1999), pp. 220-2. Reprint of the original published by C. L. Webster, (New York, 1885).

¹⁶ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part I, pp. 404-6. Major-General Mansfield Lovell's report on Corinth, 13th October 1862 to Major M. H. Kimmel, Assistant Adjutant-General.

¹⁷ Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, Volume II, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1990), p. 330. This is an unabridged republication of the 1881 original.

rearguard action and he had exhibited considerable skill through this tough ordeal. Davis was not aware that Bowen had taken such an important role.

Davis had to take action because the outcry after the defeat at Corinth was widespread. He had Major-General John C. Pemberton available in Richmond, recently recalled from South Carolina. In October 1862, Davis gave Pemberton command of the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana.¹⁸ Van Dorn was the senior Major-General in the army, so Davis' solution was to promote Pemberton to Lieutenant-General.¹⁹ However, Davis did not advise Pemberton of his promotion until after he had arrived in the department and only after he had been forced to seek clarification from Richmond over the extent of his authority.²⁰ Pollard was critical of Pemberton's appointment, believing he was "a man who had nothing to support him but the personal affection of Mr. Davis ... No explanations but that of sheer obstinacy, can be possibly afforded for this choice."²¹ Davis believed in Pemberton's ability and had reluctantly replaced him in South Carolina. Pemberton's experience in South Carolina had been in an administrative command in a large department, similar to his new role, but he had not commanded a field army. There were doubts concerning his ability and concerning his quick rise to high rank, without any evidence that it was based on success in his previous role. Davis saw qualities in Pemberton that he had not yet exhibited in practice, but at least he had resolved the confusion over command in Mississippi promptly, even though he had allowed the initial confusion to take place.

¹⁸ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part II, p. 716-7. Randolph to Pemberton, 30th September 1862.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 724. Cooper to Pemberton, 10th October 1862.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 724. Pemberton to Cooper, 9th October 1862.

²¹ Edward A. Pollard, *Life of Jefferson Davis, etc.*, National Publishing Company, (Philadelphia, 1869), reproduced by University of Michigan Library, (Ann Arbor, 2007), p. 298.

Pemberton had to deal with the complaints against Van Dorn arising from his alleged poor performance in command of the field army, chief of which were charges brought by Bowen. The court of inquiry sat in November 1862, under Major-General Sterling Price, to hear the charges against Van Dorn. Bowen had a good case, but chose a wide spread of specifications to support his two main charges. He had witnessed the early cessation of the Confederate attacks on the first day at Corinth, knew that the time and numerical advantages had been lost and then had had to endure suffering amongst his troops during the retreat. Van Dorn had acted aggressively and his troops had responded magnificently, but the decision to cease the attack on the first day before a reeling Northern army meant the advantage gained was lost the next day. Rosecrans was able to reinforce and improve his defences during the night, and Van Dorn should not have allowed his opposite number this opportunity to regroup. There was more fighting capacity available if Bowen had been properly used and an opportunity had existed for a further advance on the first day. Bowen alleged that his commander had neglected his duty and that there was cruel treatment of his troops.²² Van Dorn's colleagues rallied round and he was exonerated on all charges, the verdict being approved by Pemberton, leaving Bowen in a difficult position.²³ There had been other allegations of Van Dorn being drunk and the court of inquiry was also required to address this issue.²⁴ There were widespread requests for his replacement from various sources, after Corinth.²⁵ President Davis' older brother, Joseph, was moved to comment that, "when Van Dorn

²² *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part I, pp. 415-6 from the Proceedings of a Court of Enquiry, convened by Special Orders No. 24 issued by R. W. Memminger, Assistant Adjutant-General, 7th November 1862 on behalf of Pemberton and detailed in pp. 414-459.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 459. Pemberton dissolved the court of inquiry into Bowen's allegations against Van Dorn on 28th November 1862, approving the conclusions, noting that every allegation was fully disproved.

²⁴ *Davis papers*, Vol. 8, Holly Springs citizens to Davis, 7th October 1862, p. 436.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Alexander M. Clayton, John W. C. Watson and William F. Mason to Davis, 11th October 1862, p. 439 and Augustus B. Longstreet to Davis, 14th October 1862, pp. 446-7.

was made a General it spoiled a good captain.”²⁶ The President was unmoved. His own opinion of Van Dorn, a fellow Mississippian, had been formed over long association. Davis made it plain that Van Dorn’s position was unchanged: “the wants of Mississippi & your own fame equally render me unwilling to withdraw you from your present sphere of duty at this time.”²⁷ Davis wrote that “he possessed ... both the confidence and affection of his men”; and in relation to Corinth, he believed that “the failure was due to other causes than the defect of plan or want of energy on the part of Van Dorn.”²⁸ Confederate Senator James Phelan of Mississippi wrote, on 9th December 1862, following the verdict, of “the universal opprobrium, which covers that officer, ... [so] an acquittal by a Court Martial of Angels would not relieve him of the charge.”²⁹ Davis supported an old friend, even one criticised by his older brother Joseph and by Phelan. Van Dorn’s plan had been competent, but he had been found wanting in its execution, despite the energy he displayed. Davis’ opinion was not shared by Bowen, who was adamant that Van Dorn was incompetent.

Price had been put in a difficult position chairing the court of inquiry. Davis, on the other hand, saw an old friend being pursued, who was willing to take the fight to the enemy. He believed that Van Dorn was being challenged just because he had not succeeded. Price had earlier recognised Bowen’s talent and wanted him to join his army, stating that “I shall be glad to obtain the assistance of so excellent an officer.” Bowen had the added advantage of being a Missouri resident, a place to which Price, who was from Missouri, was anxious to return.³⁰ Bowen was reassigned in October 1862, before

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Joseph Davis to Jefferson Davis, 7th October 1862 in an additional footnote dated 8th October, p. 433.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Davis to Van Dorn, 20th October 1862, p. 452.

²⁸ Jefferson Davis, *Confederate Government*, Vol. 2, p. 328.

²⁹ *Davis papers*, Vol. 8, Phelan to Davis, 9th December 1862, pp. 539-44.

³⁰ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part II, pp. 683-5, Price to Randolph, 25th August 1862.

the court of inquiry took place, from Van Dorn to Price, who needed a new division commander after the death of Brigadier-General Henry Little at Iuka.³¹ Price had eventually got his wish to have Bowen as part of his command, but then had to chair the court of inquiry that found against his new subordinate and sustained Van Dorn in command. Davis had, once again, backed his own judgement of a general in the field, even though Van Dorn had demonstrated that he was incapable of managing a large body of troops in combat. In the process the President had failed to support one of the best generals under Pemberton's command and who was beginning to demonstrate that he had the potential to be best Confederate combat general in the West. No other Confederate general in the West had demonstrated this leadership capability.

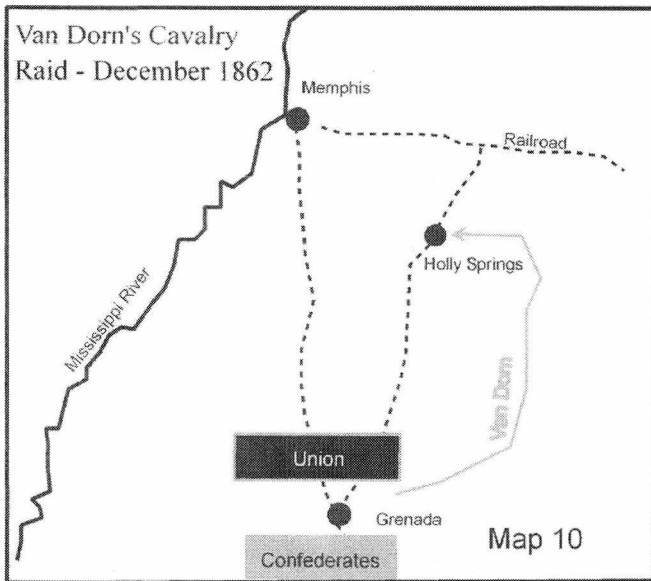
Importance of cavalry

The use of cavalry in the Vicksburg Campaign was limited to scouting and observation duties, apart from two spectacular raids, one by either side. In northern Mississippi, Van Dorn's destruction of Grant's supply base at Holly Springs caused the abandonment of the Central Mississippi Campaign, in December 1862. The following April, Colonel Benjamin Grierson's cavalry raid through Mississippi was one of the most effective and most famous operations in the Civil War. However, the key role of the cavalry for scouting was available to the Union throughout the Vicksburg Campaign, but was denied to the Confederates when the bulk of the Mississippi cavalry was moved to Tennessee in early 1863.

The Central Mississippi Campaign commenced in November 1862, with a southward movement into Mississippi, using the railroad as a supply route. Having

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 729, by order of Van Dorn from Kimmel, 16th October 1862.

ensured that the Confederate field armies had retreated from northern Mississippi, Grant was prepared to begin the campaign to capture Vicksburg.³² His entire command was on



the defensive until this moment, keeping control of the various railroads in western Tennessee and into northern Mississippi.³³

By advancing southward, Grant was able to use garrison troops, increasing his field army to a strength that he estimated at 30,000, similar to his estimate of

Pemberton's strength.³⁴ Pemberton retired before Grant's advance to the line of the Tallahatchie River and, once outflanked, retreated further to the Yallahusha River.³⁵

Grant knew that he was faced by most of Pemberton's army from Vicksburg, so his plan was to order Sherman southward down the Mississippi River, whilst holding the bulk of the Confederates in place on the Yallahusha.³⁶ In order to supply his own army, whilst it remained stationary, Grant built up a huge depot of stores at Holly Springs.³⁷ This, and a number of other vulnerable points, was garrisoned as Grant moved south.

Grant's plans were disrupted when Van Dorn's cavalry raid destroyed this supply base at Holly Springs, on 20th December 1862; but he subsequently learnt that he could provide subsistence for his troops from the countryside. So the raid was successful from

³² Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, p. 222.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 224-5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 227-8.

³⁶ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part I, Grant to Sherman, 8th December 1862, p. 601 and Grant, Ulysses S., *Personal Memoirs*, Modern Library, (New York, 1999), p. 229.

³⁷ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, p. 226.

a Confederate perspective, but it contributed to opening Grant's thinking to a new, harder, form of warfare. Van Dorn had pleaded lack of cavalry to Pemberton.³⁸ Somehow, he managed to gather enough mounted men to head north, shortly afterward catching the Union garrison completely unaware, capturing 1,500 prisoners and destroying huge quantities of supplies.³⁹ Grant decided to call off his campaign, but noted that in the aftermath, he had been able to gather supplies from the countryside to subsist his troops for two weeks, despite being out of contact with his base for more than a week.⁴⁰ He did not forget this lesson, noting it for use later in the campaign to capture Vicksburg.⁴¹ Pemberton did not question how Grant had been able to survive without his supplies. The Union commander had learnt from the experience, but his Confederate counterpart did not appear to have gained any information of value.

Johnston decided to take direct command of the Confederate cavalry in northern Mississippi so that he could orchestrate co-operation with Bragg's cavalry in Tennessee. He used Van Dorn's relative idleness in Northern Mississippi, after Grant's retreat in December 1862, to issue orders for the transfer to his command.⁴² Pemberton decided to retain a brigade under Colonel Wirt Adams.⁴³ Pemberton was not sure that the cavalry had been moved from northern Mississippi, enquiring as to Van Dorn's whereabouts in March 1863.⁴⁴ At the end of April 1863, Davis passed on the message: "Genl. Pemberton telegraphs ... that he can not prevent cavalry raids."⁴⁵ Pemberton protested to Johnston

³⁸ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part II, p. 777, Van Dorn to Pemberton, 3rd December 1862.

³⁹ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part I, p. 503, Van Dorn to Pemberton, 20th December 1862.

⁴⁰ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, pp. 229-31.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁴² *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part II, p. 832, Johnston to Pemberton, 11th January 1863.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 834, Pemberton to Van Dorn, 13th January 1863.

⁴⁴ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, p. 681, Pemberton to Johnston, 21st March 1863.

⁴⁵ *Davis papers*, Vol. 9, Davis to Johnston, 30th April 1863, p. 160.

several times about his lack of cavalry.⁴⁶ Johnston's response was to note that Pemberton had been reinforced by infantry from Bragg and that he had ordered 3,000 cavalry to Tennessee in compensation.⁴⁷ Pemberton placed the newly arrived Loring in command of Van Dorn's former division.⁴⁸ Pemberton did not realise that once Johnston took control his orders had removed this cavalry from northern Mississippi, thus leaving the state open to Union cavalry raids. Johnston refused to return the cavalry, because Davis had moved Stevenson's division against his wishes. Davis did not challenge Johnston further, but the real loser was Pemberton, who was deprived of cavalry because of the dispute between his superiors. He refused to overturn his original decision to remove the cavalry from northern Mississippi. Johnston was indifferent to these protests, because he had been upset by Davis' transfer of a division of 8,000 under Stevenson from Bragg to Pemberton. Giving Bragg virtually all of the cavalry and leaving Pemberton with hardly any was a serious problem in Mississippi and one that benefited the Northern forces in a spectacular way. This decision by Johnston created the opportunity for Grant to exploit his own use of cavalry.

One of Grant's most brilliant ideas was to exploit the Confederate cavalry's weakness by ordering a raid by Grierson in April 1863, who led 2,000 mounted men through the centre of Mississippi. Because Pemberton had only one regiment of cavalry under Adams at his disposal, all he could do was use sorely-needed infantry to protect the railroads and attempt a pursuit. Loring acidly pointed out that he could not pursue

⁴⁶ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part II, pp. 816-7, Pemberton to Johnston, 1st January 1863, *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part I, pp. 249-331, Pemberton to Cooper, 2nd August 1863. This was Pemberton's Vicksburg Campaign report in which he confirmed that he had a deficiency of cavalry p. 249, that he had requested Johnston to return Van Dorn's cavalry on 25th March p. 255, that he had contacted Johnston again on 20th April 1863 p. 250, and where he stated he had no cavalry from Grand Gulf to Yazoo City on p. 253.

⁴⁷ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. LII, Part II, p. 463, Johnston to Davis, 30th April 1863.

⁴⁸ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part II, p. 824, General Orders no. 5 from R. W. Memminger, Assistant-Adjutant General, 21st January 1863.

mounted men on foot.⁴⁹ Grierson was able to travel the whole length of Mississippi from Tennessee, to Union-held Baton Rouge in Louisiana, having only one slight skirmish with Adams near Natchez. Grant reported that “He had spread excitement throughout the State, destroying railroads, trestle-works, bridges, burning locomotives and railway stock, taking prisoners, and destroying stores of all kinds”, in one of the most famous cavalry actions of the war.⁵⁰ The cavalry raid succeeded beyond Grant’s expectations and he was moved to comment: “To use the expression of my informant, ‘Grierson has knocked the heart out of the State.’”⁵¹ Not only did this raid disrupt Confederate infrastructure, it also diverted Pemberton’s attention and many troops away from what Grant was undertaking across the Mississippi. The resulting chaos contributed to Grant’s being largely ignored on the west side of the Mississippi. Grant had given Pemberton much to occupy his mind at precisely the moment that his opponent needed to concentrate on the bigger picture of preventing a Union landing on the eastern shore. The damage inflicted by Grierson was incalculable to Confederate morale, but the real value lay in the diversion afforded. However, whilst Pemberton’s orders to prevent damage and chase Grierson were necessary, the sheer number of troops allocated to this objective was an over-reaction. Johnston’s decision to remove most of Pemberton’s cavalry created this opportunity for Grant. Davis protested at the removal of the cavalry, but failed to order its return, a decision that had a profound effect on the Vicksburg Campaign.

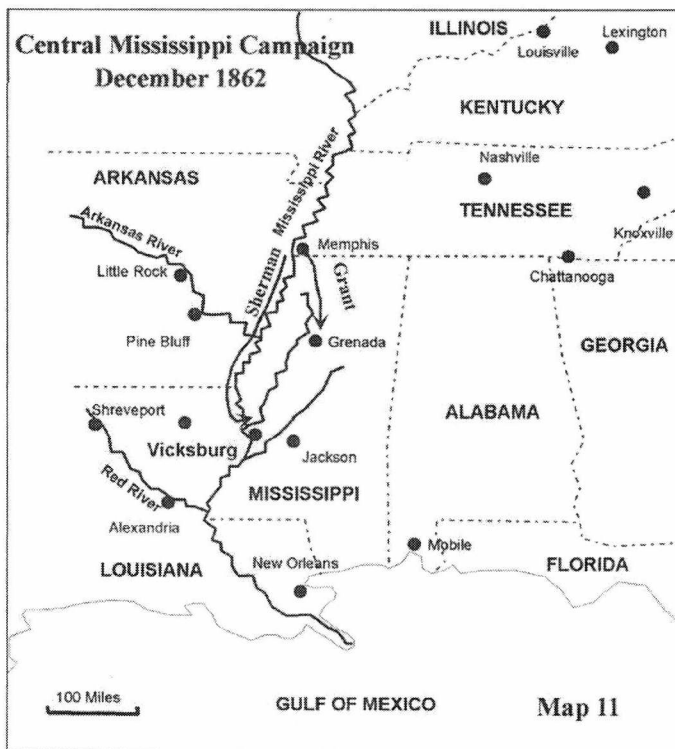
⁴⁹ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part I, p. 544, Loring to Pemberton, 25th April 1863.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34, Grant to Halleck, 6th May 1863.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34, Grant to Halleck, 6th May 1863.

Vicksburg defences stand firm against Sherman

Sherman had orders from Grant, in late December 1862, to contribute to the Central Mississippi Campaign by moving his army down the Mississippi River to arrive in Pemberton's rear, as the Confederates were pressed in northern Mississippi. In Memphis, he had 21,000 men available to take part in this downriver expedition.⁵² To



these men, he intended to add a further division of 9,000 men from Helena, Arkansas, to make a force of 30,000 in total.⁵³ With Grant holding the bulk of Pemberton's forces in northern Mississippi, it appeared that Sherman would have a formidable force, with which to overcome the depleted garrison in Vicksburg. Communications

with Grant were lengthy, back to Memphis via the river. After Van Dorn's cavalry raid, Grant was out of touch for more than a week. As Sherman moved south, he was unaware of Grant's withdrawal from northern Mississippi. The two-pronged attack now only had Sherman's prong left.

⁵² *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part I, pp. 601-2, Sherman to Grant, 12th December 1862.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 602-3, Sherman to Brigadier-General Lorenzo Thomas, Adjutant-General, Washington D. C., 16th December 1862.

Sherman was faced with low-lying, swampy land below the bluffs, on the Yazoo River to the north of Vicksburg, which made using the whole of his force in an assault difficult to achieve. He attacked on the 29th December 1862 across two points, but was repulsed with heavy losses.⁵⁴ He remained in the vicinity planning another attack, but heard trains arriving in Vicksburg and saw more troops forming in the defences.⁵⁵ Major-General John A. McClernand arrived and Sherman discovered that Grant had withdrawn from northern Mississippi, which helped to explain the arrival of Confederate reinforcements.⁵⁶ McClernand had orders to take command and agreed with Sherman's decision to withdraw on 1st January 1863.⁵⁷ Grant, once again, had attempted a pincer movement, this time on a much grander scale, and once again poor communications between the two parts of the pincer meant that the forces actually operated in isolation. He had, however, seen the value of twin efforts causing the opposing defensive forces to be split, but on this occasion Sherman was left in isolation because of his own withdrawal. Sherman believed that the bluffs along the Yazoo River were impregnable and that his only hope of success was if there were depleted troop numbers in the defences, due to Grant's presence further north.⁵⁸ The bluffs were heavily fortified and the low ground had a number of lakes and bayous that inhibited the attackers, affording only limited crossing points. During the assault, the defenders were able to concentrate their fire on the crossing points of the bayous and the Union army could only bring a small proportion of its force to bear. A lesson had been given, as the Union losses were

⁵⁴ William T. Sherman, *Memoirs*, Penguin Classics, (London, 2000), pp. 270-1, originally published by D. Appleton, (New York, 1875) and then a second edition published in 1876. The first edition caused many protests and Sherman modified his tone and added information to the second edition, which has been reproduced by Penguin with an added introduction by Michael Fellman, Professor of History at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

over one thousand killed and wounded, five times the Confederate losses. Sherman did not forget this lesson and was ever afterward wary of attacking head-on against well prepared defences. The terrain lesson was vital knowledge for defence in this type of countryside. Pemberton did not witness the events at Chickasaw Bayou, as he was in northern Mississippi at the time, but he needed to heed the information at his disposal, because his leadership was already being questioned.

Initial criticism of Pemberton's Mississippi leadership

Pemberton arrived in Mississippi in mid-October 1862. Having had problems with his relationships with South Carolina politicians, it was imperative that he developed his political and leadership skills to avoid similar problems in Mississippi. Davis commended Pemberton to Pettus and to Phelan.⁵⁹ By early December, the first complaint came from Phelan. He reported that, "Pemberton has not impressed himself, either upon the people or the Army."⁶⁰ In early April 1863, Davis replied to a complaint concerning Pemberton from Judge William M. Brooks of Alabama: "I hope that the distrust in his fidelity & ability to which you allude is not as great as you have been led to believe. ... I feel assured that they are 'groundless.'"⁶¹ In mid-April there was a note of testiness in a communication from Pettus concerning interference in the mustering of new troops.⁶² In his new department, these were the first rumblings of disquiet. Davis was not concerned at this stage. His belief in Pemberton was undimmed, particularly after the success in repelling Grant and Sherman in the early days of his command and his own visit to

⁵⁹ *Davis papers, Vol. 8*, Davis to Pettus, 30th September 1862, p. 414 and Davis to Phelan, 11th October 1862, p. 439.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Phelan to Davis, 7th December 1862, pp. 539-544.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Davis to Brooks, 2nd April 1863, pp. 122-4.

⁶² *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, pp. 745-6, Pettus to Pemberton, 15th April 1863.

Mississippi. Pemberton was about to be tested again by Grant, as he sought more routes to approach Vicksburg from the north through the Delta region.

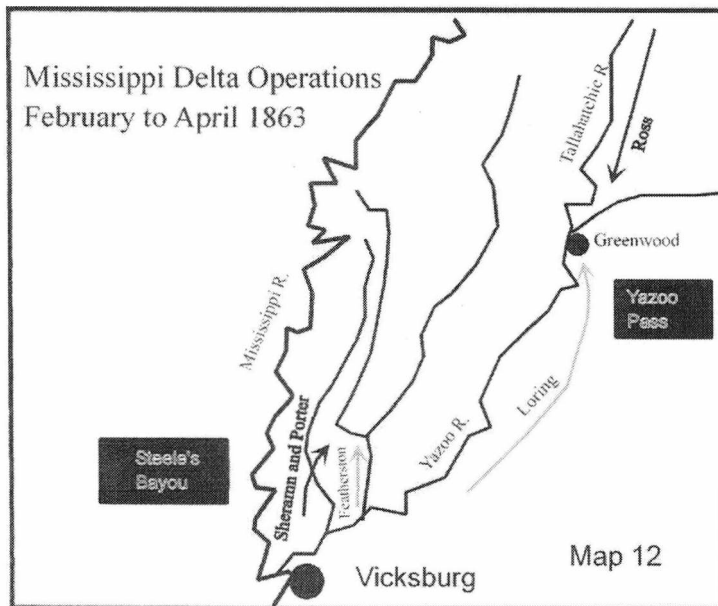
Small Confederate forces win in the Delta

There were a number of bayous and lakes that occupied the Delta region between the Mississippi and the Yazoo Rivers. This area was low lying, frequently flooded and heavily wooded with areas cleared for plantations. There were several water routes that almost completed the link between these two rivers. The problems faced by Grant were how to use iron-clad gunboats in narrow waterways and how to transport large numbers of troops quickly, before there was a Confederate response. The Confederates had to block the waterways somehow to prevent this threat from materialising. Pemberton chose Loring, his second in command, to take charge of the forces in the Delta.

The Yazoo Pass expedition was Grant's first attempt to arrive above Vicksburg on the Yazoo River. The Yazoo Pass was an exit from the east side of the Mississippi River that followed the Coldwater and Tallahatchie Rivers. Grant placed Brigadier-General Leonard F. Ross in charge, who had about 4,500 men on transport ships following behind two iron-clads.⁶³ Loring supervised the construction of an earthwork fort, named Fort Pemberton, which spanned a small piece of slightly higher land between the Tallahatchie and Yazoo Rivers, with a field of fire toward the oncoming northern iron-clad gunboats. The fort was surrounded by swampy land that made it difficult for infantry to approach. Heavy guns were mounted in an earthen fort and the iron-clads were fired on for the first time on 11th March 1863, retiring quickly. Loring had a garrison in Fort Pemberton of about 2,000 men. He blocked the Tallahatchie River by sinking a ship and was able to

⁶³ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, pp. 238-9.

concentrate his fire on the gunboats that had little room to manoeuvre. Consequently, they were hit many times at close quarters. Both sides built up their forces before the



Union troops were withdrawn, when it was realised that there was no way through Loring's determined defence.

Loring had demonstrated that he could prevent two iron-clad gunboats, a flotilla of lesser ships and

an army division from penetrating the Delta region, by the careful emplacement of guns, supported by well-entrenched, but outnumbered, troops.

Grant thought it was worth another attempt to use the Delta, and the Steele's Bayou expedition was set up under the leadership of Admiral David Dixon Porter in March 1863. Opposing him was Brigadier-General Winfield S. Featherston. Porter left ahead of Sherman and had travelled along Steele's Bayou, then Black Bayou and then Deer Creek before he was brought to a halt by the Confederates. Porter's flotilla consisted of five ships that came under constant fire from guns and rifles. His men were forced to take cover within the gunboats, so he begged Sherman for assistance.⁶⁴ Sherman ordered Colonel Giles A. Smith to advance with about eight hundred men.⁶⁵ Featherston wanted to chop down trees to prevent the gunboats from retreating, sending

⁶⁴ Sherman, *Memoirs*, p. 284.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 284-5.

men forward, but Sherman's infantry arrived just in time to drive them off.⁶⁶ The expedition was abandoned and once again, small well-sited defences had taken maximum advantage of the narrow waterways and the swampy terrain. Pemberton had a second example of the success of determined resistance aided by the natural obstacles of the countryside. Loring succeeded in the Delta and Grant was forced to think again, turning his thoughts to using the Mississippi River itself to arrive south of Vicksburg, with a much bolder plan.

Grant crosses the Mississippi River

On the western side of the Mississippi, Grant had also given up the Lake Providence expedition and the canal digging project across De Soto Point, toward the end of March 1863, because of falling water levels, rather than because of successful Confederate military operations. Grant's new plan was more daring. He desired to move down the west bank of the Mississippi River with his army, to cross to the east bank to the south of Vicksburg on to the higher ground that was suitable for marching an army. Grant abandoned the attempts to get to the Yazoo River through the Delta Region, and decided, in conjunction with Porter, to attempt to by-pass the Vicksburg guns with his gunboats. This was a brave but necessary decision because the Mississippi current added to the speed of the gunboats, whereas the return journey slowed them to a crawl, vastly increasing the length of time they would be under fire. Grant had no direct authority over the admiral, but Porter readily agreed.⁶⁷ Water was Grant's biggest problem because it inundated the land to the west of the Mississippi River levees. The roads were under

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

⁶⁷ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, pp. 243-4.

water, apart from the tracks along the top of the levees. As April commenced, the seasonal drying out of the land made marching tenable, so McClernand's division was ordered to lead the way.

Only one person in the Confederate command suspected the plan that Grant was undertaking. With no support available from further Trans-Mississippi forces, Bowen decided, in early April 1863, to send approximately 1,000 men over to the west side of the river to reinforce a small cavalry force operating under Major Isaac F. Harrison, that was being pressed by about 1,500 Union soldiers, notifying Pemberton of his action.⁶⁸ Four days later, Bowen requested to be allowed to resist the Union forces with the whole of his command, if the enemy presence was heavy.⁶⁹ Pemberton, in a qualified reply, gave permission.⁷⁰ Bowen urged that up to 20,000 men would be needed to ensure success, should Grant land on the east bank.⁷¹ Bowen believed that the risk of exposing Grand Gulf was worth taking to get early information of Union intentions. He had sent Colonel Francis M. Cockrell, his senior brigade commander, across the Mississippi River to confer with Harrison, becoming convinced that substantial Union forces were descending the west bank in the process.

Although Grant was now able to begin troop movements, they could not cross the river unless Porter ran past the Vicksburg batteries with his iron-clads and troop transports. Grant's request for Porter to attempt to by-pass the formidable Vicksburg guns received a positive response, with six iron-clads successfully running the batteries

⁶⁸ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, pp. 713-4, Bowen to Pemberton, 4th April 1863 (two dispatches on the same day).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 724, Bowen to Pemberton, 8th April 1863.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 724, Pemberton to Bowen, 8th April 1863.

⁷¹ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part I, p. 663, Bowen to Major R. W. Memminger, Assistant Adjutant-General, 4th June 1863. This document was Bowen's report of the battle of Port Gibson and followed his earlier report of 4th May 1863, where he concentrated on the battle itself, rather than this expanded report that included the events leading up to the battle.

on the night of 16th April 1863.⁷² This was followed a few days later by transport ships achieving the same objective.⁷³ The iron-clads were relatively undamaged and with the loss of only one transport ship, the damage was less than was feared possible. Johnston had earlier assessed the location of the Vicksburg guns and had expressed his opinion to Pemberton and Davis during his visit with the President. Their ineffectiveness should not have been a surprise to Pemberton, who specialised in artillery. Johnston believed that the guns were spaced along a lengthy waterfront and were unable to bring concentrated fire on each vessel as it passed. Porter endured further transport losses on 22nd April but he was able to carry out repairs to most of the ships. It was one thing for the armour of iron-clad gunboats to keep out shells, but quite another for unarmed transports to be able to carry out the same feat. Admittedly, the transports suffered more damage, but this was to be expected because of the lack of armour plating. Grant had the navy below Vicksburg, able to ferry the troops to the east bank, with the benefit of their considerable firepower.

Bowen was concerned about the build-up on the west side of the Mississippi. Cockrell had been involved in repeated skirmishing. Bowen crossed to the west bank to confer with Cockrell on 17th April, finding him located in a very strong position.⁷⁴ Having learned of the passage of Porter's iron-clads, he checked with Pemberton and then reluctantly withdrew all of his troops to the east bank.⁷⁵ Bowen had wanted to harass the Union forces with a larger presence on the west bank, but he had failed to motivate Pemberton to do anything other than withdraw. Pemberton had been cautious but Bowen only had to deal with the immediate problem to hand, whereas his commander

⁷² Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, pp. 244-5.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 249-250.

⁷⁴ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, p. 754, Bowen to Memminger, 17th April 1863.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 755, between Bowen and Pemberton (seven dispatches), 17th April 1863.

was faced with the potential for the Northern troops on the west bank being only another well-disguised feint. A major Union offensive suddenly occurring elsewhere along his extensive defences had to be guarded against.

Grant decided that his ideal landing point would be at Grand Gulf, as the land above was impracticable, but first Porter had to overcome the batteries Bowen had designed. On the west side of the Mississippi River, Grant sent McClelland's division in the vanguard, followed by McPherson's division to rendezvous with Porter's fleet. Grant marched his army to Hard Times almost opposite Grand Gulf, where he now had the steamship capacity to board 10,000 troops.⁷⁶ On 29th April 1863, Bowen reported that six gunboats bombarded the defences for more than six hours, firing 3,000 projectiles.⁷⁷ Despite this huge bombardment, Bowen was relieved to report only three of his troops were killed, and that six transports loaded with Union troops had not been able to land.⁷⁸ The work at Grand Gulf had been undertaken very quickly when Bowen arrived in March 1863, after reviewing the poor state of his inherited defences.⁷⁹ Pemberton was fulsome in his praise to Bowen and his troops, reminding him to repair the damaged defences overnight and concluding that he had already recommended him for promotion to Major-General, a recommendation he would renew.⁸⁰ Bowen's pre-war skill as an architect had combined with his military skill to produce formidable defences.

Having failed at Grand Gulf, Grant and Porter decided to move further south down the west bank. They were made aware of a landing point at Bruinsburg, a little to

⁷⁶ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, p. 251.

⁷⁷ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part I, p. 575, Bowen to Pemberton, 29th April 1863.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 575, Bowen to Pemberton, 29th April 1863 (2 dispatches).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 249-331, Pemberton to Cooper, 2nd August 1863. This was Pemberton's Vicksburg Campaign Report and the reference to Bowen quickly constructing the Grand Gulf defences is on page 250.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 576, Pemberton to Bowen, 29th April 1863.

the north of their new intended landing point at Rodney.⁸¹ In order to ensure that Pemberton kept troops at Vicksburg, Grant arranged for Sherman to create a feint at Hayne's Bluff by ascending the Yazoo River.⁸² This was successful, as only Bowen's division of 3,000 was left in position to defend against Grant's landing. When the troops came ashore, Grant stated that, "when this was effected I felt a degree of relief scarcely ever equalled since."⁸³ He had a right to be relieved as it was over four months since his repulse in northern Mississippi and almost six months since the capture of Vicksburg became his target. Perseverance was a key quality in senior commanders, and Grant had not lost sight of his objective through many disheartening experiences. On the 30th April 1863, Grant managed to land 33,000 troops ashore thereby reaching the high ground to the south of Vicksburg. This was land in which armies could march and he could bring to bear the whole of the force at his disposal. At the outset, Pemberton had more men over a widely dispersed area, but Grant had his forces concentrated, with one major advantage: the Confederates did not know what he was going to do. His deceptions using Grierson's cavalry raid and Sherman's feint at Hayne's Bluff had kept Pemberton off-balance and ensured that the Confederate forces remained widely dispersed. Grant had demonstrated aggressive and creative leadership skills. Pemberton had remained close to Vicksburg, believing his great objective was to defend the city at all hazards, rather than to combat Grant's landing. This gave Grant the unopposed foothold he needed on dry land on the east bank and also the initiative in the coming manoeuvres.

⁸¹ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, p. 254.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

Conclusion

Davis did not expand his thinking from September 1862 to April 1863, as Grant was taking the offensive into northern Mississippi and developing his philosophy toward the capture of Vicksburg. During this period Johnston was rooted in Tennessee and did not contribute, beyond his rebuffed assessment of Pemberton's defences, whilst visiting with Davis in December 1862. Davis was unable to counter the changes in Union strategy and his direct orders to Pemberton reflected his lack of understanding of the way that Northern strategy was progressing. The President made a further four errors during this phase of the Vicksburg Campaign.

First, he did not resolve the northern Mississippi leadership problem between Van Dorn and Price before the battle at Iuka in September 1862. W.C. Davis (1991), noted that Price refused to co-operate with Van Dorn but did not investigate the reasons behind this decision.⁸⁴ Woodworth (1990) and Ballard (2004) were more perceptive, arguing that Davis relied on voluntary co-operation and was slow to realise Bragg had left behind a structure that was not working.⁸⁵ One of the main reasons for the Confederate defeat at Iuka was that there was no clear leadership decision between Price and Van Dorn. Whilst Van Dorn was seeking clarification on his leadership, Price was almost trapped by Grant. Davis had failed to provide orders so that Van Dorn and Price knew who was in command. To Davis, it was obvious that the ranking general was in command, but in the field this was not always such a clear-cut matter. Price's original orders came from Bragg, who as his commander and a full general outranked Van Dorn. Consequently

⁸⁴ William C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis, The man and his hour*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1996), pp. 470-1. This was a paperback edition of the 1991 original.

⁸⁵ Steven E. Woodworth, *Jefferson Davis and his generals, The failure of Confederate command in the West*, University Press of Kansas, (Lawrence, 1990), pp. 159-161 and Michael B. Ballard, *Vicksburg: The campaign that opened the Mississippi*, The University of North Carolina Press, (Chapel Hill, 2004), pp. 75-7.

Price initially would not accept Van Dorn's authority. Even Davis was wary of issuing orders to clarify the leadership in Mississippi, in case he inadvertently caused Bragg a problem. However, Davis could not leave matters of command to local resolution and he had to issue unequivocal orders. Price was lucky to escape Grant's trap with his army, whilst Davis stood by his principles, rather than providing clear leadership.

Second, after Corinth, in October 1862, Davis sustained Van Dorn in command, for reasons of personal friendship, against a public outcry over his competence. Ballard and Woodworth both gave an accurate analysis of the confusion surrounding Van Dorn's loss of command when Pemberton arrived from Richmond.⁸⁶ These historians recorded that Van Dorn was supposed to be in command in Western Tennessee, but after the Corinth defeat he fell back into Mississippi, where the command confusion then occurred. Corinth was a Confederate disaster and Bowen, who witnessed Van Dorn's weak leadership at first hand, was determined not to allow a repeat performance, so he pressed charges. Woodworth noted that Davis had a high opinion of Van Dorn, even after Corinth, but he stopped short of concluding that the President wanted to protect Van Dorn.⁸⁷ Ballard acknowledged the court of inquiry that acquitted Van Dorn, but did not elaborate on the proceedings.⁸⁸ Van Dorn had acted with a lower degree of competence than required of an army commander. Although the President had an unreasonably high opinion of Van Dorn's military capability, his actual performances justified removal from command and taken with the protection afforded by the acquittal at the court of inquiry, Davis was determined to have Van Dorn's reputation unsullied. In a blatant act of

⁸⁶ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, pp. 169-173 and Ballard, *Vicksburg*, pp. 86-88.

⁸⁷ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, p. 173.

⁸⁸ Ballard, *Vicksburg*, p. 87.

favouritism, the President sustained Van Dorn, a commander who had failed, by promoting Pemberton, who had not succeeded in his previous role in South Carolina.

Third, Davis unjustly promoted Pemberton to command in Mississippi. Cooper and W.C. Davis both incorrectly recorded that Pemberton was promoted to Lieutenant-General before arriving in Mississippi.⁸⁹ Cooper, W.C. Davis and Woodworth all agreed that Pemberton was promoted beyond the level that his capabilities and experience warranted.⁹⁰ Davis needed Pemberton to outrank Van Dorn, who was the most senior Major-General in the army and he could not be outranked unless Pemberton became a Lieutenant-General. Pemberton had been far from successful in South Carolina and did not warrant the rank of Major-General, but he had the benefit, as did Van Dorn, of Davis' unwavering support. Davis gave this unjustified promotion to Pemberton just to protect Van Dorn, who was an old friend from Mississippi.

Fourth, Davis failed to order Johnston to return Pemberton's cavalry to Mississippi, when it had mostly been transferred to Tennessee by January 1863. Woodworth recorded that Johnston had appropriated the cavalry, and that Davis did not order its return to Mississippi for fear of another confrontation with Johnston.⁹¹ Davis had been made aware by Pemberton of the limited amount of cavalry at his disposal. Johnston's decision to transfer Van Dorn's cavalry to Bragg prevented Pemberton from launching raids and also prevented him from policing the movements of Grant's forces. Johnston must bear the responsibility for persevering with this shortcoming that exposed Pemberton unnecessarily, but only Davis had the power to insist that the cavalry was returned. Overturning Johnston's decision was a matter of principle with Davis, who

⁸⁹ Cooper, *Jefferson Davis*, p. 441 and W. C. Davis, *Davis*, p. 474.

⁹⁰ Cooper, *Jefferson Davis*, p. 441, W. C. Davis, *Davis*, p. 474 and Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, p. 173.

⁹¹ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, pp. 204-7.

mostly would not issue peremptory orders to a general in the field, but in this case he would have been wholly justified, as Pemberton was at a significant disadvantage. Johnston's stated motive was to redress the balance between the two armies. The balance was not redressed, however, because the westward transfer was 8,000 infantry and the eastward transfer was 4,000 cavalry. This decision was little more than a flexing of muscles by Johnston as a response to Davis' earlier interference, and was not soundly based in military necessity. Davis should have seen through Johnston's obduracy and he should have ordered the cavalry to be returned to Mississippi. Whilst he did question the wisdom of Johnston's decision, he stopped short of ordering Johnston to comply. His grudging admission that Johnston could move the infantry back to Tennessee, in return for the cavalry, was as close as Davis would ever come to admitting he may have been wrong in the first place. Davis' principles had overridden the military situation, which had the effect that Pemberton had to fend for himself.

To show top-level command capability, Pemberton had to think for himself to combat Grant, rather than follow Davis', sometimes out-of-touch, directions from far-off Richmond. Pemberton chose to follow Davis' strategic direction, but as the commander facing Grant, he needed to develop from the way he had carried out his role in South Carolina. He needed to work with Johnston, rather than disobey orders, as he had previously demonstrated. He also needed to be open to new ideas for the defence of Vicksburg and to avoid the reaction he had evinced from Pickens in Charleston. Pemberton was out-thought by Grant and he did not learn from the information at his disposal. Grant's use of diversionary tactics, with Grierson's cavalry raid and Sherman's long-distance shelling of Vicksburg from the Yazoo River, divided Pemberton's troops in

April 1863. Pemberton made three mistakes during these early stages of the Vicksburg Campaign.

First, he did not understand the considerable terrain advantage he enjoyed at Chickasaw Bayou and in the Delta could have been used in the similar countryside on the Mississippi River west bank. Grabau (2000) described this terrain accurately, but in a narrative study and, in common with all other historians, he did not develop the argument that a substantial Confederate force on the west bank of the Mississippi River could have delayed Grant.⁹² The same tactics demonstrated in the Delta were used briefly by Bowen on the west bank, but he did not have enough troops. Bowen's warnings of a Union build-up on the west side of the Mississippi River went unheeded by Pemberton. The victories by Loring and Featherston provided valuable information that Pemberton needed to understand and that was useful to the defence on the west side of the Mississippi River. Pemberton did not stand on departmental principle when he learned of Bowen's troops crossing the river and so he had no reason for not trying to counter the forces on the west bank. His main concern was ensuring that these troops were not cut off. Bowen was forced to extricate his troops for want of reinforcements that could have been ordered to him from either Holmes or Pemberton, so he had to abandon the west bank to Grant at a crucial stage in the campaign.

Second, Pemberton persevered with his poor gun emplacements and a large garrison at Vicksburg, when Bowen's defences at Grand Gulf gave him a template for how the defence should be conducted. Ballard gave a thorough account of the Grand Gulf bombardment and recorded the quality of Bowen's defences, but he did not develop

⁹² Warren E. Grabau, *Ninety-Eight Days: A Geographer's View of the Vicksburg Campaign*, The University of Tennessee Press, (Knoxville, 2000), pp. 67-73.

the argument further in relation to the Vicksburg defences.⁹³ When Porter's gunboats bypassed the Vicksburg guns, on 16th April 1863, the damage was slight and the guns did little damage to transport ships when they ran the gauntlet six days later. This confirmed Johnston's assessment that the placing of the Confederate guns at Vicksburg was ineffective. Further south, Porter failed to break down the Grand Gulf defences on 29th April 1863. These defences were excellently designed and prepared by Bowen, who made good use of fortifications to prevent injury to his troops as well as to protect his limited number of guns. Whilst he could not prevent the gunboats passing, as at Vicksburg, he was able to prevent the Union troops from landing, whilst sustaining very small casualties. Bowen made Grant and Porter rethink and they decided to move further downriver, without the benefit of knowing their precise departure and landing points. Bowen's defence at Grand Gulf proved that small, well-designed defences could thwart gunboats and prevent large numbers of infantry from landing ashore. Bowen had shown true leadership qualities, during April 1863, but his ability was only partially recognised by Pemberton and by Davis. Pemberton had been found wanting as an artillery expert in failing to improve his gun positions at Vicksburg, so he had to have a much larger garrison than Bowen had needed to prevent a landing, with a corresponding reduction in the size of his field army.

Third, he did not give sufficient credence to Bowen's information of a massive build-up of Union forces on the west bank of the Mississippi River. Woodworth identified that Bowen had reported the Union build up.⁹⁴ Ballard gave a comprehensive account of the continuous nature of Bowen's warnings, but he did not develop the

⁹³ Ballard, *Vicksburg*, pp. 217-220.

⁹⁴ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, pp. 204-5.

reasons behind Pemberton's poor response.⁹⁵ Pemberton's thinking was hampered by the overriding instructions he had received from Davis to give priority to the defence of Vicksburg. Throughout this period Bowen was in constant contact with Pemberton, who made no significant move to support his subordinate, because of his preoccupation with Grierson and Sherman. Bowen forecasted a landing by Grant on the eastern shore, as soon as he was aware that Porter had bypassed the Vicksburg guns and he persisted over the next two weeks. He advised Pemberton to rush every available man to oppose Grant, but Pemberton could not envisage that a Union operation of the scale reported was underway. Pemberton was reluctant to send reinforcements from his Vicksburg fortifications, because he considered that Bowen was being subjected to a further diversionary attack and the real assault would come at the city.

In contrast, Grant rapidly developed his thinking. His strategy to capture Southern armies was thwarted by the failure of an elaborate pincer movement at Iuka and by Bowen's rearguard action after Corinth. An even more elaborate pincer movement failed in December 1862, during the Central Mississippi Campaign. This time Van Dorn demonstrated the importance of cavalry by destroying Grant's supply base, but Grant learnt much by subsisting from the Mississippi countryside for two weeks, until more supplies could be obtained. Sherman was repulsed because of the defenders' terrain advantage at Chickasaw Bayou and similar terrain advantages assisted the defenders in the Delta Region in the spring of 1863. Davis and Pemberton underestimated Grant's tenacity. Grant did not waver in his objective to eventually capture Vicksburg. The lesson that it was difficult to hold strategic points, by using large garrisons, was quickly learnt by Grant. He realised, in November 1862, that any Confederate cavalry incursion

⁹⁵ Ballard, *Vicksburg*, pp. 204-5.

northward into Tennessee could cut the railroad with ease. This contrasted with the Confederate policy that was to retain control of strategic points at all costs. Union policy was similar to that proposed by Johnston, because he realised that garrisoning places for their defence was not effective as a strategy by itself. Whilst Southern forces lay just to the south of the railroad it was always vulnerable, so Grant was correct to drive the Confederate forces southward into Mississippi in December 1862, reducing the prospect of enemy attacks on the railroad, reducing the need for garrisons at strategic points and securing his military advantage of interior lines.

During his visit to the West, Davis was cheered by the repulses of Grant and Sherman in late December 1862, but the President did not understand the tenacity that the northern commanders were applying to the opening of the Mississippi River Valley. Grant developed his thinking, by using his superior manpower, to use diversions that hid his main thrust or flanking movements that forced his enemy to retreat from prepared defensive positions. When he commenced the next phase of his campaign this shift in thinking was evident. The two diversionary actions Grant made in December 1862 made Pemberton believe that an attack could fall on any location and so he maintained the city garrison in Vicksburg, protecting the waterfront from a direct assault. Of the 49,000 troops at his disposal, the requirement to protect various points, including Port Hudson, meant that he decided that fewer than 20,000 were available to take the field; thus, Pemberton did not provide enough force to counter Grant's landing in Mississippi.

The dynamism needed to combat Grant's inspired leadership was not available in Mississippi, except perhaps in the capable hands of Bowen, who was insufficiently senior in the hierarchy to affect the situation. Grant was secure on the east bank of the

Mississippi River and no one in the Confederate leadership had any real idea of his plans. On 1st May 1863, only Bowen stood in Grant's way and he was heavily outnumbered as the Union troops came ashore, so he choose a good defensive position and waited, with little hope that enough reinforcements would reach him in time. Grant had mastered this stage of the Vicksburg Campaign and it would need frantic efforts by Pemberton and Johnston, acting with the support of Davis, to succeed against him.

Chapter five

Southern defence of the overland campaign

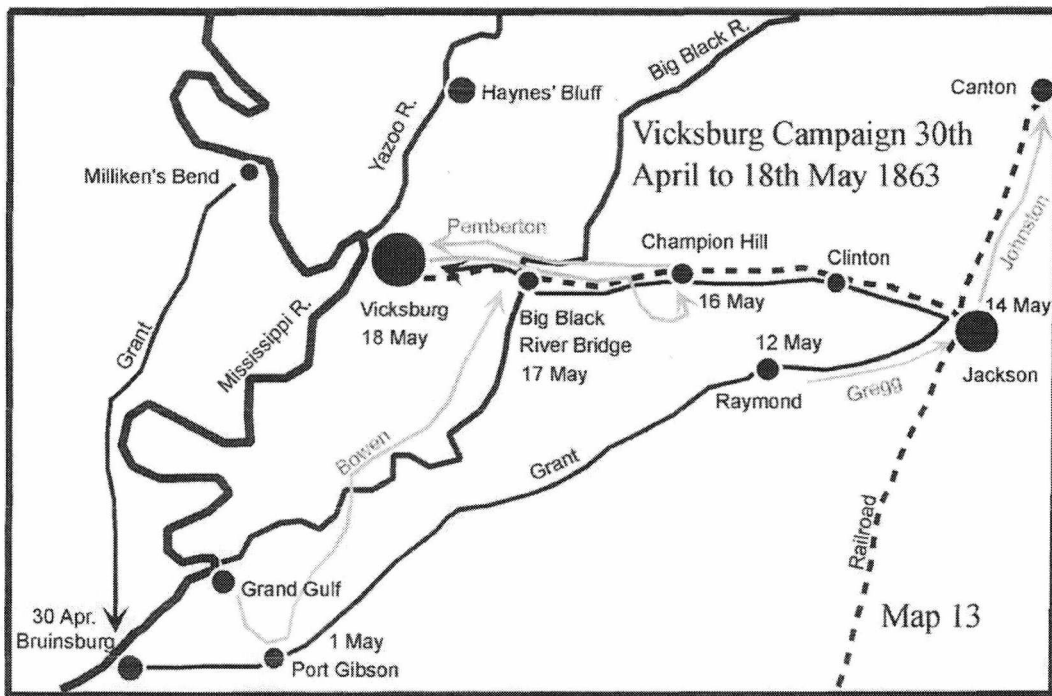
Introduction

On 1st May 1863, Confederate leadership in Mississippi was in disarray.

Lieutenant-General John C. Pemberton was tasked by President Jefferson Davis with holding the Mississippi River Valley between Vicksburg and Port Hudson. Apart from having large garrisons in both of these strongholds, Major-General William W. Loring's infantry division of 6,500 was chasing Colonel Benjamin Grierson's Union cavalry raid in the interior of Mississippi and Brigadier-General John S. Bowen's small force of 5,000 was grappling with the problem of how to contain Major-General Ulysses S. Grant's invasion force of 25,000 that had landed at Bruinsburg the previous day. Bowen insisted that the whole Union army was landing south of Grand Gulf, but Pemberton had to guard against the risk that the activity south of Vicksburg was another diversion. Pemberton believed that his primary duty was to defend the city of Vicksburg and this governed his actions.

Vicksburg was protected by a major river to the west with a steep approach to the bluffs from the bank, by a tributary river to the north that was protected by swampy lowlands before reaching the bluffs and by another tributary river, with a sharply undulating landscape to the south. Grant sought to gain the land to the east of Vicksburg, that was higher and dry, but this land also undulated in a series of narrow, steep hills, interspersed with deep, overgrown ravines, many with streams making the bottoms boggy that promoted extensive growth. The hill-tops were used for dirt roads and the larger elevated expanses for cultivation, but the terrain gave advantages to the defenders,

allowing concentrated fire along the narrow approaches. For Grant these natural, but dry, obstacles were easier to overcome than the wet terrain in the Delta region and on the west bank of the Mississippi River.



Davis and Pemberton believed that Grant's only goal was to capture Vicksburg. Johnston knew that Grant would target the capture of the Confederate army as well as the city. Without the capture of the Confederate army, a Union victory in the Mississippi River Valley would be incomplete. If Vicksburg was lost, but the army was saved, it could continue fighting and make more attempts to inhibit Union control of the Mississippi River Valley. The most important Union objective, therefore, was trapping the Confederate army in Vicksburg. Grant's movements were aimed at ensuring that Pemberton could not receive reinforcements and at ensuring that he was forced back into the Vicksburg defences.

Davis ordered Johnston to Mississippi, because he wanted him to give his personal attention to the deteriorating situation. Johnston had not been involved in Mississippi since December 1862 and was out of touch with Pemberton's defensive dispositions and he was unaware of Grant's progress. On arrival in Jackson on 13th May 1863, he was forced to retreat the next day, giving up the state capital. Grant destroyed the railroad at Jackson, making it more difficult for Johnston to assemble reinforcements rapidly. The expert positioning of Grant's army of 33,000 between Johnston's small force of 6,000 and Pemberton's field army of 20,000, meant that the Confederate forces could not be united. After Grant defeated Pemberton at Champion Hill on 16th May 1863, the Confederate landing positions along the Yazoo River at Haynes' Bluff and Snyder's Bluff were abandoned. This was an advantage to Grant, because he could now bring in supplies through a much shorter route and he did not have to place his reliance on the lengthy west bank route. Grant realised that he now had to commence siege operations and that his overland campaign was complete.

Grant succeeded during his overland campaign in keeping Pemberton's army in Vicksburg separated from Johnston's army situated near Jackson and Canton. Johnston was, therefore, prevented from taking overall command in Mississippi of an enlarged army. Grant won five battles at Port Gibson, Raymond, Jackson, Champion Hill and Big Black River Bridge in seventeen days and succeeded in preventing Confederate reinforcements from arriving with Pemberton. He had trapped the Confederate army as well as having every chance of capturing the city. Pemberton's field army was strengthened by the untested Vicksburg garrison troops, so as the siege commenced, Union assaults on the lines on 19th and 22nd May were repulsed. The series of

Confederate defeats, during this early phase of Grant's overland campaign caused friction between Pemberton and his division commanders.

Bowen and Loring lose faith in Pemberton

Bowen, as the commander south of Vicksburg, and Loring, as commander to the west of Vicksburg and the senior of the two, were about to be brought together by the aggressive Union movements after Grant's landing at Bruinsburg. Bowen stood immediately in Grant's way, whereas Loring was two days' march away, because of his earlier orders to defend against Grierson's cavalry raid. Bowen knew that there was a significant Union troop build up in Louisiana, but Pemberton was not easily convinced, having his mind focused on Grant's effective diversions. Major-General Carter L. Stevenson, the commander in Vicksburg, was undecided as to where the point of attack would be, but he knew from the Union build-up that something was about to happen. He had received intelligence from one of his senior officers, passing it on to Pemberton on 15th April 1863 that, "[S.D.] Lee ... has information that they will make an effort on our left up Bayou Pierre. ... Our force opposite Grand Gulf has checked them."¹ Pemberton did not heed this information about possible movements on the west side of the Mississippi River. Across in Louisiana, Colonel Francis M. Cockrell had been keeping Bowen informed of Grant's build-up of substantial numbers of troops since mid-April. Bowen predicted to Pemberton on 27th April that "all of the movements of the enemy ... indicate an intention on their part to march their army still lower down in Louisiana ... and cross to Rodney. ... I have examined myself ... a line of battle south of Port

¹ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, pp. 744, Stevenson to Pemberton, 15th April 1863.

Gibson.”² This information was very reliable, but Pemberton gave it insufficient credence. From the north of the city, Stevenson reported long-range shelling from Sherman’s corps, which helped to aid Pemberton’s indecision.³ Thus Bowen’s solid intelligence was only one piece of conflicting information Pemberton received in late April. The problem was that Grierson, in particular, and Sherman were both visible and real threats that had immediately to be countered. The threat through Louisiana was not easily quantifiable, but there was one significant and undeniable clue as to Grant’s intentions, Porter’s gunboats and transports had run the Vicksburg batteries and were visible in the Mississippi River in the second half of April 1863. These gunboats could aid neither Sherman nor Grierson, so the Confederate high command needed to work out their purpose. Both Stevenson and Bowen had alerted Pemberton to the possibility of Grant’s army crossing the Mississippi River south of Vicksburg.

On the west side of the Mississippi River, Cockrell had taken up a strong defensive position. Bowen withdrew him back to the east bank, because he could be outflanked and there were insufficient troops available at Grand Gulf to reinforce him. The assessment Bowen made of Cockrell’s position and his assessment of an alternative location, should a retreat be needed from the river, illustrated how a small number of troops could use the swampy and low-lying countryside to take up good defensive positions.⁴ Bowen, to his regret, withdrew the troops on 17th April, knowing that a larger force could have made the Union advance through Louisiana very difficult.

Pemberton began to realise that a threat at Grand Gulf was materialising, but Stevenson, on the spot in Vicksburg, was still concerned that the Union forces had

² *Ibid.*, pp. 792-3, Bowen to Memminger, 27th April 1863.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 806, Stevenson to Pemberton, 30th April 1863.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 754, Bowen to Memminger, 17th April 1863.

several different options at their disposal. Pemberton's own assessment was that Grand Gulf was there to defend the mouth of the Big Black River, rather than to prevent gunboats passing.⁵ Pemberton warned Stevenson to keep troops in readiness to march south.⁶ Stevenson stood his ground, stating that "There is no information in my possession which induces me to believe that the larger force is not above us. ... no reinforcements [should] be taken from Vicksburg for Grand Gulf until it is ascertained definitely that the main force of the enemy is opposed to it."⁷ Pemberton reiterated that he was only seeking to ensure that there was a communication route over the Big Black River and that troop movements in either direction were then possible.⁸ Neither Stevenson nor Pemberton at this late stage had committed their forces to the south of Vicksburg, leaving Bowen alone, despite his warnings.

By 28th April, Pemberton had started to have some idea of Grant's purpose, but still had not realised the extent of the Union build-up in Louisiana. He wired Johnston concerning the extensive Union forces at Hard Times.⁹ Bowen confirmed from Grand Gulf that there was an "an immense force opposite".¹⁰ Pemberton still did not seem to appreciate the meaning of the word 'immense', asking Bowen: "Have you enough force to hold your position? If not, give me the smallest additional force with which you can. My small cavalry force necessitates the use of infantry to protect important points."¹¹ This was a complete misunderstanding of the extent of the force facing Bowen and was a significant error. Pemberton had failed to appreciate that at that moment there was no other more important point in the Vicksburg area of operations. Whilst Grierson was

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 770, Pemberton to Bowen, 20th April 1863.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 780, Pemberton to Stevenson, 23rd April 1863.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 783, Stevenson to Memminger, 24th April 1863.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 788, J. C. Taylor [Pemberton's aide-de-camp] to Stevenson, 25th April 1863.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 797, Pemberton to Johnston, 28th April 1863.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 797, Bowen to Pemberton, 28th April 1863.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 797, Pemberton to Bowen, 28th April 1863.

roaming relatively unmolested in the interior of the state, Bowen was facing Grant's biggest effort to capture Vicksburg. Bowen knew it, but by using the word 'immense' rather than attempting to quantify the Union numbers, he had failed to impress on Pemberton the extent of the Union forces visible across the Mississippi River. Bowen had been asked an impossible question and he gave a short answer that was the only correct response: "I advise that every man and gun that can be spared from other points be sent here."¹² Pemberton merely ordered Stevenson to have 5,000 men on standby, ready to move when Bowen asked for them.¹³ Stevenson was reluctant to comply, requesting that the troops stay where they were, until a crossing in force was obvious.¹⁴ Bowen's assessment had been watered down by Pemberton, who did not give sufficient credence to the warnings. Bowen's assessment of the situation demanded decisive action. Bowen was under bombardment from the gunboats and could see the transport ships loaded with troops waiting to land, but he did not have Pemberton's full attention.

Grierson's cavalry raid was taking precedence with Pemberton and he did not give sufficient priority to the unfolding invasion. During Bowen's frantic warnings of an immense invasion force opposite Grand Gulf on 28th April and Pemberton's responses, there were interspersed two messages warning of Grierson's force numbering 1,500, with their potential destination being Natchez or Baton Rouge.¹⁵ Pemberton wanted cavalry to be instructed to catch Grierson, but he had no definite instructions for Bowen concerning the visible Union hordes in the river on the troop transports. The Grand Gulf defences stood up to the bombardment and Bowen had bought valuable time that could have been used to rush every available man to the south of Vicksburg, in a coordinated plan to

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 797, Bowen to Pemberton, 28th April 1863.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 800, Pemberton to Stevenson, 28th April 1863.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 800, Stevenson to Pemberton, 28th April 1863.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 797, Pemberton to Bowen, 28th April 1863.

defend against Grant's invasion. No such plan was forthcoming, but the Union forces, because of Bowen's success, were forced to move further south.

It took Grant a further two days to gain the east bank of the Mississippi River. Porter and Grant had to move further down river, after the failure of the bombardment of Grand Gulf. On 30th April, Bowen reported 3,000 enemy troops "at Bethel Church, 10 miles from Port Gibson, at 3 p. m., advancing. They are still landing at Bruinsburg."¹⁶ Grant was across the Mississippi and Bowen's small force, with no reinforcements near enough to assist, was all that stood in Grant's way. Pemberton had failed to react to his reports and so Bowen would bear the brunt of the Union onslaught. The battle of Port Gibson, fought on 1st May 1863, was a victory for the overwhelming Union forces. Pemberton reported that day to the President that, "Bowen says he is outnumbered trebly; ... Enemy can cross all his army from Hard Times to Bruinsburg, ... success in passing our batteries has completely changed character of defense."¹⁷ It had taken Pemberton two weeks to realise that having gunboats bypass the Vicksburg batteries was a significant development. Yet he had remained passive for these two weeks, failing to assess Grant's opportunities with the gunboats below Vicksburg. This was despite Bowen and the cautious Stevenson having put forward Grant's eventual actions as a possible Union plan. Bowen had the option of falling back, but his orders had been to hold his position, protecting Grand Gulf and the navigation of the Big Black River. Pemberton could still have ordered Bowen to retreat and to merge with Loring's force, having failed to send reinforcements to him in time. When Bowen lost the battle, Grand Gulf was lost anyway in the subsequent retreat. With odds heavily stacked against

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 806, Bowen to Pemberton, 30th April 1863.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 807, Pemberton to Davis, 1st May 1863.

Bowen, Pemberton should have been decisive and ordered the abandonment of Grand Gulf, so he could place the maximum force in Grant's way nearer to Vicksburg. He did not do this because he had underestimated the size of Grant's force, believing that Bowen's small army could thwart Grant and hold Grand Gulf. He also had orders from Davis to hold Vicksburg at all costs, so he did not want to venture too far from the city, in case there was an attack further north, where Sherman had disembarked. Grant had the luxury of fighting part of Pemberton's forces with his whole army, with his first contact presenting the Northern commander with that opportunity. For Bowen, who was not supported by Pemberton or ordered on an alternative course, this retreat meant that he would next meet with Loring, who, as the senior, would take command of their combined forces.

When Bowen and Loring met in early May 1863, they agreed to retreat behind the Big Black River. Pemberton was moved to comment to Loring, "If, therefore, when you reach the Bayou Pierre you believe the enemy can be driven back ... or, if you can hold your position you should remain."¹⁸ With the modest force at his disposal and Grant's troops vastly outnumbering him, a Union outflanking movement quickly decided Loring on the retreat. Pemberton still had not grasped the extent of the Union invasion to the south of Vicksburg and was unrealistic in his expectations, even though he expressed his utmost faith in Bowen's abilities to Loring.¹⁹ This confidence in Bowen had not resulted in a rapid response to his reports of extensive enemy activity, which were heavily discounted by Pemberton. The Southerners managed to destroy part of the bridge at

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 818, Pemberton to Loring, 2nd May 1863.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 818, Pemberton to Loring, 2nd May 1863.

Hankinson's Ferry, with the Union army close behind, checking their pursuit. The Confederate army took up defensive positions along the north of the Big Black River.

Arriving at Big Black River Bridge where the railway from Jackson crossed on its route to Vicksburg, the Confederates went into camp. Loring knew that the Union army was passing his front, moving toward Jackson, and believed its flank was vulnerable. He asked Pemberton whether the Confederates would be allowed to take the offensive, rather than sit in their defences waiting for Grant to arrive.²⁰ On 9th May 1863, Loring detailed an aggressive plan to bring the forces together, to attack the flanks and rear of the Union army. The whole Union army was marching north-eastward toward Jackson and Loring knew that it was vulnerable, adding that he believed that, "They don't expect anything of the kind; they think we are on the defensive."²¹ Pemberton was more cautious and Loring had to remain in the defences, losing further confidence in his superior. Loring understood that waiting in the defences to be attacked gave most of the advantages to Grant, who was able to move with limited harassment of his marching troops.

Loring had had previous concerns over Pemberton's leadership when manning Fort Pemberton at Greenwood in the Mississippi Delta. He now had further experience from the fruitless chasing of Grierson and the passive response to Grant's invasion of Mississippi. Lieutenant William A. Drennan, wrote to his wife: "There is quite a feud existing between Loring and Pemberton – so far as Loring is concerned I heard several expressions of disrespect at Greenwood – and also at Laniers and then at Edwards."²² The President's older brother, Joseph E. Davis, thought that Loring was antagonistic toward

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 849, Loring to Memminger, 9th May 1863.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 849, Loring to Memminger, 9th May 1863.

²² William A. Drennan papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Drennan to wife, 30th May 1863, quoted from within Timothy B. Smith, *Champion Hill, Decisive Battle for Vicksburg*, Savas Beatie, (New York, 2006), p.121."

Pemberton.²³ Bowen had been ignored by Pemberton, when giving accurate assessments of the Union intentions in northern Louisiana, had failed to receive reinforcements when requested and had witnessed his troops being defeated, before joining Loring. Both Loring and Bowen now had to abide by Pemberton's passive orders for defence, instead of adding the element of harassment that could have delayed the Union approach to Jackson, buying time for Johnston to receive reinforcements. Pemberton's leadership in this phase needed to be more aggressive and decisive, in order to compete with Grant.

Pemberton remains on the defensive

Pemberton had failed to confront Grant as he landed on the east bank of the Mississippi River. Consequently Grant's whole force in early May 1863, moved unchecked in the direction of Jackson, Mississippi. In his campaign report, Pemberton stated his belief that Vicksburg was the ultimate Union objective, but he did not know when Grant would change direction.²⁴ Pemberton was aware of his need to defend the city, a choice that limited his options, because he was "unfavourable to any advance which would separate me farther from Vicksburg, which was my base."²⁵ He also believed that he "fully estimated the importance of preventing an advance upon Jackson, if it could be done without sacrificing Vicksburg."²⁶ Bowen and Loring were in defensive positions along the Big Black River, and Pemberton was content to leave them there awaiting attack. When it became clear that Grant was advancing parallel to the Big Black River, with Jackson becoming the target, Pemberton made no attempt to thwart the

²³ *Davis papers, Vol. 9*, Joseph E. Davis to Davis, 3rd June 1863, p. 205.

²⁴ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part I, pp. 249-331, Pemberton to Cooper, 25th August 1863. This was Pemberton's Vicksburg Campaign report.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

Union advance, in accordance with his declared intentions to give priority to the defence of Vicksburg.

In Tennessee, Johnston was still recovering after his period of incapacity and illness that had put him out of active service since the beginning of April 1863.²⁷ His contribution to the Vicksburg Campaign, at this stage, was to write to Pemberton from Tullahoma on 1st May, advising that, “If Grant’s army lands on this side of the river, the safety of Mississippi depends on beating it. For that object you should unite your whole force.”²⁸ This sound advice, seconded by Bowen, came too late, as Port Gibson was already lost. Johnston tried to get Pemberton to take a different tack when he followed up his earlier advice the next day: “If Grant crosses, unite all your troops to beat him. Success will give back what was abandoned to win it.”²⁹ This advice was ignored and not interpreted as an order. Pemberton did not respond, failing to keep Johnston informed. Johnston was moved to write on 6th May, after hearing nothing from Pemberton for five days, since being told of the commencement of the battle of Port Gibson. He asked: “What is the result, and where is Grant’s army?”³⁰ Pemberton saw Johnston as interfering from afar, giving out advice that conflicted with that received from Davis. Most important, he did not view Johnston as his real commander. The President did not want Vicksburg exposed to capture and he advocated that the defence of the city was all-important. Events had moved on apace, yet Pemberton had failed to keep his immediate superior informed. The difference in command that was apparent in December 1862 had again reared its head, with Johnston taking a different approach to Pemberton and Davis.

²⁷ Johnston’s incapacity is covered in chapter three.

²⁸ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, p. 808, Johnston to Pemberton, 1st May 1863.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 815, Johnston to Pemberton, 2nd May 1863.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 838, Johnston to Pemberton, 6th May 1863.

Pemberton had a ready source of reinforcements for Vicksburg, within his own department at Port Hudson. Using these reinforcements was risky, because at any moment Union forces under Banks from New Orleans could appear. This fort on the Mississippi River, just north of Baton Rouge, kept the river northward open to Vicksburg and also kept open the mouth of the Red River, which was a supply route deep into Louisiana. Pemberton ordered, on 4th May 1863, that 5,000 reinforcements from Port Hudson must proceed to Vicksburg, under the leadership of the garrison commander, Major-General Franklin Gardner.³¹ Davis reiterated, three days later, that both Vicksburg and Port Hudson must be defended, because this would protect the ability to cross the Mississippi River along the two hundred mile stretch between the two places.³² Pemberton's response was to order Gardner and 2,000 troops back to Port Hudson.³³ Davis had not ordered this retrograde movement, but Pemberton thought better of his original order, deciding that leaving the garrison without its appointed commander was too risky. The remaining brigade of 3,000 under Brigadier-General Samuel B. Maxey was diverted to Jackson.

In Jackson, Brigadier-General John Gregg's small force of 3,000 was awaiting orders. Pemberton's assessment, by 7th May 1863, of Grant's north-eastward movement, was that his true destination was the Big Black River Bridge, where the Jackson to Vicksburg railway crossed the river.³⁴ Five days earlier Pemberton had warned Governor John J. Pettus, in Jackson, "to remove the State archives ... The enemy has or is crossing

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 828, Pemberton to Gardner, 4th May 1863.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 842, Davis to Pemberton, 7th May 1863.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 845, Pemberton to Gardner, 8th May 1863.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 843, Pemberton to Brigadier-General John Adams (commanding in Jackson), Pemberton to Bowen and J. C. Taylor, Aide-de-Camp, to Stevenson, 7th May 1863.

nearly his whole force. It is likely he will move on Jackson.”³⁵ Pemberton had changed his mind on the objective of Grant’s advance in the intervening five days, but he could not be sure of Grant’s intentions. If Grant was turning north toward the Big Black River Bridge, it would mean that his right flank would become vulnerable. Pemberton made the decision to order Gregg to explore Grant’s position, even though he only had 3,000 men at his disposal.³⁶ On 12th May 1863, Pemberton’s next order was laced with caution, in case his assessment of Grant’s intentions was incorrect: “Do not attack the enemy until he is engaged at ... Big Black Bridge. Be ready to fall on his rear or flank. ... Be careful that you do not lose your command.”³⁷ These orders proved impossible to carry out, because the terrain prevented assessments of the movements of large numbers of troops. Sharply undulating, heavily wooded countryside, with narrow approach roads along the hill tops, prevented accurate assessments of the enemy forces. The shortage of cavalry also contributed to the problem of assessing the opposition strength. Gregg blundered into McPherson’s whole corps, without realising the strength of the opposition he faced. Gregg reported to Pemberton, later on the same day as the order urging caution had been issued, that he was retreating after fighting a strong Union advance at Raymond.³⁸ He had been heavily outnumbered, but the terrain also gave defensive advantages and so he was able to hold up far superior forces, before being forced to retire into Jackson. Gregg had been unable, because he was short of cavalry and because of the terrain, to assess his opposition. The battle of Raymond was fought, from a Confederate perspective, by accident and gave Grant the second victory of his overland campaign.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 821, Pemberton to Pettus, 2nd May 1863.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 855-6, Pemberton to Gregg (two dispatches), 11th May 1863.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 862, Pemberton to Gregg, 12th May 1863.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 862, Gregg to Pemberton, 12th May 1863.

Only concentration of the Confederate forces could have stopped Grant's juggernaut. Johnston advocated concentration, but was issuing this advice from Tennessee, rather than issuing orders in Mississippi. Davis decided that Johnston should be in Mississippi and so he was ordered to travel westward to take an active part in the campaign to save Vicksburg. After Gregg had fought the battle of Raymond, he withdrew to Jackson, meeting Johnston there, who had just arrived by rail, on 13th May 1863. Davis now wanted Johnston to use his superior military capability to orchestrate the campaign to save Vicksburg.

Johnston's lack of action before the siege develops

Johnston had departed for Mississippi on 9th May 1863 because of the worsening situation, and was ordered by Seddon to "Proceed at once to Mississippi and take chief command of the forces, giving to those in the field, as far as practicable, the encouragement and benefit of your personal direction."³⁹ Johnston's reply was typical of his manner: "I shall go immediately, although unfit for field service."⁴⁰ Exasperated by Johnston, Davis had decided the only way that he could gain his co-operation for the defence of Vicksburg was to send him there. Davis explained that Grant was leading the main effort in the West and that Johnston "would be convinced of the fact if he repaired to the field in person."⁴¹ Davis considered that Johnston would change his focus away from giving priority to the situation in Tennessee. It was likely that once in Mississippi, he would begin to see Pemberton's real needs.

³⁹ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIII, Part II, pp. 825-6, Seddon to Johnston, 9th May 1863.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 826, Johnston to Seddon, 9th May 1863.

⁴¹ Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, Vol. 2, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1990), p. 339. This an unabridged republication of the 1881 original.

Johnston had not had any direct involvement in Mississippi since January 1863 and he had been content to remain in Tennessee. He proceeded westward, noting:

I had been prevented, by the orders of the Administration, from giving my personal attention to military affairs in Mississippi at any time since the 22d of January. On the contrary, those orders had required my presence in Tennessee during the whole of that period.⁴²

These were the comments of someone frustrated at the orders he had been given and who had continually protested that he could not be in two places that were so far apart. He had forgotten that Davis had suggested he visit Mississippi in February. He still refused to accept that his command responsibility extended to both Mississippi and Tennessee simultaneously, despite his orders being clear on the extent of his department and how his command was to be exercised. Orders and illness had kept him in Tennessee, but the Administration had not required him to remain there and the orders had certainly not prevented him from maintaining communications with Mississippi.

Johnston arrived in Jackson on 13th May 1863 and made an immediate assessment of the predicament in Mississippi. He met Gregg, who had just been defeated the previous day at the battle of Raymond, by Major-General James B. McPherson.⁴³ Johnston wired Richmond: “I arrived this evening, finding the enemy’s force between this place and General Pemberton, cutting off the communication. I am too late.”⁴⁴ Gregg had informed Johnston that he had learned from Colonel Wirt Adams, commander of the only cavalry in Mississippi, that Pemberton’s main force was at Edward’s Depot

⁴² Joseph E. Johnston, *Narrative of Military Operations During the Civil War*, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1990), p. 173, unabridged reprint of original published as *Narrative of military operations directed during the late War Between the States*, D. Appleton, (New York, 1874).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁴⁴ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part I, p. 215, Johnston to Seddon, 13th May 1863.

and that McPherson's corps had marched to Clinton.⁴⁵ Johnston again appeared to be defeated before he had started, believing that he was cut off from direct contact with Pemberton. The route from the direction of Mechanicsburg, north-east of Vicksburg, along the high ground between the Yazoo and Big Black rivers, was still open. By taking a circuitous route to the north-west of Jackson, Johnston, with his staff and a small escort, could have reached Pemberton. He did not know the full dispositions of the enemy forces, but reached the conclusion that he was too late to assist on the basis of flimsy evidence.

Johnston remained in Jackson on 13th and 14th May 1863 awaiting reinforcements, rather than immediately moving to take command in the field. Pemberton had sent a telegram the previous day to Davis confirming his own dispositions, noting that the enemy was moving toward him and expecting that Edward's Depot was to be the location of the battle.⁴⁶ Johnston was aware from Gregg that Grant's forces were approaching from the south-west and he could have travelled to reach Pemberton, had he made haste. Johnston stayed in Jackson, awaiting imminent reinforcements. Maxey's brigade from Port Hudson and Brigadier-General States Rights Gist's brigade from Beauregard in South Carolina were on their way. The urgency required of the situation was not forthcoming from Johnston, who could easily have left orders for the reinforcements to continue in his wake. Davis confirmed this after the war: "a confusion with consequent disaster resulted, which might have been avoided had he, with or without his reënforcements, proceeded to Pemberton's headquarters in the field."⁴⁷ The enemy

⁴⁵ Johnston, *Narrative*, pp. 175-6.

⁴⁶ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, p. 859, Pemberton to Davis, 12th May 1863.

⁴⁷ Jefferson Davis, *Confederate Government*, Vol. 2, p. 340.

already had momentum and a cautious approach in the divided Confederate high command guaranteed that the initiative could not be regained.

Whilst Johnston remained stationary, he expected Pemberton to become aggressive and immediately mobile. He ordered him to try to get to the rear of McPherson's corps at Clinton, assuming that this corps was detached from the rest of Grant's forces and was capable of being defeated.⁴⁸ This was a gamble, taken without knowledge of the rest of the enemy's dispositions. Johnston offered to co-operate with Pemberton, stressing that time was all-important.⁴⁹ The next morning news arrived that Sherman's corps was also marching toward Jackson, but on another road, making an approach from the west.⁵⁰ Johnston sent forward troops under Gregg to act as a delaying rearguard and abandoned Jackson. He retreated his small army in the direction of Canton, giving Grant his third victory in his overland campaign. Johnston alerted Maxey and Gist to the danger, who were approaching from the east, which had the effect of delaying the arrival of their reinforcements with his army.⁵¹ Canton was north of Jackson and further away from Pemberton's forces, at Edward's Depot. Johnston had the option of retreating north-westward to make joining with Pemberton easier. However, moving northward in the direction of Canton made it easier for Maxey's and Gist's brigades to meet eventually with the rest of Johnston's army, eliminating any possibility of joining with Pemberton's army. The more pressing need was to unite with Pemberton or at the very least to get his army across the Big Black River, using the route along the high ground between the Yazoo River and Big Black River to the north-east of Vicksburg. Occupying it would have kept an exit route from Vicksburg open and prevented Grant

⁴⁸ Johnston, *Narrative*, p. 176.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

from obtaining supplies from the Yazoo River, forcing him to maintain his extraordinarily long supply chain. Johnston chose to retreat to safety away from Grant, rather than make an aggressive attempt to link with Pemberton. As a result Grant's whole army was between Johnston's and Pemberton's armies, with neither strong enough to make an attack.

Johnston sent a telegram timed at 7 p.m. on 16th May, unaware that the Battle of Champion Hill had already taken place during the day. In it he stressed that "It is a matter of great anxiety to me to add this little force to your army, but the enemy being exactly between us, and consultation by correspondence so slow, it is difficult to arrange a meeting."⁵² It was also difficult to arrange a joining of forces whilst not actually moving, as Johnston acknowledged, whilst giving his reason that intelligence from Pemberton was needed.⁵³ Johnston did not want to risk having his own force trapped in Vicksburg and whilst he was suggesting his objective was the merging of the two forces, his actions took the opposite course. He knew that Pemberton would insist on keeping his army between Grant and Vicksburg, this being the last place Johnston wanted to be caught. Pemberton had ventured across the Big Black River Bridge to Edward's Depot on the Jackson to Vicksburg railroad. He had left too many troops behind in Vicksburg, to defend against a now non-existent threat. He now faced Grant with fewer troops than he should have had in the field and without the benefit of Johnston's small force and Johnston's leadership.

Davis was anxious that Johnston took the field, so the Confederate forces had the benefit of his leadership. Johnston had, in the absence of any information, commenced a

⁵² *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, p. 884, Johnston to Pemberton, 16th May 1863.

⁵³ Johnston, *Narrative*, p. 179.

movement toward Pemberton on 17th May, but that evening, he received word of Pemberton's retreat. Johnston then sent the order to evacuate Vicksburg. He lamented in relation to Pemberton's army, "I should have... taken command..., if at any time after my arrival in Jackson I had been strong enough to attempt such a ride."⁵⁴ Johnston was still suffering from poor health from his wounding at Seven Pines and he did not agree with the scope of his command responsibility. It is difficult to establish which had the greater effect, but it was convenient to blame ill health after the war for his failure to act. The pre-eminent reason was not particularly relevant, as both contributed. Johnston's frame of mind was not right, and this raised the question as to why he was in command in the first place. Davis wrote that the reason for Johnston's appointment was "to avail ourselves of the public confidence felt in his military capacity."⁵⁵ Davis' point was laced with sarcasm and his own lack of confidence. Johnston had achieved very little between arriving in Jackson on 13th May and the Vicksburg defences being manned on 18th May. He had issued advisory orders from Tennessee, without being sufficiently aware of the troop movements on either side, with the result that Pemberton could not comply with his advice.

Davis had insisted that Vicksburg should be defended; a requirement that was interpreted by Pemberton as meaning that he should remain in the city or its vicinity. Once arriving in Jackson and after retreating to Canton, Johnston, although now located nearer to Vicksburg, could still only issue orders, without being sufficiently aware of the troop movements on either side. Johnston's change of base had little effect, for this reason. However, there was clear thinking behind his orders that accorded with sound

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁵⁵ Jefferson Davis, *Confederate Government*, Vol. 2, p. 339.

military principles. Allowing an enemy to concentrate its army and attack segregated elements of the defending army was what Johnston sought to avoid. A more enlightened recipient would have seen the military value behind these orders and been more strenuous in trying to comply. This criticism was also relevant to Johnston, as he ignored his own advice, making little attempt to move his own force toward Pemberton. Pemberton had been passive in the handling of his forces, prior to Johnston's arrival on the scene. He had directed operations from his desk, first in Jackson and then in Vicksburg, as the campaign intensified. He had now taken command of his army at Edward's Depot, where his leadership was to be tested in the field: a place where his experience had, so far in the Civil War, been limited. Pemberton decided that he would reinforce the Big Black River dispositions with more troops from Vicksburg and wait for Grant to attack.

Pemberton's field leadership and the collapse in morale

The Confederate army along the north bank of the Big Black River now comprised of three divisions under Bowen and Loring, with Stevenson having now joined from Vicksburg, totalling 31,000 soldiers.⁵⁶ Grant had three corps under McClelland, Sherman and McPherson, totalling 50,000 men in his army after they had all crossed the Mississippi River.⁵⁷ Orders for the dispositions of the Confederate army were dispatched from Vicksburg, once Pemberton changed his headquarters from Jackson on 1st May, until taking command in the field himself on 13th May 1863 at the Big Black River Bridge.

⁵⁶ Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign*, Volume II, Morningside House Inc., (Dayton, 1986), p. 453. Bearss gave the Confederate strength along the Big Black River at 31,000, bolstered by some of the Vicksburg garrison, who were not part of the mobile field army.

⁵⁷ Timothy B. Smith, *Champion Hill: Decisive Battle for Vicksburg*, Savas Beatie, (New York, 2006). Smith has given the initial Union division strengths as they crossed the Mississippi River at the end of April and beginning of May 1862. McClelland's division strength was more than 17,000, p. 35, McPherson's division strength was almost 16,000, p.36 and Sherman's division strength was just short of 17,000, p.38.

Watching from the north bank of the Big Black River on 4th May, Loring could see Union troops, with pontoons, ready to force a crossing at Hankinson's Ferry. Pemberton ordered the division to Edward's Depot and with the enemy in his front, Loring responded: "Your reiterated order to proceed with dispatch to Edwards Depot makes it my duty to comply with it, though I may be forced, whether I wish it or not, to give this enemy battle here."⁵⁸ Pemberton, by issuing peremptory orders, was leaving his field commander little latitude to adapt to the immediate situation he was facing. Loring's response was tinged with sarcasm. Pemberton added to the previous order by insisting on Loring marching his division to Lanier's, ending the dispatch: "Come here and see me."⁵⁹ Loring was not impressed. A few days later Loring, having ignored the first summons, received a further summons that also summoned Stevenson. This came from a member of Pemberton's staff, revealing that his commander had complained that, "he finds great difficulty in having his views comprehended, and wishes to see you at once personally."⁶⁰ Loring was not enthusiastic about attending a conference with Pemberton, because of the friction between them.

The editors of the Jackson newspaper the *Mississippian* suggested, on 8th May 1863, that, "three-fourths of the people in army and out," did not support Pemberton and that he ought to be replaced.⁶¹ Davis returned the letter to the editors with an endorsement added: "there is no remedy. Time does not permit the change you propose, ... The distrust surprises me and is surely unjust."⁶² This was after the loss of the battle at Port Gibson, but before the defeats at Raymond, Jackson, Champion Hill and Big

⁵⁸ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, pp. 828-9, Loring to Pemberton, 4th May 1863.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 840, Pemberton to Loring, 6th May 1863.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 852, F. M. Stafford, Acting Assistant Adjutant-General (to Pemberton) to Loring and Stevenson, 10th May 1863.

⁶¹ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. LII, Part II, pp. 468-9, Fleet T. Cooper and A. N. Kimball to Davis, 8th May 1863.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 468-9, Fleet T. Cooper and A. N. Kimball to Davis with returned endorsement from Davis, 8th May 1863.

Black River Bridge. The editors were not criticising Pemberton in their newspaper and were trying to support the Confederate government. Davis did not give credence to the contents, but the editors had nothing to gain by writing to the President. Davis believed that Pemberton was settling into his new role and he, therefore, discounted the advice he had received.

Johnston had the opposite opinion. He knew that Pemberton was ignoring his orders, first, to abandon Vicksburg, second, to join his forces with Johnston's small army of 6,000, and third, to concentrate all of his forces to beat Grant.⁶³ Consequently, Pemberton was outnumbered and out-manoeuvred by Grant. This was the primary reason for the loss of morale, but it commenced with poor decision-making as Grant came ashore south of Vicksburg and was reduced further as the solely defensive positions were adopted.

At the Big Black River Bridge, Bowen was also questioning the wisdom of orders received on 11th May 1863. He had been instructed to cover Bachelor's Ferry, a move that would thin the manning of his already extensive and newly-completed fortifications.⁶⁴ He reported that, "If possible, I would prefer that the troops who have thrown up these trenches with their own hands ... be allowed to fight in them. Please send further instructions to-night."⁶⁵ This was a plea for Pemberton to reconsider his orders. Bowen reconnoitred the position himself, reporting back the next day that there was no crossing of the river possible at the Batchelor plantation and that this corresponded with earlier scouting information he had received.⁶⁶ The order was shown to have been of questionable military value, referring to impenetrable countryside that

⁶³ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, p. 882, Johnston to Pemberton, 15th May 1863.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 854-5, Bowen to Lieutenant J. C. Taylor, Aide-de-Camp, 11th May 1863.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 854-5, Bowen to Lieutenant J. C. Taylor, Aide-de-camp, 11th May 1863.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.861, Bowen to Memminger, 12th May 1863.

was found to be some three miles distant from Bowen's situation. Any good military commander would have sent out scouts to ensure that he knew whether he could be outflanked. Bowen had earlier already been more than aware at Bayou Pierre that he was being outflanked and it was an affront to a commander in the field to assume that he would not be aware of the potential for being outflanked. Bowen, who was unimpressed, following the earlier support failure at Port Gibson, was even more unimpressed with Pemberton. The next day Pemberton arrived at the Big Black River Bridge to take personal command of the forces in the field.

Pemberton, on arrival on 14th May, received orders to move his army to Clinton, to merge with Johnston's force. Pemberton wrote back the next morning, when he received this dispatch, confirming that he was moving with 16,000 men and protesting, "I do not think you fully comprehend the position that Vicksburg will be left in, but I comply at once with your order."⁶⁷ Pemberton responded by calling a council of war of all of his generals and the majority expressed support for Johnston's idea to attempt to concentrate all of the forces against Grant. Loring and Stevenson both dissented and their minority view persuaded Pemberton to a different course of action. Pemberton decided to move southward, in the direction of Dillon's Plantation, to attempt to cut Grant's communications. Pemberton notified Johnston later the same day, not knowing that Johnston had already moved northward from Jackson to Canton.⁶⁸ Johnston maintained that he chose this route because it was the best available and because it prevented supplies from reaching Grant.⁶⁹ This was little more than an excuse and Johnston was unable to offer a more plausible explanation. Thus the attempted union of

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 877, Pemberton to Johnston, 14th May 1863.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 876, Pemberton to Johnston, 14th May 1863.

⁶⁹ Johnston, *Narrative*, pp. 177-8.

the two forces was now impossible, as they were moving away from each other in completely opposite directions.

By disobeying Johnston's earlier order, Pemberton's conference decision was now in concurrence with a dispatch from Johnston sent on 14th May that suggested an alternative course of action to Pemberton against Grant by asking, "Can he supply himself from the Mississippi? Can you not cut him off from it, and, above all, should he be compelled to fall back for want of supplies, beat him?"⁷⁰ Pemberton was committed to this course already and rapidly moving away from Johnston, which spelt disaster.

The next day, 15th May 1863, Johnston immediately ordered Pemberton to about turn. This led to further confusion in the Vicksburg army when Johnston stated:

Our being compelled to leave Jackson makes your plan impracticable. The only mode by which we can unite is by your moving directly to Clinton, informing me, that we may move to that point with about 6,000. I have no means of estimating the enemy's force at Jackson. The principal officers here differ very widely.⁷¹

Johnston was ordering Pemberton from afar, to Clinton, without any idea of the whereabouts of Grant's forces and without an understanding of the difficulties being faced. The order was acknowledged, "Your letter, written on the road to Canton, was received this morning at 6.30. It found this army on the middle road to Raymond. The order of countermarch has been issued."⁷² This decision showed a breakdown in cohesion between Johnston and Pemberton that was to cause a disastrous result.

Pemberton, against his own preference, had backed the minority decision when meeting his generals, in contravention of Johnston's first order; but the second order caused him to reconsider his first decision, leading to a change of mind. Pemberton was caught in

⁷⁰ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, pp. 877-8, Johnston to Pemberton, 14th May 1863.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 882, Johnston to Pemberton, 15th May 1863.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 884, Pemberton to Johnston, 16th May 1863.

the act of turning around by substantial Union forces, with part of his army separated from the rest by the baggage trains. The wagons were transformed, from bringing up the rear, into becoming a reluctant vanguard. Pemberton's initial error in moving south was made worse by Johnston's order to turn back. The close proximity of the enemy was unknown to either general, who had been subsisting on scraps of information from recent sightings of parts of the rapidly deploying Federal forces.

The battle of Champion Hill took place on 16th May 1863. Pemberton had an army of 24,000 involved, whereas Grant outnumbered him by at least 5,000.⁷³ The crucial moment in the battle came when Stevenson's division, on the left, which had borne the brunt of the Union attacks, began to crumble. Bowen in the centre, and Loring on the right, were both outnumbered by relatively passive forces. Pemberton ordered both Bowen and Loring to send reinforcements to Stevenson. Bowen took some persuading to respond, but he eventually did so, Pemberton reporting that this division "charged the enemy, and for the time turned the tide of battle in our favor, again displaying the heroic courage which this veteran division has made conspicuous on so many stricken fields."⁷⁴ What was needed was a further follow-up attack from Loring's reinforcements that never came. Somehow Loring managed to take the wrong road after repeated requests to move. In the aftermath of the battle, his division disappeared from the field, even though the bridge over the retreat route over Baker's Creek, toward Big Black River Bridge, had been held by Bowen's division for a sufficient amount of time for Loring to arrive. By a long circuitous march, Loring and his troops eventually reached Jackson, joining Johnston in the Army of Relief. Loring had behaved badly during the battle, with his

⁷³ T. B. Smith, *Champion Hill*. Smith gave Pemberton's strength at 24,000 and Grant's strength at 29,000 engaged in the battle of Champion Hill, p. 372, but estimated Grant had 32,000 men available, p. 115.

⁷⁴ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part I, pp. 249-331, Pemberton to Cooper, 25th August 1863. This was Pemberton's Vicksburg Campaign report and this quotation is from page 264.

lack of confidence in Pemberton being one of the main contributory factors.

Nevertheless, Loring should have taken a more active part in the battle. Because of the large Union force present, it is doubtful if a movement by part of his division would have made any difference to the outcome of the battle. However, he should have obeyed orders and the absence of his division at Big Black River Bridge contributed to the rout the next day.

The battle at Champion Hill was a decisive victory for the Union forces under General Grant, giving him his fourth victory in the overland campaign. Pemberton reported to Johnston that he had had to withdraw about 5 p.m. after being heavily pressed all day.⁷⁵ He also noted that the forces were then at the Big Black Bridge, under constant cannonading, and: “There are so many points by which I can be flanked that I fear I shall be compelled to withdraw. If so, the position at Snyder’s Mill will also be untenable.”⁷⁶ Pemberton then had to abandon the Big Black River Bridge, giving Grant his fifth victory of the overland campaign. This was after some poor performances from his troops, demoralised after the fiasco the previous day. Johnston’s response was terse,

If Haynes’ Bluff is untenable, Vicksburg is of no value, and cannot be held. If, therefore, you are invested in Vicksburg, you must ultimately surrender. Under such circumstances, instead of losing both troops and place, we must, if possible, save the troops. If it is not too late, evacuate Vicksburg and its dependencies, and march to the northeast.⁷⁷

Pemberton informed Johnston that:

On receipt of your communication, I immediately assembled a council of war of the general officers of this command, and, having laid your instructions before them, asked the free expression of their opinions as to the practicability of carrying them out. The opinion was unanimously expressed that it was impossible

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 217-8, Pemberton to Johnston, 17th May 1863.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 217-8, Pemberton to Johnston, 17th May 1863.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 888, Johnston to Pemberton, 17th May 1863.

to withdraw the army from this position with such *morale* and material as to be of further service to the Confederacy.⁷⁸

So Pemberton disobeyed Johnston, but not the higher authority of President Davis, whose views on holding Vicksburg he well understood. Davis stated that Pemberton was aware of “the importance... the administration attached to the holding of Vicksburg, he relied for the coöperation of a relieving army to break any investment which might be made.”⁷⁹ Johnston’s prediction of the fate of Pemberton’s army if it was trapped in Vicksburg was fast becoming a reality, now that his orders had been disobeyed. It was Johnston’s responsibility to arrange a relieving army and it was Davis’ responsibility to send reinforcements from elsewhere in the Confederacy.

After the hasty withdrawal at Big Black River Bridge, Pemberton’s forces reunited with those already in Vicksburg, manning the defences late on 17th May. The defeated Confederate troops entering the city were a shocking sight. Diarist Emma Balfour, who occupied the house next door to Pemberton’s Vicksburg headquarters, observed:

I hope never to witness again such a scene as the return of our routed army! From twelve o’clock until late in the night the streets and roads were jammed with wagons, cannons, horses, mules, stock, sheep, everything you might imagine that appertains to an army – being brought hurriedly within the intrenchment. Nothing like order prevailed, of course, as divisions, brigades and regiments were broken and separated.⁸⁰

This picture of the chaos of the army as it arrived in Vicksburg indicated the scale of the defeat and precipitate retreat. It also showed that there was a complete lack of organisation. Colonel Winchester Hall, a member of the garrison, confirmed this, saying,

⁷⁸ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, pp. 889-890, Pemberton to Johnston, 18th May 1863.

⁷⁹ Jefferson Davis, *Confederate Government Vol. 2*, p. 344.

⁸⁰ Emma Balfour, *Diary of the Vicksburg Siege*, Philip C. Weinberger, (1983), entry for 17th May 1863.

“I saw at once it was our army in retreat, and in utter confusion – a long line of stragglers.”⁸¹ This lack of organisation was blamed on the leadership. Emma Balfour was moved to comment, although with expressions of extreme reluctance:

I knew from all I saw and heard that it was want of confidence in the General commanding that was the cause of our disaster. I cannot write more – but oh! there will be a fearful reckoning somewhere. This has been brooding, growing, and many fears have been felt for the result. Gen. Pemberton has not the confidence of the officers, people or men, judging from all I am compelled to see and hear!⁸²

The events involving Bowen and Loring at Champion Hill and the crushing defeat at Big Black River Bridge were blamed on Pemberton by the rank and file, as they dejectedly trudged into Vicksburg. Mary Webster Loughborough, wife of a Confederate Major, was trapped in Vicksburg, writing that she had heard the comments from the beaten troops: “It’s all Pem’s fault”, and “It is all General Pemberton’s fault.”⁸³ Others joined the clamour, with Mississippi lawyers Alexander M. Paxton and Jehu A. Orr writing to Davis on consecutive days, as the siege commenced, recommending Pemberton’s replacement.⁸⁴ Davis confirmed to Lee that “all the accounts we have of Pemberton’s conduct fully sustain the good opinion heretofore entertained of him.”⁸⁵ At this stage, the clamour for Pemberton’s removal had not reached Davis. However, eight months after Pemberton’s appointment to command in Mississippi, Davis and Lee were still corresponding, which indicated that, in Richmond, there was some concern over Pemberton’s capability. The belief in Pemberton had evaporated in the field army, but

⁸¹ Winchester Hall, *History of the 26th Louisiana Infantry Regiment*, privately printed, 1890, quoted on p. 22 within, A. A. Hoehling, *Vicksburg, 47 Days of Siege*, Stackpole Books, (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, 1996).

⁸² Balfour, *Diary*, entry for 17th May 1863.

⁸³ Mary Webster Loughborough, *My Cave Life in Vicksburg*, D. Appleton & Co., (New York, 1864), pp. 43-4.

⁸⁴ *Davis papers, Vol. 8*, p. 186, Paxton to Davis, 21st May 1863 and p. 187, Orr to Davis, 22nd May 1863.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Davis to Lee 31st May 1863, pp. 201-3.

the troops were marching into prepared fortifications and meeting with the garrison troops that had not been similarly tested.

Because the position at Haynes' Bluff was now outflanked, the troops there were ordered to abandon their fortifications, to strengthen the Vicksburg garrison. Brigadier-General Louis Hébert, arriving in Vicksburg with his troops during the night of 17th and 18th May, observed that the retreating troops of the field army were demoralised.⁸⁶ The Confederate troops manning the defences were dismayed at the condition of the entrenchments and fortifications. Colonel Hall provided an illustration of inadequate rifle pits and exposed ground that needed feverish work to complete.⁸⁷ Colonel Bevier had a similar opinion, noting “hastily and irregularly constructed entrenchments ... so badly engineered that in some places an enfilading fire would sweep us for regiments in length.”⁸⁸ Hébert, on his arrival from Haynes' Bluff, provided the most vivid picture of the condition of the defences: “in spite of the previously vaunted report that Vicksburg had been surrounded by fortifications that were impregnable, we found a very feeble line, with gaps at intervals, and very weakly thrown up, with little redoubts here and there.”⁸⁹ Grant knew that Confederate morale was at an all-time low and he believed that an immediate assault on the lines would succeed, once he had sufficient forces in place. Colonel Hall had other ideas, expressing the different opinion held by members of the garrison who had not been defeated: “Everyone I met had the gloomiest forebodings. I felt some of the ‘stern joy’ that warriors feel. My spirits rose as much above their normal

⁸⁶ Louis Hébert, unpublished autobiography written in 1894, # 3047-2, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, p. 12.

⁸⁷ Hall, 26th *Louisiana*, quoted on p. 25 within, Hoehling, *Vicksburg*.

⁸⁸ R. S. Bevier, *History of the First and Second Missouri Brigades 1861-1865*, Bryan, Brand and Company, St. Louis, 1879, quoted on p. 25 within, A. A. Hoehling, *Vicksburg, 47 Days of Siege*, Stackpole Books, (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, 1996).

⁸⁹ Hébert, unpublished autobiography, p. 13.

condition as others were depressed.”⁹⁰ Mary Loughborough witnessed the contrast between the cheery garrison troops, on their way to the defences, and the dejected field army troops that they passed in the Vicksburg streets on 18th May 1863.⁹¹ Although the collapse in morale in the Confederate field army was complete, many of its troops were embarrassed by their situation and had to witness the high morale of the garrison troops. Grant was not expecting them to hold out long after the demoralising defeats they had just suffered. The Union forces invested the city on 18th May 1863. But Grant had miscalculated, because the sizeable Vicksburg garrison had not been defeated and the existing defences gave some protection, with the time being well used to improve them considerably, as the Union forces took up their attacking positions.

An all-out Union assault was ordered on 19th May 1863. Grant was certain that the Confederate defences would collapse, after his recent experiences.⁹² The assaults failed badly, mainly because of the terrain and because his troops were forced to concentrate along avenues of approach that gave easy targets to the defenders, protected behind their rapidly improved fortifications. The contrast between the low morale of the demoralised troops entering Vicksburg and the high morale of the garrison troops produced a mix that surprised Grant, with a result not anticipated by him. This victory for the Confederate troops boosted the morale of the defenders, who now realised that they could hold out against the most determined of attacks. Grant was left to think again, but he was reluctant to allow a lengthy siege, so he decided to attack again and soon.

Grant was able to get more troops into attacking positions and he had a chance to survey the Confederate positions in order to consider a better plan of attack. He decided

⁹⁰ Hall, *26th Louisiana*, quoted on p. 22 within, A. A. Hoehling, *Vicksburg*.

⁹¹ Loughborough, *Cave Life*, pp. 46-7.

⁹² Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, p. 281.

to soften the Confederates before the assaults on 22nd May with a more extensive artillery bombardment, having had time, in the intervening three days, to bring up and emplace many guns. This assault caused a further repulse, but Grant thought the effort worth making because, if successful, it would have avoided the need to draw reinforcements from other areas, where they were badly needed.⁹³ These additional preparations were met by additional Confederate preparations, fortified by belief and the consequent boost to morale, from the previous victory. The turnaround in Confederate morale was not expected, given the disasters in the field army. Grant was forced to abandon plans for assaults that had yielded nothing except casualties, so siege operations settled down in earnest. Grant was able to do this knowing he had kept Johnston and his reinforcements at bay.

Confederate failure to unite their armies in Mississippi

In mid-May 1863, Grant and Sherman wanted to ensure that the Confederate forces in Mississippi were prevented from joining into one large army and they were wary of Johnston as an adversary. Whilst Davis had reservations concerning Johnston's ability, this was not shared by his opponents. Sherman wrote to Grant urging caution.⁹⁴ Sherman took extreme care in entrenching his forces, facing away from Vicksburg toward Johnston's Army of Relief.⁹⁵ Sherman recalled that "the ability of General Johnston was recognized, and General Grant told me that he was about the only general

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

⁹⁴ William T. Sherman, *Memoirs*, Penguin Books, (New York, 2000), pp. 291-2, originally published by D. Appleton, (New York, 1875) and then a second edition published in 1876. The first edition caused many protests and Sherman modified his tone and added information to the second edition, which has been reproduced by Penguin with an added introduction by Michael Fellman, Professor of History at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

on that side whom he feared.”⁹⁶ Grant had known Johnston at West Point and during the Mexican War. He was well aware of Johnston’s intellect, his bravery and his capacity to command. Grant took a considerable gamble crossing the Mississippi River, knowing his supply line would not be able to provide sufficient quantities to subsist his army. The prize of Vicksburg was so important that the attempt had to be made, but care was taken in the Union dispositions to ensure that Johnston would find it difficult to intervene.

Grant needed to shorten his lines of communication and the landing points along the Yazoo River to the north-east of Vicksburg, at Haynes’ Bluff and Snyder’s Bluff, were crucial to his campaign. Possession would enable him to bring in supplies and reinforcements along a shorter and less vulnerable route. Grant would have to cross the Big Black River to gain this objective. Once across the Mississippi River, Grant’s forces were strung out in a north-easterly direction running parallel to the Big Black River, with Pemberton’s considerable forces at Vicksburg to the west. Because of this, Grant expected Pemberton to attack his rear as he marched toward Jackson, as there were numerous crossing points of the Big Black. Whilst Pemberton exhibited caution, Grant was concerned that Johnston would order an attack. Grant managed to intercept Johnston’s dispatch to Pemberton, ordering him to do exactly that.⁹⁷ From it, Grant concluded that “Their design is evidently to cross the Big Black and pass down the peninsula between the Big Black and Yazoo rivers. We must beat them.”⁹⁸ The battles of Champion Hill and Big Black River Bridge did just that and prevented the junction of the armies of Pemberton and Johnston. The Yazoo River landings were abandoned by the Confederates on 17th May 1863. Preventing Grant from reaching the Yazoo River

⁹⁶ Sherman, *Memoirs*, p. 303.

⁹⁷ Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, Modern Library, (New York, 1999), p. 268. Reprint of the original published by C. L. Webster, (New York, 1885).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

would have forced the Union army to keep lengthy supply lines. It was critical to Northern success to stop Pemberton from combining with Johnston between the Big Black River and the Yazoo River. Grant was able to capture Snyder's Bluff and Haynes' Bluff after the victory at Champion Hill, and he immediately began using the landing points to bring in supplies, guns and reinforcements. Pemberton did not see the value of the Yazoo River landing places to Northern communications and abandoned them without a fight.

Pemberton had no intention of abandoning Vicksburg and moving toward Johnston. Grant believed that Pemberton should have made a night march northward to join Johnston, keeping the Big Black River between the opposing armies. He also believed that this was the move that "Johnston would have made had he been in Pemberton's place."⁹⁹ Grant knew that Johnston was a more formidable opponent than Pemberton and one who would make the right moves to keep his army intact, irrespective of the loss of Vicksburg. Grant believed that keeping his army between Pemberton and Johnston was crucial to his success, and the retreat into Vicksburg meant he had succeeded, by preventing their junction. It would be up to Grant to tighten the stranglehold and up to Johnston to wrest Vicksburg from his grasp.

Conclusion

The overland phase of Grant's Vicksburg Campaign was one of the most brilliant actions of the war. To fight five battles in eighteen days at Port Gibson, Raymond, Jackson, Champion Hill and Big Black River Bridge, and to win them all, marked Grant as a formidable opponent, even though he had the advantage of superior numbers in the

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

field. Confederate defence was badly co-ordinated with conflicting strategic orders being given to Pemberton by Johnston and Davis. Furthermore, Pemberton was not supported by Bowen and Loring, who were sceptical of his leadership: a view that was shared by many of the troops and citizens eventually penned in Vicksburg as the siege commenced. Pemberton was left isolated to make his own decisions and was found wanting in top-level command. Four errors that Pemberton made have been argued by Ballard (2004), as the latest scholar who examined the Vicksburg Campaign, and did not warrant further analysis. First, Pemberton changed his mind on the morning of the battle at Champion Hill, disastrously reversing his army's direction of march, thereby blundering into Grant's army. Ballard argued that Pemberton did not take into account the difficulty posed by turning his army around and it was hard to understand his decision.¹⁰⁰ Second, the Big Black River Bridge defences were constructed on the wrong side of the river and were easily bypassed upstream. Ballard believed that Pemberton should not have attempted to get his troops to fight in such a poor location.¹⁰¹ Third, he ordered Loring's division of infantry to fruitlessly chase Grierson's cavalry raid, an action that kept badly needed troops away from Grant's east bank landing. Ballard noted that the dispersal of troops meant that Loring did not arrive with Bowen until the day after the battle of Port Gibson had been fought and that Pemberton was too preoccupied with Grierson.¹⁰² Fourth, he should not have allowed his forces to be trapped in Vicksburg in a siege. In mitigation, Pemberton was complying with Davis' orders and he expected a relieving army to come to his rescue. Ballard believed that Pemberton chose to retreat into

¹⁰⁰ Michael B. Ballard, *Vicksburg: The campaign that opened the Mississippi*, The University of North Carolina Press, (Chapel Hill, 2004), pp. 290-1.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 243-4 and p. 250.

Vicksburg, rather than head northward after the defeat at the Big Black.¹⁰³ However, Pemberton made four further mistakes during Grant's overland phase of the Vicksburg Campaign that have not been adequately analysed by other historians.

First, Pemberton did not order Bowen to retreat after receiving his reports of large numbers of troops on the east bank of the Mississippi River at the end of April 1863. Woodworth (1990) argued that Grant's plan perplexed Pemberton and Davis.¹⁰⁴ Cooper (2000), similarly, argued that Grant simply outfoxed Pemberton and Johnston.¹⁰⁵ Both historians were correct, but there was a fundamental flaw in Pemberton's thinking. Grant was in the process of landing his entire force on the east bank, but even though Pemberton had doubts about the veracity of the reports, militarily he could not afford to allow the Union commander to defeat his forces piecemeal. Pemberton was normally cautious, but in this case he froze into inactivity. A cautious approach required that Pemberton should have prevented Bowen from confronting Grant until more information was available about the scale of the Union operation that was underway. This was a major leadership mistake, because Pemberton allowed Bowen to fight with an inadequate number of troops. At the battle of Port Gibson, the attackers were unable to bring all of their numbers to bear, because of the advantages of terrain to the defence, so it was not necessary for the defenders to have numerical parity to succeed, but Bowen's numerical disadvantage was too great. Pemberton should have ordered Bowen to retreat from Port Gibson, to join a larger force. The absence of orders allowed the battle of Port Gibson to take place by default. Loring arrived too late to assist at the battle, but he did arrive the

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

¹⁰⁴ Steven E. Woodworth, *Jefferson Davis and his generals. The failure of Confederate command in the West*, University Press of Kansas, (Lawrence, 1990), p. 220.

¹⁰⁵ William J. Cooper Jr., *Jefferson Davis. American*, Vintage Books, New York, 2001, p. 471. This was a paperback edition of the 2000 original.

next day. The immediate combination of Bowen's and Loring's troops, could have caused Grant to become stalled, as Sherman's division was still north of Vicksburg. This could have bought enough time for further reinforcements to arrive. Any delay in Grant's advance would have also benefitted Gregg and Johnston later in Jackson. Bowen had warned Pemberton of the scale of the Union landing, but Pemberton simply did not act in the way that a top-level commander should.

Second, Pemberton completely surrendered the initiative to Grant, in late April 1863, by remaining on the defensive for two weeks, whilst the Northern forces marched to Jackson unopposed. Woodworth thought that Pemberton wanted the security of prepared defences.¹⁰⁶ Cooper also argued that Pemberton looked for security by remaining in the Vicksburg defences.¹⁰⁷ Ballard noted that Pemberton refused to attack Grant's left flank as he advanced toward Jackson, but he argued, more tellingly, that Grant realised that the Confederates were not aggressive.¹⁰⁸ In Pemberton's defence, his lack of cavalry prevented good quality intelligence reaching him and it reduced any attempt at harassing Grant. Loring wanted him to attack Grant's flank or rear with infantry, but Pemberton's caution meant that this opportunity was missed. Even if additional cavalry intelligence had been obtained, Pemberton was still intent on keeping his army between Vicksburg and Grant's army. Surrendering the initiative meant that Grant was able to co-ordinate the Union forces without fear of disruption. It also meant that Grant arrived in Jackson earlier than if he had been subjected to harassment, which had further implications for the conduct of the campaign. One of the most important issues in field leadership was seizing the initiative, so that the attacking momentum was

¹⁰⁶ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, pp. 206-7.

¹⁰⁷ Cooper, *Jefferson Davis*, p. 471.

¹⁰⁸ Ballard, *Vicksburg*, p. 259 and p. 290.

maintained. An aggressive defence was needed to put those attacking off-balance and Pemberton, just like Johnston in Virginia, did not understand this aspect of leadership.

Third, he ordered Gregg to attack Grant's non-existent flank at Raymond, risking the total loss of that part of his force, in another poorly executed operation. Ballard correctly argued that Gregg did not have enough troops to attempt this movement but he did not elaborate on the leadership problem this revealed.¹⁰⁹ Pemberton made a bad error and assumed that Grant would swing to the north to the railroad to the west of Jackson, rather than capture the city. This was a generous assumption. If Pemberton had been right, then Gregg could have attacked portions of Grant's rear or right flank. Whilst Pemberton issued instructions to be cautious to Gregg, this order was incapable of being carried out because of the undulating, heavily-wooded landscape. Pemberton's lack of field experience meant that he did not understand that it was impossible for Gregg to know enough of the Union dispositions to judge the size of the forces he was encountering, because of this terrain. He held up the Union advance for a day, in a similar way to Bowen at Port Gibson, whilst being considerably outnumbered. Although Gregg had performed well, by then a more substantial field army was necessary to thwart the Union advance. Gregg's force should never have been left in isolation in such a vulnerable position. Pemberton had, for a second time, risked the piecemeal defeat of part of his forces, as with Bowen at Port Gibson, which, again, reinforced his inadequate field leadership.

Fourth, he withdrew the troops at Snyder's and Haynes' Bluffs on the Yazoo River, without understanding the importance of the supply points to Grant. Ballard noted that the Bluffs were abandoned, but saw this merely as a consequence of Grant's victory

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

at Champion Hill.¹¹⁰ Cooper argued that Johnston was resigned to defeat.¹¹¹ Johnston's best opportunity to contribute to the defence of Vicksburg was to mobilise his forces to cross the Big Black River, occupying the high ground between that river and the Yazoo River. This course of action would only have been worthwhile if a corresponding movement away from Vicksburg was made by Pemberton's field army. Johnston's actions, on arrival in Jackson, were founded on the knowledge that Pemberton would not leave Vicksburg behind him to create a larger mobile field army to the north-east of the city. Johnston knew that Pemberton would never abandon Vicksburg and so he had correctly informed him that, if he retreated into the city, the Yazoo River landing points were untenable. Surrendering these Bluffs to Grant without a fight was an important advantage to the Union campaign, because it significantly shortened his supply route. Pemberton did not think strategically, a requirement for a top-level commander, and was focused merely on his own dispositions for the defence of Vicksburg.

The problems posed by Grant tested the military and political strategy of the Confederacy. The defence of Vicksburg at all costs was militarily unsound, but was important to the Confederacy in terms of morale. Grant had learnt from his experience in northern Mississippi in December 1862, and he had taken the gamble of obtaining subsistence for his army from the countryside. Grimsley (1995) argued that Grant ensured his army lived off the countryside, but extended his remit by denying the Confederates sustenance by confiscation or destruction.¹¹² This was bad news for the local populace and it began the development of hard war that was aimed at disheartening the whole Confederacy, as well as cutting off supplies to the Confederate army. This was

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

¹¹¹ Cooper, *Davis*, p. 472.

¹¹² Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, (Cambridge, U. K., 1995), p. 151.

the beginning of the policy aimed at reducing the support of the Southern public for the continuance of the war. The end of the overland phase of the Vicksburg Campaign and the commencement of the siege increased the friction between Davis and Johnston. Davis' contribution to this phase of the campaign had ensured that Pemberton was committed to a siege that Johnston did not want.

Johnston's contribution to this phase of the Vicksburg Campaign was minimal. Whilst he said he desired to merge his forces with Pemberton's, his actions in the retreat from Jackson indicated that he did not want this to happen. Woodworth believed that Pemberton was right to allow the siege to commence and that Johnston was just not energetic enough.¹¹³ W. C. Davis (1991) was more direct, arguing that Davis was wise to attempt to hold Vicksburg, but that after his problems getting Johnston to act as the overall theatre commander, he could simply have removed him, but he conceded that the President had limited options on the choice of a new commander.¹¹⁴ Johnston did, indeed, act slowly and he was in constant dispute with Davis, as these historians have indicated, but there were other factors to consider. If Johnston had succeeded in merging their forces, he would have been in immediate conflict with Pemberton, as well as Davis, and he would have had to take command in this adversarial situation. A movement to join Pemberton with alacrity could still have succeeded, to the north of the Big Black River, and it may have kept the route open from Vicksburg to the north-east for a short time. However, Johnston did not want to be in charge of forces that were already pressed by Grant, preferring the ability to manoeuvre to retreat from the aggressor. With Davis taking the side of his Vicksburg commander, who was able to ignore orders because of

¹¹³ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, pp. 210-11.

¹¹⁴ William C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis, The man and his hour*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1996), pp. 502-3. This was a paperback edition of the 1991 original.

this relationship, a confrontation with Pemberton would not have changed the situation. If Johnston had been able to persuade Pemberton to abandon Vicksburg, he would have had to disobey Davis and his honour would not allow him to extend to such a public display of disobedience. It was far simpler for Johnston to merely fail to arrive on the scene. For these reasons, Johnston's heart wasn't in the campaign and he became less effective than he had been in Virginia. Davis could have removed Johnston from command, but he knew that there was no one else that met his approval to fulfil the role, so he persevered even though there was every indication that Johnston would continue in the same cautious and fractious manner that had plagued his command in Virginia as well as in the West. Johnston was now charged with the task of helping the Vicksburg defenders to break the siege by building up and then using the Army of Relief.

Chapter six

The siege and the aftermath

Introduction

The Union siege operations to capture Vicksburg began in earnest after the failed general assault along the whole length of the Confederate lines on 22nd May 1863. A race commenced, with General Joseph E. Johnston attempting to build up the Army of Relief faster than the Union could build its besieging army. Confederate President Jefferson Davis believed that the Northern army, with superior manpower resources available, would grow faster and that a quick response by Johnston was essential, because time would widen the disparity between the armies.

Within Vicksburg, the siege meant an unpleasant job garrisoning the earthwork defences at all hours, in all types of weather. During the siege, a continuous bombardment, food shortages and disease caused the physical condition of the troops to deteriorate, so numbers fit enough to man the defences declined. Communications with the Confederate Army of Relief reduced to a trickle, as Major-General Ulysses S. Grant increased the stranglehold on the city. Co-ordination of the Confederate forces inside and outside of the city was difficult.

During June 1863, Johnston divided his time between Canton and Jackson, to supervise the assembly of the Army of Relief.¹ By mid-June, both armies reached their maximum strengths, with Johnston having 30,000, faced by Grant's entrenched force of 77,000 that was laying siege to Lieutenant-General John C. Pemberton's garrison of 30,000. Johnston was then unable to break the cordon to assist Vicksburg and saw no merit in uselessly sacrificing men against prepared fortifications.

¹ Joseph E. Johnston, *Narrative of Military Operations during the Civil War*, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1990). This was an unabridged reproduction of the original version published as: *Narrative of military operations directed during the late War Between the States*, D Appleton, (New York, 1874), p. 191.

Johnston and Davis continued to have exchanges during the siege that became increasingly fraught, as a Northern victory loomed and no attempt to break the siege had commenced.

The surrender at Vicksburg on 4th July 1863 made Port Hudson untenable, so the garrison there surrendered to Major-General Nathaniel P. Banks on 8th July 1863, thereby ending the presence of any significant Confederate force along the Mississippi River. The garrison troops at Vicksburg and Port Hudson, in surrendering, signed paroles and were effectively lost to the Southern cause. The opening of the Mississippi River navigation to the Gulf of Mexico was a massive boost to Northern morale, segregating the Trans-Mississippi department from the rest of the Confederacy.

Pemberton concluded the surrender negotiations with Grant on 4th July 1863. This date, being United States Independence Day, caused an outcry, and Pemberton, of Northern birth, was vilified throughout the South. Davis believed Johnston was responsible for the loss of Vicksburg, because he did not attempt to break the siege. Johnston believed that Davis and Pemberton had created the conditions for the siege and that it should have been avoided. Davis placed the blame for the loss of Vicksburg squarely on Johnston's shoulders, but there were many in the South who blamed Davis and Pemberton.

Davis was the recipient of many protests after the loss of Vicksburg concerning Pemberton's leadership. Pemberton had lost the support of his troops before the siege commenced and the defeat destroyed his reputation in the Confederacy. Challenges to Davis' appointments increased, particularly toward Holmes in the Trans-Mississippi, and others challenged the President directly on his own shortcomings. Davis still had faith in Pemberton and wanted to give him a

further senior command, but the reaction in the Confederacy prevented the President from getting his own way. Davis accepted the situation when Pemberton applied for a demotion to a role more suited to his leadership capabilities.

Pemberton's leadership during the siege of Vicksburg

Before the siege commenced, Johnston, as commander of the Department of the West, had criticised the method of defending Vicksburg, to both Davis and Pemberton. Most important, he was sure that the extensive fortifications at Vicksburg demanded an army to man the defences, rather than a small garrison. The siege lines were over six miles in length, stretching in an eastern-facing crescent from South Fort northward to Fort Hill. Pemberton, with Davis' support, continued on his chosen course, ignoring Johnston. There were many in the army and amongst the civilian population who realised that the defence of Vicksburg was stretching the capabilities of the Southern leadership.

Confederate morale improved rapidly after the repulses of the Union assaults on 19th and 22nd May 1863. The diarist Emma Balfour, living in the house next to Pemberton's headquarters, had already observed the demoralisation of the field army and noted that the troops thought the defeats before the siege commenced were Pemberton's fault. She described the constant shelling and life under siege conditions.² On 25th May she reported comparative quiet along the lines in the morning, after a further night of bombardment.³ Brigadier-General Stephen D. Lee had taken lunch with them and the next day she recorded that he seemed in fine spirits.⁴ Pemberton had also put in an appearance, and she stated that "He seems very hopeful, says we can hold the place sixty days.... says he has no news from outside

² Emma Balfour, *Diary of the Vicksburg Siege*, Philip C. Weinberger, (1983). There are no page numbers in this booklet.

³ *Ibid.*, entry for 25th May 1863.

⁴ *Ibid.*, entry for 26th May 1863.

since the 18th.”⁵ This was just after successfully defending the second of the two major Union assaults. This indicated the rapidly-improving Confederate morale.

Pemberton was concerned about the lack of information from the relieving army. Initial news from outside the city did not arrive until 28th May 1863. The next day Emma Balfour wrote: “Yesterday morning Col. Higgins came in ... just from Gen. Pemberton’s headquarters ... to show us an official dispatch which Gen. P. had just received by courier. ... Gen. Johnston with 30 thousand and Loring with 10,000 men were at Canton and Jackson, that Bragg is marching to our relief, that Lee had driven the Yankees across the Potomac.”⁶ Enthusiastically, she went on to write, “You may judge we were excited. This, the first piece of news from the outside world we have had in 10 days, was glorious. I had laughed at Gen. Pemberton the day before for being gloomy.”⁷ At this news the Balfours invited Pemberton and a few others to lunch: “So we made merry over it. Gen Pemberton said the Yankees, if they could look in, would not think that we minded the siege *very* much.”⁸ The next day she was referring back to the lunch, noting that Pemberton was “inclined to be rather despondent and very persistent hopefulness cheers him.”⁹ Pemberton had appeared to be despondent over the lack of contact from Johnston, but the news received was encouraging, because it appeared that the Confederacy was mobilising enough force in Mississippi to relieve the siege.

Within Vicksburg, many women and children had been caught up in the siege. The constant bombardment brought severe risks, but most of the women were defiant. Balfour wrote on 30th May 1863 that “The general impression is that that they fire at this city, in that way thinking that they will wear out the women and children and

⁵ *Ibid.*, entry for 29th May 1863.

⁶ *Ibid.*, entry for 29th May 1863.

⁷ *Ibid.*, entry for 29th May 1863.

⁸ *Ibid.*, entry for 29th May 1863.

⁹ *Ibid.*, entry for 30th May 1863.

sick, and Gen. Pemberton will be impatient to surrender the place on that account, but they little know the spirit of the Vicksburg women and children if they expect this.”¹⁰ She also reported that some citizens had got up a petition to ask that a flag of truce be granted to send the women and children beyond the lines. Pemberton had agreed that he would try for a truce if the people wanted it, but very few signatures had been recorded, Balfour only reporting the three who had started the petition.¹¹ Defiantly, she stated flatly, “I told Gen. Pemberton I hoped he never would grant anything of the kind as we had all been sufficiently warned.”¹² The defiance displayed by the women within the city confirmed that the civilians and the military were unified in their resistance.

Grant realised that he needed to sap the morale of the defending troops and the citizenry in order to achieve victory. The bombardment forced everyone within the city to live in poor conditions, with many in caves, and the siege lines meant that fresh food supplies could not be obtained, so the stocks were diminishing. Mary Loughborough, living in a cave just behind the defensive positions, said, “I had often remarked how cheerfully the soldiers bore the hardships of the siege. ... Poor men, yet so badly used, and undergoing so many privations!”¹³ Like most Vicksburg inhabitants, news of the Army of Relief was anxiously awaited and Loughborough reported that dispatches were received from Johnston that were not made public, but “from the very silence of General Pemberton, the officers feared the worst.”¹⁴ News came to her on 26th June 1863 that, “one of the forts to the left of us had been undermined and blown up, killing sixty men ... the next day, of the death of the brave

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, entry for 30th May 1863.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, entry for 30th May 1863.

¹² *Ibid.*, entry for 30th May 1863.

¹³ Mary Webster Loughborough, *My Cave Life in Vicksburg*, D. Appleton & Co., (New York, 1864), pp. 107-8. The copy obtained is a 2003 facsimile reproduction of the original purchased at the Vicksburg National Military Park and the author was originally identified as “by a Lady”. Mary Loughborough was the wife of Major James M. Loughborough who was fighting on the lines and she has been identified in a short note added about the author. The 2003 edition is printed by the Vicksburg and Warren County Historical Society from a copy of the original provided in 1951 by a member of the Loughborough family.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

old General Green.”¹⁵ The men who were fit enough were forced to man the earthworks continuously because of the reduced numbers from sickness and the length of the siege lines. Despite this, morale in the defences remained high, even though the food rations were low, there were risks from the bombardment, and there were risks from the sharpshooters. Pemberton had nothing of substance to report, because the Army of Relief was still assembling. Grant’s strategy was slowly wearing down the Southern forces and the will of the civilians.

Food stocks in Vicksburg were running low for the critical items of meat and bread. Food stored in the city was unbalanced, as there was plenty of pea-meal. Pemberton confirmed to Johnston on 15th June that he had food stocks for twenty days and he confirmed on 22nd June that this had reduced to fifteen days’ supply.¹⁶ Mary Loughborough concluded: “We were swiftly nearing the end of our siege life: the rations had nearly all been given out.”¹⁷ Brigadier-General Stephen D. Lee, one of Stevenson’s brigade commanders, thought it was “the physical and mental condition of the troops that forced surrender.”¹⁸ Tunnard confirmed that “starvation was the actual cause of the surrender.”¹⁹ United States Assistant Secretary of War Charles A. Dana reported: “Deserters said that the garrison was worn out and hungry; besides the defense had for several days been conducted with extraordinary feebleness.”²⁰ Pemberton’s predictions indicated that he thought that the food stocks would last until somewhere between 5th and 7th July. The physical condition of the troops was reducing and there was now no longer any prospect of mobilising enough fit troops

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁶ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, p. 964, Pemberton to Johnston, 15th June 1863 and p. 974, Pemberton to Johnston, 22nd June 1863.

¹⁷ Loughborough, *Cave Life*, p. 136.

¹⁸ John C. Pemberton III papers, # 586, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Brigadier-General Stephen D. Lee to Brigadier-General Eppa Hunton, 9th February 1866.

¹⁹ William H. Tunnard, *A Southern Record, The History of the Third Regiment Louisiana Infantry*, The University of Arkansas Press, (Fayetteville, 1997), p. 244. This is a reprint of the 1866 original, self published by W. H. Tunnard, Baton Rouge, with typographical corrections for consistency made by the University of Arkansas.

²⁰ Charles A. Dana, *Recollections of the Civil War*, University of Nebraska Press, (Lincoln, 1996), p. 88. This is a reprint of the 2nd edition published by D. Appleton, (New York, 1902). The 1st edition was published by D. Appleton in 1898.

for a breakout. Grant had such a stranglehold on Vicksburg that the addition of another month's supplies would merely have prolonged the siege, without affecting the outcome. Starvation had weakened the garrison and negotiations commenced to bring their misery to an end on 3rd July 1863. The troops understood that the main reason for the surrender was that they had been worn down by food shortages.

Many of the troops in Vicksburg were bitterly disappointed by the surrender on 4th July 1863, American Independence Day. On 3rd July 1863, Mary Loughborough witnessed: "a painful calm prevailed. ... At ten o'clock General Bowen passed by, dressed in full uniform, ... preceded by a courier bearing a white flag. ... all believed a treaty of surrender was pending."²¹ Grant believed that Pemberton started the negotiations on 3rd July to avoid the expected Union assault the next day and also because he did not want to lose the city on Independence Day.²² Pemberton stated in his campaign report that, "I believed that upon that day I should obtain better terms."²³ Battle McCardle, son of Pemberton's Assistant Adjutant General, W. H. McCardle, confirmed that his father told him that he had proposed surrender on 4th July to the council of generals called to consider the surrender proposition so "that they will give us better terms."²⁴ Grant blamed Pemberton's slowness in concluding the negotiations for this taking place on 4th July.²⁵ Although the possibility of obtaining better terms on 4th July was discussed by Pemberton and his generals, it was not the central consideration, because negotiations were started early the previous day and could have been concluded the same day.

²¹ Loughborough, *Cave Life*, pp. 137-8.

²² Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, Modern Library, (New York, 1999), p.301. Reprint of the original published by C. L. Webster, (New York, 1885).

²³ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part I, p. 285, Johnston to Cooper, 2nd August 1863.

²⁴ John C. Pemberton III, *Pemberton, Defender of Vicksburg*, The University of North Carolina Press, (Chapel Hill, 1942). Letter from B. McCardle to J. C. Pemberton III, 27th May 1937, quoted on pp. 244-5.

²⁵ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, p. 301.

Many amongst the troops thought that Pemberton was a Northern implant who had picked the 4th July to surrender, to give maximum propaganda value to the Union. William H. Tunnard of the Third Louisiana Infantry reported that many were “boldly proclaiming that they had been sold to the enemy.”²⁶ Tunnard, referring to the denunciations over the surrender date, rationalised: “Yet it seems scarcely probable or possible that General Pemberton could have been actuated by such perfidious motives.”²⁷ Lee confirmed, “it was not 4th July,” having already given the reason for surrender as starvation.²⁸ Pemberton did not have an ulterior motive for the 4th July surrender. He was slow to respond to Grant on 3rd July. When the decision to surrender had such grave consequences for Pemberton and the Confederacy, it was understandable that the negotiations were extended.

The Confederate defences were initially inadequate, as the troops retreated into Vicksburg. Efforts had been made to provide substantial food stocks. The actual earthworks were a colossal undertaking, more than six miles in length that withstood all of the assaults thrown at them by the North. The food stocks were unbalanced, but had lasted forty-seven days and were not entirely exhausted by 4th July. Tunnard thought that Pemberton “was guilty of gross neglect of duty in two ways, ... not fortifying Vicksburg so as to resist an attack from the rear ... [and] not procuring supplies ... sufficient to make a protracted defence.”²⁹ The defences did need some improvement at the commencement of the siege, but this was rapidly carried out. The defences were not perfect but they stood up to two assaults, shortly after the siege commenced. The length of time that the food had lasted indicated that reasonable efforts had been taken to create the stockpile. Pemberton’s preparations were

²⁶ Tunnard, *Southern Record*, p. 243.

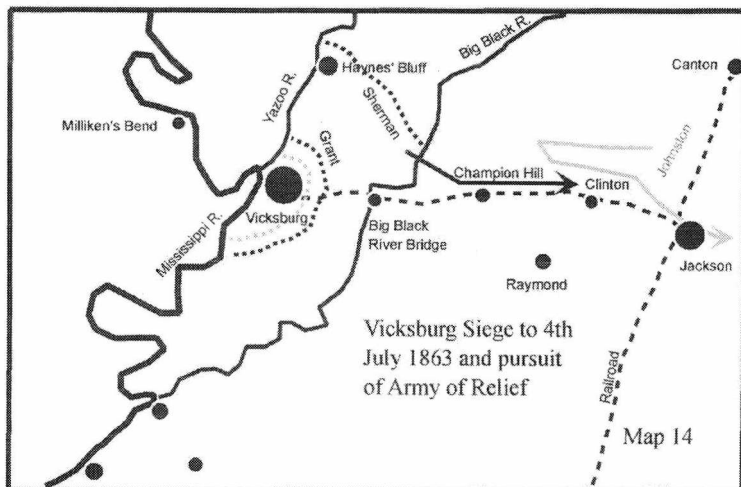
²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

²⁸ John C. Pemberton III papers, Brigadier-General Stephen D. Lee to Brigadier-General Eppa Hunton, 9th February 1866.

²⁹ Tunnard, *Southern Record*, pp. 243-4.

adequate to withstand forty-seven days of siege, unprecedented at the time, and were competent given the scale of the undertaking.

Pemberton made no attempt to break out of Vicksburg, expecting the Army of



Relief to break in with supplies. Dana reported that, “No amount of outside alarm loosened Grant’s hold on the rebel stronghold.”³⁰

Breaking out of

Vicksburg was an option that Grant made sure was not available to Pemberton, and he made sure that breaking in to the city by Johnston was going to be difficult to achieve. Johnston was now charged with assembling an army to break the Vicksburg siege.

The Army of Relief assembles

Rather than retreat into a siege, Johnston wanted Pemberton to breakout of the encirclement, which, at the commencement, was not complete. On 17th May 1863, Johnston ordered Pemberton to evacuate Vicksburg.³¹ Pemberton wanted to remain, suggesting to Johnston that he did not understand that “I still conceive it to be the most important point in the Confederacy.”³² Johnston sent an order the next day which confirmed that he now understood that Pemberton was not going to attempt a breakout: “I am trying to gather a force which may attempt to relieve you. Hold out.”³³ Pemberton believed that Johnston understood his decision to stay in

³⁰ Dana, *Recollections*, p.87.

³¹ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, p. 888, Johnston to Pemberton, 17th May 1863.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 889-890, Pemberton to Johnston, 18th May 1863.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.892, Johnston to Pemberton, 19th May 1863.

Vicksburg and that a relieving attempt would be made. Johnston had committed himself to building the Army of Relief.

Johnston was active in late May 1863 assembling the Army of Relief and informed Pemberton of his intentions. He wrote on 25th May, “Bragg is sending a division; when it comes, I will move to you. Which do you think the best route? How and where is the enemy encamped? What is your force?”³⁴ Pemberton was expecting to remain within the Vicksburg perimeter and for the siege to be relieved by Johnston. Whether the forces outside broke through, or the forces inside broke out, or both achieved the feat of meeting in the middle, Pemberton had no intention of leaving Vicksburg for Grant to capture. Johnston had taken on the responsibility of relieving Pemberton and all that was required was that both needed to agree on a plan.

Johnston struggled to communicate with Pemberton in Vicksburg, so it was difficult to create a plan that was not rendered obsolete by the time it was received. Not only was vital time taken accumulating reinforcements, but time was also lost trying to communicate about how the relieving attempt was to be made. Johnston received ten dispatches from Pemberton during the siege.³⁵ Until 8th June, when Major-General Francis J. Herron’s division occupied the southern end of the siege lines near Warrenton, the lines were not complete toward the south and it was relatively easy to get messages through. After 8th June, couriers braved the lines during the night or floated downriver. The communication speeds were sufficiently slow that the chance of co-ordinating any military plan was much reduced. Davis wanted Johnston to act quickly and knew that it was not an occasion for lengthy planning.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 917, Johnston to Pemberton, 25th May 1863.

³⁵ Johnston, *Narrative*, p. 191.

The President knew that if Johnston was slow to make an attempt to relieve the siege, superior Union resources would be applied, with defeat as the outcome.

Davis anxiously awaited developments, responding to a short letter from Johnston:

I concur in your reliance on the tenacity with which Genl. Pemberton will defend his position, but the disparity of numbers renders prolonged defence dangerous. I hope that you will soon be able to break the investment, make a junction & carry in munitions.³⁶

Davis could see that delay was going to mean capitulation by the Vicksburg defenders. He also believed that Johnston's role was to break in to Vicksburg, rather than create a path for Pemberton to break out. Johnston continued to build the Army of Relief and did not make an early attempt to break the siege.

Johnston was assembling the Army of Relief, but he always believed that his force was inadequate to combat Grant. When he arrived in Jackson on 13th May he already had 7,500 troops under Brigadier-General William H. T. Walker, including Gregg's brigade, which had joined after the battle of Raymond.³⁷ Johnston was soon joined by Brigadier-General Samuel B. Maxey's brigade from Port Hudson with 3,000 troops.³⁸ Bragg was able to send two brigades totalling 3,000 troops under, Brigadier-Generals Evander McNair and Matthew D. Ector.³⁹ Beauregard was able to send a brigade of 1,500 under Brigadier-General States Rights Gist.⁴⁰ These brigades together with the arrival of Loring's 6,200 troops from Vicksburg increased his numbers to 21,200 by 23rd May 1863.⁴¹ Pemberton wrote at the end of May that 30-35,000 men would be needed to relieve Vicksburg, and the lower number in the range

³⁶ *Davis papers, Vol. 9*, Davis to Johnston, 24th May 1863, p. 189.

³⁷ David M. Smith, (ed.), *Compelled To Appear In Print: The Vicksburg Manuscript of General John C. Pemberton*, Ironclad Publishing, (Cincinnati, 1999), p. 199.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 200

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 148. This figure came from Pemberton's manuscript and Smith has confirmed that these figures are close enough for Pemberton to make his point.

was achieved.⁴² According to Johnston, the Army of Relief was built up to a strength of 25,000 by the end of May and no further reinforcements were in transit.⁴³ These troops were assembled at Canton and Jackson. Pemberton had 29,500 troops within the city.⁴⁴ So, at the end of May 1863 the Confederate forces totalled a minimum of 54,500. Pemberton was not really in a position to assess the numbers necessary to succeed against Grant and neither was Johnston. The number of troops available to Grant could only be estimated. Johnston was convinced that he needed more men and he waited into June until he received further reinforcements.

Johnston's best opportunity to attack was in early June, before the bulk of Grant's reinforcements arrived. By 3rd June further Confederate forces arrived, a brigade of 2,000 under Brigadier-General Nathan B. Evans from South Carolina and a division of 5,500 under Major-General John C. Breckenridge from Tennessee, along with Brigadier-General William H. Jackson's 2,000 cavalry, also from Tennessee.⁴⁵ By 3rd June 1863, Johnston had 30,500 men.⁴⁶ On 7th June 1863 Confederate strength, including Pemberton's garrison, was 60,000 and Union strength was 56,000.⁴⁷ Grant received 21,000 troops from Missouri and Tennessee between 7th June and 17th June to take his total force to 77,000.⁴⁸ There was a short period from 3rd June to 7th June 1863 before any reinforcements arrived for Grant, where Confederate forces outnumbered those of the Union. This small window was not known by the Confederate forces, because they were split into two armies of roughly equal size, with neither army able to communicate with the other quickly to co-ordinate their actions. A determined attack on a weak point of the Union lines was necessary to

⁴² *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, pp. 929-30, Pemberton to Johnston, 29th May 1863.

⁴³ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part I, p. 194, Johnston to Davis, 31st May 1863.

⁴⁴ D. M. Smith, *Compelled To Appear In Print*, p. 201.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 200-1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁴⁷ Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign*, Volume III, Morningside House Inc., (Dayton, 1985-6), p. 1071.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1071.

break the siege by both Confederate armies, acting in unison. During the period from 8th June to 17th June this small advantage in numbers disappeared.

As Confederate reinforcements arrived, Grant became concerned that a large relieving army was assembling. Grant recorded that he “knew that Johnston was in our rear, and was receiving constant reinforcements from the east.”⁴⁹ On 22nd June, Grant learned that “Johnston had crossed the Big Black River for the purposes of attacking our rear, to raise the siege and release Pemberton.”⁵⁰ He detached Brigadier-General William T. Sherman, forming an outward-facing army of 34,000 that took up a strong defensive position by 23rd June.⁵¹ Johnston began to move slowly toward Vicksburg on 28th June, but perceiving Sherman’s position as too strong, he was scouting further south for an approach route when news of the Vicksburg surrender arrived.⁵² Sherman concluded: “Johnston evidently took in the situation and wisely, I think, abstained from making an assault on us because it would simply have inflicted loss on both sides without accomplishing any result.”⁵³ Pemberton was already beginning to think of surrender, but he believed that Johnston’s assembling army might give Grant reason to accept the handover of the city, whilst allowing the Vicksburg army to march out through the Union lines with all its armaments.⁵⁴ Pemberton did not understand that Grant would never allow this to happen, because his primary goal was to destroy the Confederate army. Between 3rd June and 23rd June, Johnston was not faced with troops in entrenched positions. Once Sherman achieved this, much larger numbers were needed to break the siege. From the commencement of the siege until 23rd June, Johnston had not made any

⁴⁹ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, p. 288.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁵¹ Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign*, Volume III, p. 1093.

⁵² Johnston, *Narrative*, pp. 202-4.

⁵³ William T. Sherman, *William Tecumseh Sherman: Memoirs*, Penguin Books, (New York, 2000), pp. 292-3. Reprint of the second edition by D. Appleton, (New York, 1886). The first edition, also published by D. Appleton but in 1875, was edited by Sherman and has not been used in this thesis, because of the greater insights given by the additions to the second edition.

⁵⁴ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, p. 974, Pemberton to Johnston, 22nd June 1863.

move of consequence toward Vicksburg, still believing that his force of over 30,000 was inadequate. The gap between the sizes of their respective forces had widened from 3rd to 17th June, and now, faced by Sherman with a fortified position from 23rd June, Johnston had lost any opportunity of achieving a breakthrough. Although he had not attempted to relieve Vicksburg, he had maintained his army intact and avoided the useless loss of life that would have resulted had he attempted to assault the opposing entrenched positions. Much to Grant's and Sherman's annoyance, Johnston had lived to fight another day on better terms of his choosing. Davis and Pemberton, on the other hand, did not see it that way. Neither had given enough respect to the determination of Grant to win at all costs. Whilst Johnston was assembling the Army of Relief he had a continuous dispute running with Davis.

Johnston and Davis argue about the composition of the Army of Relief

The Army of Relief needed organising into divisions as it assembled. Johnston requested that his designated division commanders be promoted to Major-General. The dispute started with a simple request by Johnston for promotions and then escalated into a dispute over the number of troops, before both issues merged. The dispute then degenerated into a protest from Johnston concerning the Northern birth of one of the Major-Generals being transferred from Bragg's army. He requested promotions for Brigadier-Generals William. H. T. Walker and Cadmus. M. Wilcox, informing Davis that he had a division without a Major-General and he would need another for arriving reinforcements.⁵⁵ Davis refused both requests, reasoning that "Brig. Gen. John S. Bowen is appointed major-general, to meet the want specified in your dispatch. General Loring becomes available for assignment to

⁵⁵ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part I, p. 190, Johnston to Davis, 21st May 1863.

the division you designate.”⁵⁶ But Davis had made two mistakes. Bowen was within the Vicksburg defences with Pemberton. Loring had arrived complete with his existing division and neither he nor Bowen was available to Johnston.⁵⁷ Davis responded by promoting Walker and raising a further query concerning Wilcox, because the translation of the cipher code had made the name unclear.⁵⁸ Johnston achieved his request for the promotion of Walker, but not for Wilcox.

Johnston notified Davis of the scale of the problem faced by Pemberton and the Army of Relief. He had received information from Pemberton about the size of the Union force involved in the attempt to storm the Vicksburg defences on 19th May 1863. Johnston forwarded a dispatch on the 24th May, received from Pemberton in Vicksburg, which reported: “Enemy assaulted intrenchments yesterday on center and left; were repulsed with heavy loss; our loss small. Enemy's force at least 60,000.”⁵⁹ This supported Johnston’s argument that the relieving army needed to be much larger than could be provided.

Johnston continued the dispute by arguing over the numbers of troops that Davis thought were at his disposal in the Army of Relief. Johnston disputed the size of his force and put pressure on Davis to provide more troops. Davis had seized on a note from Johnston quoting his total manpower in the relieving army at 23,000.⁶⁰ Davis wrote back immediately stating that Johnston was wrong and that he believed that he had 7,000 more men.⁶¹ The President again urged action and stressed the importance of minimising any delay. Johnston then asked for another 7,000 troops and again requested for Wilcox to be promoted.⁶² Johnston was in the better position

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 191, Davis to Johnston, 22nd May 1863.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 191, Johnston to Davis, 23rd May 1863.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 192, Davis to Johnston, 23rd May 1863.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 193, Johnston to Davis, 24th May 1863.

⁶⁰ *Davis papers. Vol. 9*, Johnston to Davis, 27th May 1863, p. 196.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Davis to Johnston, 28th May 1863, p. 197.

⁶² *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part I, p. 194, Johnston to Davis, 28th May 1863.

to assess his needs, but Davis continued the dispute, despite it being impossible from Richmond to verify his information. The number of troops stated in a muster roll was always considerably more than the available numbers, due, in the main, to sickness. Johnston had pointed out that he was referring to effective numbers.

Davis did not accept Johnston's assessment of the number of troops at his disposal. He checked the level of reinforcements with Secretary of War James A. Seddon on 30th May 1863, who stated, "your whole force to be 34,000, exclusive of militia." Davis also confirmed that another Major-General could be appointed: "S. D. Lee is, I think, equal to that grade."⁶³ Johnston ended the month of May by listing his effectives at Canton as 9,400, at Jackson as 7,800, and with Breckinridge just arriving at 5,800, plus 2,000 cavalry and artillery, making a total of 25,000.⁶⁴ The President had made another mistake, because he was not aware that Lee was trapped in Vicksburg. Furthermore, the militia mentioned had virtually no impact on the campaign. Davis had a romantic view of calling out poorly armed and poorly trained militia to rally to the colours. The reality was that militia were no match for battle-hardened, fully equipped Northern troops, but the numbers were small, in any case. The actual number of troops may have been more than this on the muster rolls, but Davis was sure that Johnston was understating his strength.

As June 1863 commenced, Johnston had not made a move to raise the siege, but he found time to escalate his dispute with Davis. He protested about the Northern birth of Major-General French and suggested that his appointment would weaken his forces because of hostility from the troops.⁶⁵ Johnston had raised the stakes with Davis, who replied scathingly on 11th June, listing all of French's qualities and

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 194, Davis to Johnston, 30th May 1863.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 194, Johnston to Davis, 31st May 1863.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 195, Johnston to Davis, 9th June 1863.

authorising Johnston to remove him from his position if he was undermined.⁶⁶ Davis, as he had with Pemberton, insisted that Northern birth was not a barrier to high command in the Confederacy. Many in the Confederacy were sceptical of Northerners in high positions, although Johnston raised the issue in relation to prejudice from his troops, rather than through personal prejudice. Davis did not want Johnston to wait for reinforcements, nor did he want him to wait while promotions for generals were arranged; and he did not want concerns to be expressed over the Northern birth of a general.

The President wanted quick action to relieve the Vicksburg siege from the commander of the Department of the West, but Johnston tried to restrict his scope to Mississippi and ignored the rest of his command, whilst taking no action to relieve the siege. Johnston wrote to Seddon denying that his command extended beyond Mississippi and insisting that government policy should determine whether to give up Tennessee, through weakening the army there by sending reinforcements to Vicksburg.⁶⁷ Davis seized on this, and continued the correspondence, asking “The order to go to Mississippi did not diminish your authority in Tennessee ... To what do you refer as information from me restricting your authority?”⁶⁸ Whilst Grant slowly starved the Vicksburg garrison, both men were diverted on to further exchanges of correspondence, Johnston asserting that the order to send him to Mississippi restricted his command to that state and that the task was “far above his ability ... No general can command separate armies.”⁶⁹ Davis would not give up: “I am still at a loss to account for your strange error in stating to the Secretary of War that your right to draw re-enforcements from Bragg's army had been restricted by the Executive or that

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195, Davis to Johnston, 11th June 1863.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 226, Johnston to Seddon, 12th June 1863.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 196, Davis to Johnston, 15th June 1863.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 196, Johnston to Davis, 16th June 1863.

your command over the Army of Tennessee had been withdrawn.”⁷⁰ By now it was early July and Johnston again insisted that his command was restricted to Mississippi, using as justification that troop movements had been ordered from Tennessee, without his involvement, by the War Department.⁷¹ Seddon also joined in: “Your telegram grieves and alarms me. Vicksburg must not be lost without a desperate struggle. The interest and honor of the Confederacy forbid it. I rely on you still to avert the loss. If better resources do not offer, you must hazard attack.”⁷² Johnston exasperatedly replied:

I think that you do not appreciate the difficulties in the course you direct nor the probabilities or consequences of failure. Grant's position, naturally very strong, is intrenched and protected by powerful artillery, and the roads obstructed. His re-enforcements have been at least equal to my whole force.⁷³

Seddon gave him the politician’s answer: “Rely upon it, the eyes and hopes of the whole Confederacy are upon you, with the full confidence that you will act, and with the sentiment that it were better to fail nobly daring than through prudence even to be inactive.”⁷⁴ Seddon was insisting that Confederate morale would suffer if no attempt was made to relieve Vicksburg, and that if Johnston did not act it would reflect badly on his honour and that of his country. This was Johnston’s truest assessment of the assignment he faced, revealing that he thought that the task he had been set was impossible and command of the Department of the West was above his ability. Seddon and Davis wanted action, but Johnston was still prudent, because he understood that he was heavily outnumbered by a determined Union leader, who was well-entrenched. To attack would mean heavy losses for no discernable advantage, but Johnston was not in a position to announce his reasoning to the President.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 198, Davis to Johnston, 30th June 1863.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 198, Johnston to Davis, 5th July 1863.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 227, Seddon to Johnston, 16th June 1863.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 227, Johnston to Seddon, 19th June 1863.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 228, Seddon to Johnston, 21st June 1863.

Richmond was rocked by the next revelation that Vicksburg had fallen. Seddon reported that, “A telegram of the 5th instant . . . , informing of the fall of Vicksburg, is just received. Telegraph if this be true and any particulars known.”⁷⁵ Johnston responded, “The following was sent you yesterday directly after the intelligence of the fall of Vicksburg was received: Vicksburg capitulated on the 4th instant.”⁷⁶ Even this bombshell was diluted by Seddon and Davis learning from another source before Johnston’s dispatch arrived. Davis was angry and complained that he had not been informed of any plans for the relief of Vicksburg and that he would follow up his telegram with a letter detailing Johnston’s mistakes.⁷⁷ Johnston had not had any plans, because he had decided that the task of relieving Vicksburg was not worth the effort, with Pemberton within the city, who could not easily communicate, and Grant’s massive force that could not be overcome outside of the city; so he confirmed this to Davis.⁷⁸ The fall of Vicksburg had come without any attempt by Johnston to relieve the siege. Davis and Seddon, in Richmond, insisted that he should have made an attempt. Johnston believed that any relieving attempt would fail and so he did not try. The politicians in Richmond were the superiors in the argument and Johnston had caused disappointment.

The Confederacy having lost the armies in Vicksburg and Port Hudson, Davis decided that Johnston was responsible. He was then removed from command on 22nd July of the forces in Tennessee in a telegram from General Samuel Cooper, the Adjutant and Inspector-General, in Richmond.⁷⁹ Davis revealed his thoughts on Johnston to Lee, summarising:

you know that one army of the enemy has triumphed by attacking three of ours in detail, at Vicksburg, Port Hudson and Jackson. Genl. Johnston after

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 230, Seddon to Johnston, 7th July 1863.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230, Johnston to Seddon, 8th July 1863.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 199, Davis to Johnston, 8th July 1863.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 199, Johnston to Davis, 9th July 1863.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 232, Cooper to Johnston, 22nd July 1863.

evacuating Jackson, retreated to the east ... and if he has any other plan than that of watching the enemy it has not been communicated.⁸⁰

Davis, although frustrated, was unfair to Johnston in this brief summary, because Banks, with another Union army, had invested Port Hudson and Grant had arrived to commence the siege of Vicksburg before the Army of Relief had been assembled. With the armies in Vicksburg and Port Hudson captured and the army in Tennessee no longer part of his command, the Department of the West had ceased to exist. Johnston had been expected to run his department as a roving military commander, whereas Kirby Smith was allowed to develop his command role in the other large western department in the Confederacy in a different manner.

Trans-Mississippi attacks on the Mississippi River west bank

Davis allowed Lieutenant-General Edmund Kirby Smith autonomy to manage his extensive department. His armies in the field were too far apart to co-operate and, as commander, he was too far removed to direct military affairs locally. This sounded similar to Johnston's complaints, but Kirby Smith explained his reasons in a diplomatic manner. He detailed his opinions to Davis, insisting that with a department of this scale, he could only direct it from an administrative perspective and he had to leave control of the field armies with subordinates.⁸¹ The letter was unlike the short messages from Johnston protesting that he could not simultaneously command in Mississippi and Tennessee. Davis did not challenge Kirby Smith's statements. Kirby Smith was successful in managing the department administratively by securing food and armaments, whilst managing the trade in cotton. This

⁸⁰ *Davis papers, Vol. 9*, Davis to Lee, 28th July 1863, pp. 307-9.

⁸¹ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXII, Part II, pp. 871-3, Kirby Smith to Davis, 16th June 1863.

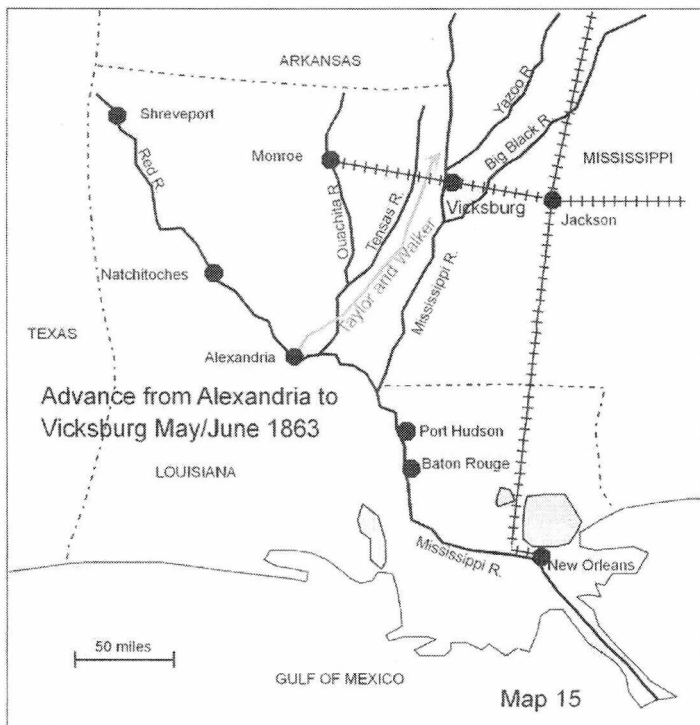
contributed significantly to the war effort, but he did not marshal his forces in the field to hinder Grant, concentrating on local issues in the Trans-Mississippi instead.

After Banks retired from western Louisiana to lay siege to Port Hudson in May 1863, there was no military reason why immediate assistance to Vicksburg could not be given. The next objective for Kirby Smith should have been Vicksburg, but he sent Major-General Richard Taylor north in command of Major-General John G. Walker and his division, whilst ordering Taylor's army to proceed back toward New Orleans. Having achieved a consolidation of their forces, the opportunity to use the whole force opposite Vicksburg was not taken up. Kirby Smith did not trust Walker to carry out the attacks on Grant's supply line, being upset with him for his tardiness in leaving Monroe, stating he "has probably defeated the possibility of a junction with

Taylor at Natchitoches."⁸²

At last Kirby Smith was taking action, in early June, to assist the situation at Vicksburg, but with only part of the forces at his disposal from western Louisiana.

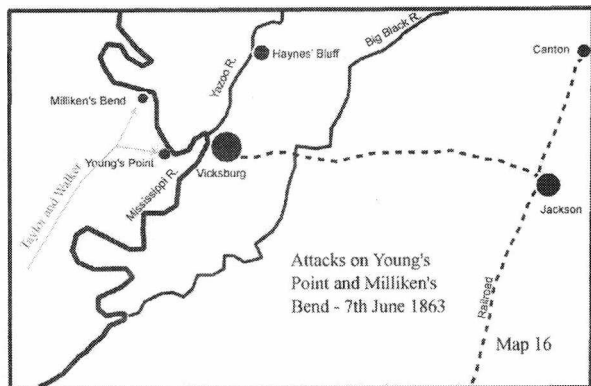
The attempt on Grant's supply lines, led by the attack on Milliken's



Bend, was a disaster for Taylor and Walker. Taylor devised a three-pronged attack on the Union bases that were approached during the early hours of 6th June 1863.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 839-840, Kirby Smith to Holmes, 16th May 1863.

Unknown to Taylor, Grant had opened a new supply line on 21st May 1863 on the east side of the Mississippi using the Yazoo River tributary.⁸³ At Young's Point, the



Confederates withdrew after some skirmishing, having arrived late, in daylight, to find gunboats in the river, supporting the enemy infantry.⁸⁴ At Milliken's Bend the Federals were pushed back to the river bank and

desperate fighting ensued, but the turning-point came at daylight when an iron-clad gunboat was able to shell the Confederate positions and another repulse resulted.⁸⁵

The cavalry attack at Lake Providence went badly wrong, because the Confederates were unable to bridge Bayou Tensas, whilst under heavy fire from the opposite bank.⁸⁶ This repulse was reminiscent of the type of defence carried out by the Confederates in the Delta and was particularly suited to the terrain. Strategically, none of these assaults made any difference to the Vicksburg campaign, but they provided insight to the thinking in the Trans-Mississippi in support of the campaign.

Walker was required to find a way to approach Vicksburg from the west. This would have involved marching along De Soto Point opposite to Vicksburg, which was a narrow neck of land where the Mississippi River turned sharply around it. Thus it was accessible for gunboat shelling along its entire length. Walker declined Kirby Smith's request, saying, "I consider it absolutely certain, unless the enemy are blind and stupid, that no part of my command would escape capture or destruction if such

⁸³ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, p. 281.

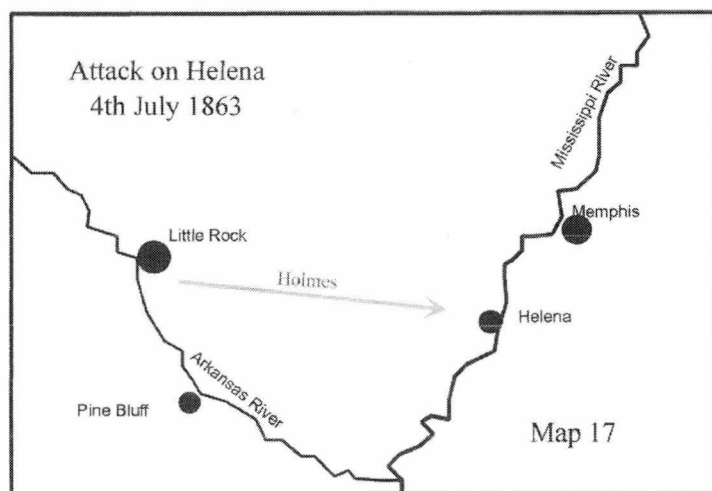
⁸⁴ Richard Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction, Personal Experiences of the Civil War*, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1995), p.139.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.139.

⁸⁶ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part II, pp. 448-9, Dennis to Rawlins, 13th June 1863. This was Brigadier-General Elias S. Dennis' report of the defence at Lake Providence to Grant's Assistant Adjutant-General, Lieutenant-Colonel John A. Rawlins.

an attempt should be made.”⁸⁷ By implication, Walker was suggesting that anyone who ordered such a movement was also blind and stupid. De Soto Point was not tenable as an approach to Vicksburg and there was no other possibility of approaching the city with infantry.

In Arkansas, Lieutenant-General Theophilus H. Holmes was slow to attempt help for Vicksburg, because his plans had been focused on Missouri for many weeks. Holmes was given discretion in his command, as to whether to assist Vicksburg, by Kirby Smith in an order dated 9th May.⁸⁸ He authorised Major-General Sterling Price to move to Jacksonport, in the opposite direction to the Mississippi River at the end of May 1863.⁸⁹ Price issued a general order concentrating on Missouri on 6th June.⁹⁰



Price and Holmes met on 8th June to discuss whether a reverse move to attack Helena on the Mississippi, in an attempt to divert Northern resources away from Vicksburg was possible.⁹¹ Price agreed it

was feasible, but Holmes dithered and on 15th June he told Price to concentrate on Missouri.⁹² Seddon wrote urging assistance for Vicksburg and Holmes changed his mind.⁹³ Kirby Smith authorised Holmes to attack Helena, with the forces from

⁸⁷ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXII, Part II, pp. 915-6, Walker to Kirby Smith, 3rd July 1863.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 835, Kirby Smith to Holmes, 9th May 1863.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 849, W. B. Blair (Holmes' Acting Assistant Adjutant-General) to Price, 27th May 1863.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 860, General Orders No. 2 from Price, 6th June 1863.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 863, Holmes to Price, 8th June 1863 and Price to Holmes 9th June 1863.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 868, Holmes to Price, 15th June 1863.

⁹³ *O.R.*, Series I, Vol. XXII, Part I, pp. 407, S.S. Anderson to Holmes, 13th June 1863. Anderson was Kirby Smith's assistant adjutant-general and was forwarding a letter from Seddon to Johnston dated 25th May 1863, giving Holmes the discretion to act as he thought fit.

northern Arkansas.⁹⁴ Holmes was under the heavy influence of Price and he turned his thoughts northward, in support of another Missouri campaign. The objective of planning to attack Helena became a reality, but the forces were dispersed and needed to be brought together. The attack was beaten off on the 4th July 1863, the day Vicksburg surrendered, with heavy Confederate losses, after poor planning and execution by Holmes and Price. Kirby Smith's lack of focus on Vicksburg, despite requests for reinforcements and for assistance, meant that whatever the outcome of the attack on Helena, it had proven fruitless in defending Vicksburg. Holmes had been diverted away from the overriding Confederate objective of holding the Mississippi River Valley, by the local pressure to enter Missouri. The lack of co-ordinated action in the Trans-Mississippi had adversely affected the outcome of the Vicksburg Campaign. Because Kirby Smith had delegated this decision to Holmes, it was entirely his judgement that was applicable, as no other orders were given him in time to assist at Vicksburg. Having succeeded on the west side, the Union commanders were intent in securing the east side of the Mississippi River, after the Vicksburg surrender, by driving any opposition forces away from the scene of their success.

Army of Relief pursued by Sherman

During the siege, Grant had positioned Sherman's troops in defensive works facing toward Johnston, effectively cutting off any approach, because Sherman's flanks were protected by the Yazoo River to the north and the Big Black River to the south. Johnston confirmed that, "There was no hope of saving the place by raising the siege ... Reconnaissances ... convinced me that no attack upon the Federal position, north of the railroad, was practicable."⁹⁵ In early July 1863, Johnston began

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 407, Holmes to Kirby Smith 15th June 1863 and Kirby Smith to Holmes, 16th June 1863.

⁹⁵ Johnston, *Narrative*, p. 203.

reconnoitring south of the railroad, but learning of the fall of Vicksburg, he retreated to Jackson reaching the city on 7th July.⁹⁶ There was little possibility of approaching Sherman's positions unnoticed, so all that could be done was a frontal assault against the prepared positions. Johnston would have needed to have outnumbered Sherman to be successful in such an assault, but he had only about three-quarters of Sherman's strength. So Johnston, recognising the futility of the task, had been passive throughout the siege of Vicksburg.

As soon as surrender negotiations commenced, Grant ordered Sherman "to be ready to take the offensive against Johnston, ... and destroy his army if he could."⁹⁷ Grant had one eye on Johnston, even as Vicksburg fell. Dana noted, "The way in which Grant handled his army at the capitulation of Vicksburg was a splendid example of his energy. As soon as negotiations for surrender began ... he sent word to Sherman ... to get ready to move against Johnston."⁹⁸ Grant, having triumphed over Pemberton, was anxious to remove Johnston from the scene. The tables were turned and Sherman now prepared to attack Johnston, rather than remaining on the defensive.

Sherman was intent on destroying the Army of Relief, but Johnston would not allow his army to be surrounded. On the 9th July Sherman's army appeared at Jackson.⁹⁹ Johnston was critical of Pemberton's lightly prepared fortifications, but believed that they were enough to assist the defence.¹⁰⁰ Sherman commenced a siege of the city that Johnston was unable to resist, because of shortages of supplies and overwhelming Union artillery.¹⁰¹ The city was abandoned during the night of 16th

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁹⁷ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, p. 302.

⁹⁸ Dana, *Recollections*, p. 101.

⁹⁹ Johnston, *Narrative*, p. 205.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-6.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-8.

July, with the bridges over the Pearl River being destroyed to delay any pursuit.¹⁰² Johnston retreated eastward to Morton, arriving on 20th July, whereas Sherman set about completing the destruction of Jackson that he had partially carried out during the overland campaign before the Vicksburg siege commenced.¹⁰³ This was the first complete destruction of a city in the Civil War and marked an escalation in hard warfare practices. Sherman did not pursue Johnston's army into the interior due to shortages of water, combined with high summer heat and lengthening supply lines. Johnston could retire much further into the interior into Alabama, without being brought to battle and that would exacerbate the problems Sherman faced. Grant had captured Pemberton's army in its entirety, but Johnston had eluded Sherman and kept his army intact to fight another day.

Davis blames Johnston for the loss of Vicksburg

After Johnston had retreated away from Sherman and had stopped near Morton, Mississippi, the correspondence between himself and the President took a turn for the worse. According to John B. Jones, a clerk in the Richmond War Department "The President, sick as he is, has directed the Secretary of War to send him copies of all the correspondence with Johnston and Bragg, etc., on the subject of the relief of Pemberton."¹⁰⁴ Davis produced a lengthy document, in an overly-detailed style, that tore into Johnston point by point in thirty-four separate headings.¹⁰⁵ Johnston could only defend himself by answering each point.¹⁰⁶ The main thrust of Davis' letter was to reiterate that at all times since 24th November 1862, Johnston had been in command of the Department of the West and had never had the extent of his

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-210.

¹⁰⁴ John B. Jones, *A Rebel war clerk's diary at the Confederate States capital*. J. B. Lippincott & Co., (Philadelphia, 1866), p. 374, reproduced by University of Michigan Library, (Ann Arbor, 2008).

¹⁰⁵ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part I, pp. 202-7, Davis to Johnston, 15th July 1863.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-13, Johnston to Davis, 8th August 1863.

command modified in any way.¹⁰⁷ Johnston's response stated that he had already admitted that he was wrong on this point and that Davis was bringing up resolved points again.¹⁰⁸ Davis was seeking to review the whole Vicksburg Campaign outcome, rather than just picking up on the outstanding points at issue between them. This letter was unnecessary to improve the Southern military position, but Davis was driven to justify his own position by picking over the details of Johnston's campaign orders. Davis was not given to admitting he was wrong and he was anxious to gain satisfaction by ensuring that Johnston's shortcomings were fully exposed, whilst justifying his views.

Davis was insistent that he was correct to permit Pemberton to report directly to Richmond, as well as to Johnston. Creating a dual reporting structure created tensions in the high command in the Department of the West. Davis acknowledged that "the different armies in your geographical district were ordered to report directly to Richmond ... to avoid the evil that would result ... when your headquarters might be ... so located as to create delays injurious to the public interest."¹⁰⁹ Pemberton, when submitting an addendum to his Vicksburg Campaign report, noted: "In relation to General Johnston's complaint that I made my report direct to the War Department instead of to him, I am surprised, inasmuch as General Johnston had been previously informed by the War Department that I had the right to do so."¹¹⁰ Davis had ensured that communications necessary for command could be sent to Richmond rather than his department commander by insisting on dual reporting. Pemberton had ignored Johnston on several occasions and had sent communications directly to Richmond that he did not see. Davis had now modified his reasoning, by referring to the mobility of

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-7, Davis to Johnston, 15th July 1863.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-13, Johnston to Davis, 8th August 1863.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-7, Davis to Johnston, 15th July 1863.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 330, Pemberton to Seddon, 14th December 1863.

Johnston's headquarters location, when these movements had been infrequent and not in any way detrimental to communications. The submission of Pemberton's report, without it passing through Johnston's headquarters, was a blatant breach of military protocol. Dual reporting created a triangle of command rather than a hierarchy.

Johnston sent a lengthy response back to Davis, in which he mentioned several times that direct orders from Richmond caused him to consider an alternative course and limited his authority.¹¹¹ Johnston provided more detail of the reasons behind his decisions, presenting a sound military case for each of his actions.¹¹² He returned to the political question that he had never had answered: namely, guidance on whether Mississippi or Tennessee was the more important.¹¹³ Davis insisted that Johnston had been given the full authority to administer his department. Johnston was adamant that the distance between his two major armies was an insurmountable obstacle. This was a reasonable question, because the distances were great and whichever army provided reinforcements was weakened, making the state it was there to protect more vulnerable. Moving troops from Tennessee to Mississippi, during the Vicksburg Campaign, made the former state vulnerable. Johnston resisted this movement, because he knew that the loss of Tennessee would allow a wedge to be driven deep into the central Confederacy. Davis, having mulled over Johnston's response, decided not to challenge him in detail, but he had one last point he wanted to make.

Davis seized on the elements of the response, where Johnston had admitted his main mistake and settled for a small victory on this point, rather than pursuing every issue. When referring to the alleged existence of orders limiting the scope of Johnston's command, Davis pointed out that he had used the phrase "grave error" rather than the interpretation in Johnston's reply that referred to "a serious military

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-13, Johnston to Davis, 8th August 1863.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 209-13, Johnston to Davis, 8th August 1863.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-13, Johnston to Davis, 8th August 1863.

offense.”¹¹⁴ The President said, “I now cheerfully accept your admission of your ‘misapprehension’ ... and the mistake made by you, in attributing to me orders which I had not given, being now admitted, it is not necessary to dwell on these extraneous subjects.”¹¹⁵ Davis had started this exchange with a view to ensuring that Johnston was put in his place on many points, but it had ended weakly, as soon as the President obtained one limited admission. This admission that Davis now accepted had already been acknowledged by Johnston and so the end result was a hollow victory. All this correspondence achieved was a sense of satisfaction for Davis that he had been proven right.

Johnston had supporters in Congress, who raised the issue of his removal by Davis. First amongst these supporters and the main leader of opposition to Davis was Senator Louis T. Wigfall from Texas. Johnston had recuperated at Wigfall’s home after his wounding at Seven Pines and a long-lasting friendship had been the result. Another supporter, Senator R. M. T. Hunter from Virginia, wrote to Johnston that he had tried to view Johnston’s Vicksburg Campaign report at the War Department but it was with the House of Representatives; in any case, he noted that he did not need to see the report because, “I had read your letters to General Wigfall, and the explanation which they gave seemed to me to be sufficient.”¹¹⁶ Support had been marshalled in the House of Representatives and the result was that there was a demand for the House to see all of the correspondence between Davis and Johnston. The President had other issues to resolve, so the efforts of Wigfall and Hunter made no difference and Johnston was left in Mississippi. Johnston suffered as a result of the loss of Vicksburg, but he was not generally blamed, with the bulk of the criticism being aimed at Pemberton.

¹¹⁴ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXX, Part IV, pp. 618-9, Davis to Johnston, 7th September 1863.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 618-9, Davis to Johnston, 7th September 1863.

¹¹⁶ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part III, pp. 1065-6, Hunter to Johnston, 28th December 1863.

Clamour for Pemberton's removal from command

Pemberton's performance during Grant's overland campaign drew some protests to Davis, but once Vicksburg was lost the clamour for Pemberton's removal came from many opponents. Former Mississippi Governor John J. McRae wrote in mid-July 1863 that, "The sentiment of condemnation against him ... is severe and universal. It is both with the people and the Army."¹¹⁷ Mississippi Confederate Congressman Ethelbert Barksdale confirmed that Pemberton was "entirely out of favor."¹¹⁸ Colonel Richard Harrison reported that Pemberton was "a brave and patriotic officer but the entire Army has lost confidence in him."¹¹⁹ Mississippi Lawyer Reuben Davis thought the public and the troops believed that Pemberton was "a traitor and a fool."¹²⁰ Lieutenant-Colonel William L. Brandon, who met many of the paroled troops from Vicksburg, stated that, "The great despondency there, is attributable, Mr. President! to the entire want of confidence in Genl. Pemberton."¹²¹ Confederate Senator James Phelan, who had written at length in December 1862 concerning Pemberton, added his further opinion to Davis on 14th August 1863 that: "You cannot uphold him. ... The attempt will only destroy you."¹²² Joseph Davis, the President's older brother, added his opinion on Pemberton, "an accomplished soldier & gentl[ema]n ... but the command of troops in the field I believe him unfit."¹²³ The complaints about Pemberton's loyalty and commitment to the Southern cause were unjust and this was acknowledged by a number of the correspondents. However, there was general consensus that Pemberton had lost the support of the troops and could not continue in command. It would have taken a brave man to persevere with

¹¹⁷ *Davis papers, Vol. 9*, McRae to Davis, 21st July 1863, p. 297.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Barksdale to Davis, 29th July 1863, p. 312.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Harrison to Davis, 30th July 1863, p. 315.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, Reuben Davis to Davis, 2nd August 1863, p. 319.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, Brandon to Davis, 8th August 1863, pp. 323-5.

¹²² *Ibid.*, Phelan to Davis, 14th August 1863, p. 343.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, Joseph Davis to Davis, 9th September 1863, pp. 377-8.

Pemberton, but there was no need to make the decision. Pemberton had given furloughs to his paroled army, so he had no troops to command. He decided to write his Vicksburg campaign report in Gainesville, Alabama, submitting it to Richmond on 25th August 1863. Johnston was in charge of the Army of Relief in Mississippi and the troops that returned after being exchanged had an army available to join. Davis, however, drew wider criticisms than those related to Pemberton.

Davis received challenges from Mississippi

The loss of Vicksburg prompted others to add their voices to the criticism, but some were aimed directly at Davis, whilst others were aimed at other aspects of command in the West. Phelan directly challenged Davis: “you never yield a *partiality* for a *friend*, or a *prejudice*, against a *person*; and, that, *blinded* by this peculiarity, you fail to perceive, what is palpable to all others, and disregard as ignorance or resent as dictation, any effort to change your convictions.”¹²⁴ This was a powerful observation that was a succinct summary of Davis’ personality in relation to his friendships, but the letter did not name anyone other than Pemberton, although the scope was intended to be wider.

Others who complained to Davis particularly mentioned Holmes, as well as Pemberton. Brandon wrote, “the same feeling exists as intensely, Mr. President! on the west of the Mississippi, to Genl. Ho[l]mes, as it does on the East to Genl. Pemberton. ... when they found Genl Ho[l]mes was still in command, they were greatly discouraged & demoralised.”¹²⁵ Chaplain B. T. Kavanaugh deemed Pemberton “wholly incompetent ... [and] Holmes, with no merit – no action ...

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, Phelan to Davis, 14th August 1863, p. 343.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, Brandon to Davis, 8th August 1863, pp. 323-5.

relieve us of these drones ... give us Generals of known ability.”¹²⁶ Davis’ adversary, Mississippi Congressman Henry S. Foote, criticised the selection of Holmes and Pemberton in the West.¹²⁷ Davis had written to Holmes on 15th July 1863, shortly before these criticisms began to arrive, “to renew to you the assurances of my full confidence and most friendly regard ... We have rumors that your attack on Helena has failed. I hope the reverse may be true.”¹²⁸ Davis had no inclination to remove Holmes from command, despite the rumours of the defeat at Helena. Holmes had not reported the January defeat at the Post of Arkansas, and Davis had learnt from another source before Holmes had reported the 4th July 1863 outcome at Helena to him. His opinion of his long-term friend was unchanged and he would not bend to criticism. Davis would not consider replacing Holmes, but circumstances meant that the President was now faced with a decision on how to use Pemberton, his trusted, but vanquished, Lieutenant-General from Vicksburg.

Pemberton’s reassignment and Bragg’s replacement by Johnston

The shortage of talented generals meant that Davis could not afford to have any senior general idle for any length of time, and he believed that he needed to support those in whom he had trust, through all of the backbiting that seemed to be present with top-level command. The problems in Bragg’s army had consistently caused dissention, and after Chickamauga, Lieutenant-General Leonidas Polk had been placed under arrest.¹²⁹ Polk, as a long-term personal friend of Davis from their days as classmates at West Point, considered himself above his commander’s orders. The simmering resentment that had started in the Kentucky campaign and continued

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, Kavanaugh to Davis, 13th August 1863, p. 342.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, Foote to Davis, 26th August 1863, p. 356.

¹²⁸ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. LIII, pp. 881, Davis to Holmes, 15th July 1863.

¹²⁹ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXX, Part II, p. 55, Bragg to Cooper, 29th September 1863.

through the battle of Murfreesboro had now risen again after the battle of Chickamauga. Davis noted that Bragg “has the power to arrest an officer of his command, but is bound in that case to show cause by preferring charges as prescribed.”¹³⁰ Davis, however, had finally faced the long-delayed realisation that Bragg and Polk could not continue in the same army. He proposed to replace Polk with Pemberton.

Pemberton had been idle through the summer and early autumn of 1863, but wanted to take on a further senior role. Cooper wrote to Bragg recording that there was known prejudice against Pemberton, but asking if this was weak enough in Tennessee to ensure his usefulness as a corps commander.¹³¹ Pierre Beauregard requested that his brother and aide, Captain Armand N. T. Beauregard, visit Bragg. Whilst in Chattanooga, he wrote to his brother stating that “General Pemberton ... had accompanied the President, expecting to be the successor of General Polk, but abandoned his pretensions upon learning the opposition raised by the troops.”¹³² This view was echoed by W. W. Mackall, Bragg’s Chief of Staff, who wrote to Johnston: “Pemberton consulted me about staying here in command of a corps. I told him that there was not a division in this army that would be willing to receive him.”¹³³ Davis, correctly, did not press the point, because the wounds in the Department of the West were still sufficiently raw to prevent the appointment.

Davis had still not solved either the problem over what to do with Pemberton or the long-term difficulty with Bragg. Bragg, after Chickamauga, had been unable to prevent the Union army from occupying Chattanooga, so he took up positions overlooking the city on Lookout Mountain to the south-west and on Missionary Ridge

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55, Davis endorsement on letter from Bragg to Cooper, 29th September 1863.

¹³¹ *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XXX, Part IV, p. 727, Cooper to Bragg, 4th October 1863.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 734-6, A. N. T. Beauregard to P. G. T. Beauregard, 10th October 1863.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp 742-3, Mackall to Johnston, 13th October 1863.

to the south-east. The Union army was reinforced by the troops released from the Vicksburg Campaign. Sherman's troops drove Bragg's army in shameful disarray from the top of Missionary Ridge. This time Bragg could not survive the decreased confidence in his leadership, so he resigned. Davis replaced him reluctantly, because his only real option was Johnston, who took command, with Bragg departing for Richmond in an advisory role. Davis only had the problem with Pemberton left to resolve.

Pemberton applied for a demotion after months of idleness, taking up a position as a colonel of artillery in the Richmond defences. Pemberton was loyal to the Southern cause, demonstrating true commitment by his willingness to accept any position Davis saw fit.¹³⁴ Davis solved the problem by getting Pemberton to resign as a Lieutenant-General in the provisional army and revert to his pre-war Union rank of a Colonel in the regular army.¹³⁵ His detractors were left to consider his lack of competence arising from his over-promotion. Pemberton's promotion, to a command that proved to be beyond his abilities, was a risk Davis took that was reasonable in the circumstances, given his early successes in Mississippi. The allegations of subversion arising from his Northern birth and his surrender on 4th July 1863 were proven to be false. Someone who was not true to the Southern cause would not have accepted the scale of the opposition and could easily have departed northward or could have taken no further part in the Civil War. Pemberton continued to put himself in harm's way for the Confederacy. Davis had persevered with both Bragg and Pemberton because of his unerring belief in their abilities. Despite the concerted opposition he had remained loyal to his friends and to those in whom he had faith.

¹³⁴ Pemberton III, *Pemberton*. Letter from Pemberton to Davis, 9th March 1864, quoted on p. 261.

¹³⁵ Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, Vol. 2, Da Capo Press, (New York, 1990), p. 442. This an unabridged republication of the 1881 original.

Conclusion

Allowing the Vicksburg siege to develop in May 1863 to defend the city was a disaster for the Confederacy. Davis' orders were proven to be strategically unsound. Johnston had, correctly, remonstrated against allowing the siege to happen. A mobile army, as advocated by Johnston, could have remained a thorn in Grant's side, but a lost army was a disaster. Davis had little defence because Pemberton had just tried to carry out his orders, so his mistakes were from the same mould as the President's. Although Davis' twin objectives of preventing Union navigation of the Mississippi River and of maintaining a connection with the Trans-Mississippi were laudable, there came a point when the consequences of losing were greater than the prize. After the loss of Vicksburg, Davis engaged in lengthy correspondence with Johnston aimed at placing the blame squarely on his shoulders, which many historians classified as unworthy and aimed at proving that the was President right.¹³⁶ Apart from his war of words with Johnston, Davis made three further misjudgements during and after the siege operations.

First, he was convinced that a siege could be resisted and he expected Johnston to achieve a break-in using the Army of Relief. Other historians have not amplified this point, Woodworth (1990), for instance, referring to a simultaneous break-in and breakout but not elaborating on the options possible.¹³⁷ The President realised that quick action from the Army of Relief to break-in to Vicksburg with supplies was needed, before the North could ship substantial reinforcements. Johnston, rightly, believed that this task was impossible. Opening a supply corridor

¹³⁶ See William J. Cooper Jr., *Jefferson Davis, American*, Vintage Books, New York, 2001, p. 472 (this was a paperback edition of the 2000 original), Steven E. Woodworth, *Jefferson Davis and his generals. The failure of Confederate command in the West*, University Press of Kansas, (Lawrence, 1990), p. 211, William C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis. The man and his hour*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1996), p. 472. (this was a paperback edition of the 1991 original) and Michael B. Ballard, *Vicksburg: The campaign that opened the Mississippi*, The University of North Carolina Press, (Chapel Hill, 2004), pp. 425-6.

¹³⁷ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, p. 211.

into Vicksburg would make the flanks of the Army of Relief vulnerable to continual assault, something it could not hope to withstand. The only hope for Pemberton was if he could break out through a corridor kept open for a short time for that purpose by Johnston. This possibility was never discussed between them because of the difficulty in communications, but Johnston already knew that Pemberton would not evacuate Vicksburg, because of Davis' direct orders. Johnston was right about the lack of military value of Vicksburg, once gunboats were south of the city, but the political dimension of allowing unrestricted use of the Mississippi River for Northern commerce was still worth preventing, but not if the city was to be subjected to siege operations. During early June 1863, the Confederacy had more troops available, in Vicksburg and Jackson, than were available to the Union. However, with Grant's army between them, there was little chance of co-ordinating an attack to make the superior numbers tell. Furthermore, Pemberton was never convinced to use all of his troops in his field army, so the numerical superiority could never have been assembled. Difficult communications, from mid-June onward, meant that co-ordinating a plan for those inside and outside of the city to strike simultaneously was impossible once the siege operations had settled. Johnston could do nothing to relieve the encirclement and there was only ever a slim chance of co-ordinating with Pemberton throughout the siege.

Second, he did not appreciate the strength of the campaign waged by Grant and Sherman, nor did he appreciate the ruthless developments toward hard war that were aimed at the civilians, as well as the military within the city. Woodworth argued that Davis did not understand Grant's campaign for the rest of his life.¹³⁸ Cooper (2000) thought that Grant's plan was masterful and believed that only Johnston had a

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

good understanding of the Union designs.¹³⁹ Grimsley (1995) analysed the development of hard war in Mississippi in the first half of 1863, suggesting that it was merely a necessary adjunct to the war, by removing from civilians the means to support the Confederate forces.¹⁴⁰ This harder style of campaign was not used in the East at this time in the Civil War. As the siege commenced, in late May 1863, the citizens and soldiers within the Vicksburg defences had blamed Pemberton, rightly, for his poor field leadership. Morale within the defeated troops had slumped, but when they met the defiance of the citizens and of the garrison troops, there was renewed determination to defend the city. However, this had little to do with Pemberton's leadership. The recovery in morale from meeting those within Vicksburg, untouched by the earlier defeats, produced the conditions for unexpected resistance. The civilians were subjected to the same conditions as the military throughout the forty-seven days of the siege. Civilian support never wavered and Grant's siege operations were aimed at wearing down the resistance of all within the city. Grant had no alternative but to use tactics that wore down the civilians as well as the military, so that all of the Confederate opposition within the city was weakened by bombardment, by lack of food, by casualties and by disease. Grant took sufficient precautions to prevent Johnston from approaching Vicksburg from the north-east, which was the only feasible route, because of the terrain. This task he had delegated to Sherman, whose strongly-entrenched positions made Johnston rightly cautious in attempting an attack. By mid-June 1863, Grant had sufficient reinforcements, so that Sherman was able to take up a defensive position facing Johnston that was virtually immune from capture. Johnston decided not to risk any proportion of his army on fruitless attacks. The combination of hard war tactics and substantial, dual-facing,

¹³⁹ Cooper, *Davis*, p. 471 and p. 475.

¹⁴⁰ Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, (Cambridge, U. K., 1995), pp. 151-7.

field fortifications, toward the city and toward Johnston, wore down the Vicksburg occupants and prevented the Army of Relief from having an opening that could be exploited.

Third, after the loss of the city Davis ignored complaints about Pemberton, to the extent that he tried to appoint him to the Army of Tennessee. Woodworth noted that Davis had a high opinion of Pemberton and W. C. Davis (1991) thought that the President saw Pemberton as a casualty.¹⁴¹ Cooper argued that the President was irrational in attempting to appoint Pemberton in Tennessee.¹⁴² Ballard (2004) noted that Phelan had challenged Davis over Pemberton's appointment in December 1862.¹⁴³ However, these historians have not identified the extraordinary level of, mostly, well-balanced complaints that Davis received and subsequently ignored. Davis tried to place Pemberton in the Army of Tennessee, when it had been made perfectly obvious to him that the extent of opposition was substantial. Phelan again challenged Davis in August 1863 after the fall of Vicksburg. He provided the most accurate contemporary insight into Davis' personality when it came to appointing and standing by friends, despite complaints over their capabilities. Davis, with complete loyalty, ignored the condemnation of Pemberton during his attempt to appoint him to divisional command within the Army of Tennessee, in October 1863, but he did accept the views of the army during his visit. Whilst the public criticism of Pemberton was justified because of his lack of military capability, it was not justified in relation to his Northern birth and to the allegations of being a traitor. Nevertheless, the allegations impaired Pemberton's usefulness and Davis failed to recognise this, displaying a conviction that demonstrated he had an iron will.

¹⁴¹ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, pp. 218-9 and W. C. Davis, *Davis*, p. 509.

¹⁴² Cooper, *Davis*, p. 491.

¹⁴³ Ballard, *Vicksburg*, pp. 119-120.

Allowing the siege to take place amounted to an all-or-nothing gamble by Davis and Pemberton. Losing Vicksburg, when Grant's overland campaign had been spectacularly successful, was survivable for the Confederacy, but causing the loss of the army at the same time by adherence to a stubborn principle, when the city was lost anyway, was a massive error. Pemberton's only defence was that he had been following Davis' superior orders, but he made two misjudgements of his own during the siege.

First, he did not develop his thinking from that advocated by Davis and would not obey Johnston's orders to temporarily abandon Vicksburg. Ballard noted that Pemberton was sandwiched between Johnston and Davis, but the most insightful analysis was by W. C. Davis who argued that Grant could only have been defeated if the Confederate response was fast and properly co-ordinated.¹⁴⁴ The necessary brevity of dispatches could not persuade Pemberton to avoid becoming trapped in the city and it would have taken a meeting with Johnston, at the very least, to have convinced him of the merit of freeing his army from Vicksburg. Because Pemberton had shown no desire to break out, Johnston had only one unpalatable option, which was to break-in to Vicksburg using the Army of Relief. Pemberton, toward the end of June 1863, was considering surrender, but he suggested to Johnston that Grant might let him march his army out of the city, so that the Union did not have to fight the unknown number of Confederates in Johnston's Army of Relief. This demonstrated how far apart Pemberton's thinking was from Johnston's. Johnston knew that Grant wanted to capture Pemberton's army and he knew the area between his army and Vicksburg had been targeted by Sherman to ensure that the Army of Relief could not subsist off the land. Grimsley (1995) argued that hard war at this stage of the

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170 and W. C. Davis, *Davis*, p. 471.

campaign consisted at a directed severity born out of military necessity, but he did not comment on the actions taken against the Vicksburg civilians who were subjected to continuous bombardment and food deprivation.¹⁴⁵ Pemberton was mired in the thinking that Grant's primary goal was to capture Vicksburg and he expected Grant to let his army escape in return for surrendering the city. He did not appreciate the shift in Northern thinking on prosecuting the war, with its twin goals being to eliminate the Confederate army and to destroy the morale of the civilian population, as part of the methods used to capture the city.

Second, he was naïve over the surrender on 4th July and tried to post-rationalise his decision. Ballard noted the strength of feeling against Pemberton and Woodworth mentioned Pemberton's vilification over the date of the surrender, but neither historian analysed the circumstances of the 4th July surrender.¹⁴⁶ The timings during the surrender negotiations showed that he had sought to avoid an assault on his troops, who were weakened from lack of food. After the surrender, Pemberton was wrongly accused of being a Northern-born traitor, but he was incorrect to use 4th July as either an opportunity for bargaining or for justifying his action afterward, whichever was the true reason. Pemberton should have been aware of the propaganda value to the North and surrendered either earlier or later. The vilification in the South was at a personal level and this was unfair to a man who had complied with Davis' requirements. When the surrender negotiations commenced on 3rd July, Grant reported that the delayed conclusion until the next day was because of tardiness in Pemberton's acceptance and he denied that he had allowed better terms because of Independence Day. Pemberton altered his reasons for surrendering by the time he wrote his campaign report in August 1863. Shortage of food caused the surrender and

¹⁴⁵ Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, (Cambridge, U. K., 1995), p. 157.

¹⁴⁶ Ballard, *Vicksburg*, pp. 412-3 and Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, p. 218.

Pemberton had confirmed to Johnston twice that his food stocks would run out at about the date of his eventual surrender. The initiation of discussions at 10am on 3rd July supported Grant's opinion that Pemberton wished to avoid a major Union assault rumoured for 4th July, because he knew the weakened condition of his troops would lead to a humiliating defeat. The attempt to post-rationalise his reasoning was not becoming of a top-level leader, but it was the conduct of someone who was simply out of his depth.

During May 1863, in the Trans-Mississippi, Kirby Smith did contribute to the Vicksburg Campaign by keeping Banks occupied in the Red River Valley. This helped to free some of the Port Hudson garrison to reinforce Vicksburg. Kirby Smith made two misjudgements during the Vicksburg Campaign.

First, he believed that he had the luxury of time to attack Grant's supply route on the west bank of the Mississippi River after Banks retired from the Red River Valley in May 1863. Woodworth noted that Kirby Smith did not believe in Taylor's argument that attacking New Orleans would cause northern troops to leave Port Hudson, which would then release Confederate troops to join Johnston.¹⁴⁷ Kirby Smith did not have an alternative plan, beyond keeping his troops in the Red River Valley until he was sure that Banks had retired. He did not order an attack on Grant's supply bases until early June when Union supplies had already been diverted to the Yazoo River for more than two weeks. This was an understandable error given the pressure that Taylor was under, but Davis had required that defence of the Mississippi River be given priority. Kirby Smith chose to ignore this requirement and gave priority to his local issue instead. Davis did not issue mandatory orders and Kirby Smith did not respond with alacrity.

¹⁴⁷ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, p. 214.

Second, he allowed Holmes discretion to apply his own judgement, rather than ordering him to assist at Vicksburg. No other historian has argued this point in relation to the Vicksburg Campaign. This was an important error because Holmes was the only commander who could have assisted once Walker was ordered to the Red River Valley. Kirby Smith made the decision to leave Holmes in command in Arkansas, rather than giving him a less contentious role, and he also made the decision to give him extensive discretion in the way he carried out his command. Leaving the west bank of the Mississippi River for Holmes to defend, when he had no real inclination to co-operate, had significant implications for the defence of Vicksburg. Kirby Smith had abandoned Vicksburg to its fate by having no involvement in the strategy in Arkansas. He was aware of Davis' requirement to give Vicksburg priority, but he abdicated responsibility, which was a poor decision from someone who was supposed to provide leadership across the whole Trans-Mississippi department.

Once the surrender of Vicksburg was achieved, Grant's objectives immediately changed, and his earlier preparations for pursuing Johnston were enacted. Johnston, also exhibiting superior military skills, was alert to this possibility, retreating before Sherman's larger numbers into the interior of Mississippi after avoiding a siege at Jackson. Grimsley argued that the second time Jackson was captured was the first time in the Civil War that destruction of the South's economy was targeted without there being a pressing military necessity.¹⁴⁸ This time Sherman's destruction in Jackson went far beyond the destruction of military targets and mere foraging. Sherman had not been able to make preparations for a lengthy supply chain, so Johnston's army retired into the interior unmolested and lived to fight

¹⁴⁸ Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, p. 159.

another day. Johnston had demonstrated the Fabian tactics that he had wanted Pemberton to apply to ensure that his army was secured.

Johnston had a difficult task to carry out during the time from taking up command in the Department of the West in December 1862 until being relieved of command of the Army of Tennessee in July 1863. Sandwiched between Davis and Pemberton, who had like-minded opinions on the defence of Vicksburg, Johnston was in an impossible situation, particularly as Pemberton was allowed to bypass him and report directly to Richmond. Davis did not understand that his support for the dual reporting hampered Johnston, and because of that he did not understand his own culpability. Davis and Pemberton did not see Johnston's inaction in that light. Johnston's heart had not been in his new role in the West and he could not raise his enthusiasm during the Vicksburg Campaign.

Davis had a will of iron, but he was also blinkered to his own fallibility and, when he had a strong personal attachment, he was also blinkered to the fallibility of his chosen subordinates. His stubborn support for Pemberton, Bragg and Holmes had continued long after most of his contemporaries had realised that they were in positions that were beyond their capabilities. Johnston had not performed well and he became a target for Davis to blame. Johnston must bear responsibility for not making a better attempt to carry out his command as Davis had designed, but he simply didn't have the ability, enthusiasm or authority to rise to the challenge. Not many commanders would have been able to function effectively with the lack of command capability shown by Pemberton, Bragg and Holmes. The President was adamant that his command structure was sound, so he supported his chosen generals before, during, and after the siege, regardless of opposition and Johnston bore the brunt of his anger for the defeat at Vicksburg.

Chapter seven

Conclusion

Introduction

President Jefferson Davis had the greatest share of responsibility for the Confederate disaster on 4th July 1863 at Vicksburg. Others contributed to the catastrophe, but they did so within a strategic framework created and orchestrated by Davis. When the American Civil War has been reviewed as a whole, leading historians have concluded that Davis performed well because he directed the struggle for four years.¹ However, the defeat at Vicksburg resulted from a series of major errors that were within the control of the President. Davis failed because he did not develop a coherent strategy for the West; he persevered with ineffective generals in command; he stuck with his decisions despite calamitous errors; and he did not react to the change in thinking needed, as new forms of warfare were developed by the North. Each of these key aspects of his failure have been analysed in the context of the Vicksburg Campaign.

At the heart of Davis' concern to retain Vicksburg at all costs was his desire to prevent the North from gaining the valuable ability to navigate the full length of the Mississippi River. A less important objective was to maintain the supply route across the river. For both sides, large numbers of troops could only be moved quickly using the railroads or the rivers. General Joseph E. Johnston, correctly, had the opinion that once Vicksburg was bypassed by gunboats in mid-April 1863, it had lost its military value, whereas Davis believed there was political value in continuing to deny access for commercial shipping and to retain territory in Confederate hands. The defence of

¹ Stephen E. Woodworth, *Jefferson Davis and his generals. The failure of Confederate command in the West*, University Press of Kansas, (Lawrence, 1990), p. 316. William C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis. The man and his hour*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1996), p. 704. This was the paperback edition of the 1991 original. William J. Cooper, Jr., *Jefferson Davis, American*, Vintage Books, (New York, 2001), pp. 705-6. This was a paperback edition of the 2000 original.

fixed points was valid militarily only if the South had a sufficiently large defensive force that was under capable leadership. Because Northern resources were more extensive than those of the South, the most feasible military strategy, for the Confederate Mississippi forces, involved the use of Fabian tactics. Johnston wanted Confederate strategy to move away from holding the fixed point of Vicksburg at all costs, in favour of mobility for the army, in the belief that an eventual field victory would return the city, if it was initially lost. Davis and Lieutenant-General John C. Pemberton did not want to surrender the city at all and saw the defence of the fixed point of Vicksburg as their primary goal. These opposing points of view plagued Confederate leadership during the Vicksburg Campaign.

Strategy for the West

The Confederacy had no common strategy for the defence of the Mississippi River Valley. Woodworth (1990), the leading historian on this topic agreed on this fundamental point, but there were some aspects of the Vicksburg Campaign that warranted further analysis, because some of the issues identified made development of an effective strategy more difficult.² Each departmental commander had local needs to meet, arising from the pressure from local politicians, the desires of local military commanders, and the actions of the locally opposing forces. These factors made it difficult for decisive action toward Confederate goals, unless the strategy was communicated and guiding orders were given from Richmond. The Confederate departmental structure was often a sound way to organise military commands, but problems arose when co-operation between departments was required. In the East, Davis and General Robert E. Lee agreed on the strategy, but in the vast expanses of

² Steven E. Woodworth, *Jefferson Davis and his generals, The failure of Confederate command in the West*, University Press of Kansas, (Lawrence, 1990), p. 219.

the West, with theatre commands divided between Lieutenant-General Edmund Kirby Smith in the Trans-Mississippi and Johnston in the Department of the West, a common strategy for the defence of the Mississippi River Valley was needed.

Davis did not understand that he had taken on the co-ordinating role for his Western geographical departments, by default, because he expected his strategy for the defence of the Mississippi River Valley to be enacted by voluntary co-operation from Kirby Smith and Johnston. Woodworth agreed on this point but during the Vicksburg Campaign, there was another important factor to be taken into account.³ Although the responsibility for co-operation rested with Johnston and Kirby Smith, neither was directly involved and the responsibility devolved so that Lieutenant-General Theophilus H. Holmes was expected to co-operate with Pemberton. Unfortunately, Holmes was focused on Arkansas and Missouri. Furthermore, he did not respect Pemberton and so he failed to offer the vital support that was needed. To the President, the importance of the defence of the Mississippi River Valley was obvious and he naively expected that Holmes would also see that this was the most important issue in the West, so he did not issue the direct orders that would have forced him to set aside his prejudice toward Pemberton. Davis was the only person who could have provided orders so that Holmes and Pemberton co-operated to defend the Mississippi River Valley at Vicksburg.

Davis believed that Pemberton's defensive arrangements in Mississippi were capable of withstanding Grant's efforts to capture Vicksburg, so the President determined that the city must be defended at all costs. Other historians have not examined where this line of reasoning emerged, in the context of the Vicksburg Campaign, and it can be traced back to Davis' requirement that Pemberton defend

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-4.

Charleston in a similar manner. Davis' assertions convinced Pemberton to conduct his defence by waiting for an attack in the proximity of Vicksburg, rather than achieving the mobility that Johnston required. Johnston had noted deficiencies in the defensive arrangements, but Davis discounted this advice during his December 1862 western visit. The strategy for the defence of Vicksburg went no further than Pemberton's decision to garrison important points, site guns along the Mississippi River, and wait for an attack. Because Davis believed that the defences at Vicksburg were impregnable, he instructed Pemberton that he should never give up control of the city.

Davis agreed with Pemberton that the landward defences at Vicksburg were designed to withstand a siege, which had a strategic implication for Johnston. This was an important factor not discussed by other historians, who have analysed the Vicksburg Campaign. The design of the fortifications affected the defensive strategy. Johnston and Bowen disagreed with Davis and Pemberton on the form that the river and landward defences should take at Vicksburg. This was crucial to determining the number of troops required for the river defences and it had a corresponding effect by reducing the number of troops available for Pemberton's mobile field army. There were two Confederate schools of thinking on how to prevent the passage of Union gunboats, so that the Mississippi River was denied to Union shipping. Both schools agreed that the defences had to be sufficient to withstand infantry assaults from the river and that the gun emplacements had to be well protected from the fire of gunboats. The separation in thinking between the two schools came when landward defence was considered. It was difficult to ensure that the attackers could be beaten, unless they were confronted when they were in the act of landing on the east bank with a sufficiently large field army. One school of thought, championed by Davis and

Pemberton, believed that a large garrison supported by a relieving army would lead to victory and the other school, championed by Johnston, believed that the North would win unless the strategy was changed. Johnston advocated a reduced number of garrison troops, but sufficient to prevent a landing, with the rest of the troops kept mobile to combat an attacking army. Brigadier-General John S. Bowen, independently, supported Johnston's thinking and designed his defences at Grand Gulf accordingly. Major-General Ulysses S. Grant was unable to land there at the end of April 1863. Bowen was a skilful architect and his defences were a quickly-constructed model of efficiency. Pemberton had these fortifications within his command and he ought to have considered a similar design for Vicksburg. However, the Vicksburg defensive works were protected to the landward side by an extensive system of fortifications, intended to resist a siege. Johnston believed that Grant would win, if a siege developed, and that the best chance of success was to concentrate the army to oppose the Union forces as they landed, before they could get all of their forces ashore, or shortly after landing, before they were reinforced. Davis should have discussed the merits of this argument, reached an agreement and then allowed Johnston to issue orders to Pemberton. Instead, Davis had set Pemberton's mind on resisting a siege from an early stage in the defence of Vicksburg, a factor which was not lost on Johnston.

Davis persevered with theatre command for the Department of the West, but Johnston did not accept the scope of his assignment, because he knew that the North had gained the military advantage of interior lines. Woodworth has covered this point, but he did not accept that the advantage of interior lines had been gained by the North, arguing that earlier in 1862 General Braxton Bragg had achieved the feat of

moving his army from Mississippi to central Tennessee.⁴ However, after the defeat at Corinth in October 1862, the South lost this capability, when both armies in the Department of the West were pressed simultaneously. Davis never reached agreement with Johnston, who did not accept the responsibility of commanding simultaneously in Mississippi and Tennessee. Since both armies were outnumbered, Johnston refused to move troops, but Davis clung to the belief that this could be achieved. Davis persevered with his concept of theatre command in the West throughout the Vicksburg Campaign, even though his chosen commander did not believe in the key aspect of his role; the ability to move troops between his main armies.

Davis applied dual standards to the way he allowed his two theatre commanders in the West to organise their departments. This point has not been argued by other historians, in relation to the Vicksburg Campaign. Davis allowed Kirby Smith to command, to the west of the Mississippi River, in a substantially different way from his assertions on the methods Johnston was to use, to the east of the river. Kirby Smith examined the size of his department on arrival in March 1863, decided it was too big to allow his role to involve field command and announced to Davis that he saw his position as purely administrative. Davis did not challenge Kirby Smith's assessment of his role. Johnston, who had a similar role, was given a substantially different brief. Davis insisted that Johnston base himself with one of his field armies, taking direct command when present. Johnston was not allowed to view his position as merely administrative, but he did refuse to take command when present, because he saw this aspect of his role as impracticable and demeaning to his army commanders. Johnston protested about the way the President expected him to

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5.

exercise his command, but Davis would not yield from his own assessment. In Kirby Smith's case, Davis had allowed a diplomatic commander to assess how he was to carry out his command and in the other case he was rigid in his requirements, giving Johnston little latitude. The President, wrongly, insisted that the Department of the West was organised in a way that was not supported by his chosen commander and it was, thus, unworkable.

Competence of the Confederate western generals

The successful defence of Vicksburg and the Mississippi River Valley required above average competence from the senior Confederate generals, because Grant was a superior adversary who could only have been countered by exceptional leadership. Woodworth, in his seminal study, carried out a perceptive analysis of the Confederate generals in the West, but notably omitted mention of Bowen.⁵ Woodworth argued that Davis had a difficult relationship with Johnston that meant that they should not have worked together in the West and he further argued that Davis made errors in the appointments of Pemberton, Polk and Holmes, each of whom affected the outcome of the Vicksburg Campaign.⁶ Woodworth initially supported Bragg because of Polk's scheming, but concluded that the failure to sort out the command problems in the Army of Tennessee earlier meant that later Bragg was in an untenable position.⁷ These points made by Woodworth were accepted, but there were further considerations. Davis had a small pool of talented generals, led by the exceptional Lee in the East. He had to use commanders in the West, whom he had determined were competent, but who were not as talented as Lee. Most competent

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 305-310.

⁶ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*. For opinions on Johnston pp. 184-5, on Pemberton, p.185, on Polk, p.185 and on Holmes, p.123.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 185 and p. 254.

Confederate generals would, almost certainly, have been outclassed by Grant, so it was not a fair judgement to classify a losing general as incompetent merely on that count alone. However, Davis persevered with commanders in the West, who were sub-standard and who did not demonstrate the basic competency required for the level of command that they attained. They either failed to co-operate toward the key objective of defending Vicksburg or they detracted from its defence by causing problems in the adjacent departments. The competence of each of these generals has been considered, in relation to their performance in the West, so far as it affected the Vicksburg Campaign.

Johnston's relationship with Davis was complex to understand, because he was an old friend, who became a lifelong enemy. Woodworth argued that Davis should not have retained Johnston in command because he would not work with theatre command, he was uncooperative and he would not take action with the Army of Relief.⁸ Woodworth assessed Johnston as intelligent and skilful, but lacking the qualities of a great military leader.⁹ Woodworth's analysis of Johnston warranted development as there were further aspects to be considered. Davis, rightly, had a major concern that Johnston was not aggressive and would retreat before superior forces, rather than fight. Johnston was secretive and touchy on matters that he considered impugned his honour, to the point where Davis found him insubordinate. Despite these reservations, Davis unwisely decided to appoint Johnston to theatre command of the Department of the West in November 1862. Davis' motivation for promoting Johnston stemmed from Bragg's request to have an overall commander in the West. For political reasons, Davis had to find a senior role for Johnston. Davis did not want to replace Bragg and having Johnston in this new position meant that he

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5 and pp. 309-310.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5.

could avoid an unpleasant decision. It also meant that Johnston was not in charge of a field army, so there was a reduced risk of retreating and giving up territory. The following month the President's actions, during his visit to the West, were contrary to Johnston's opinions. This confirmed to him that his position was merely nominal. In Mississippi, because Pemberton was able to report directly to the President, Johnston knew that he could never exercise his own command philosophy, so he remained in Tennessee. Whilst there, Johnston made the major mistake of removing most of Pemberton's cavalry, which was as a direct result of Davis' earlier interference, rather than from military necessity. When Davis ordered Johnston to Mississippi in early May 1863, he went with reluctance and spent his time assembling the Army of Relief without making any aggressive effort to counter Grant and Sherman. Because Johnston had been passive in Virginia as an army commander, it was a leap of faith on Davis' part to expect him to rise to a more complex challenge. Johnston never had control of Pemberton's army in Mississippi, so he could only have been held responsible for being cautious in the way he used the Army of Relief. After the fall of Vicksburg, Davis blamed Johnston for failing to fight, but he was wary of the strength and aggression of the Union campaign, seeing no benefit in useless attacks. Johnston failed badly as commander of the Department of the West, but he was unenthusiastic when he was given the role and Davis' interference meant he lost interest completely. In these circumstances, Johnston was culpable for not trying to relieve Vicksburg when he first arrived in Jackson, but he was not to blame for selecting other western commanders who were short of ability.

The conflict between Bragg and Lieutenant-General Leonidas Polk caused a drain on Johnston and the performance of the Army of Tennessee. Woodworth argued that Davis should have removed Polk after Kentucky and after Murfreesboro

he should have removed Bragg, who by then was unable to be effective.¹⁰

Woodworth believed that Bragg was an able general and he argued that Davis was unable to see that his old friend Polk was undermining Bragg to the point where command in the Army of Tennessee was in chaos.¹¹ Woodworth has again made a perceptive argument that can be expanded. Continuing with this structure unchanged was a major error that spilled over into the Vicksburg Campaign, affecting the quality of Southern leadership on hand, because Johnston remained in Tennessee, taking little part in the defence of the Mississippi River Valley. As a personal friend of Davis, whatever the real opinions of Bragg and Johnston, Polk was in an unassailable position, despite his under-achievement. Polk should never have risen to corps command and owed his position to attending West Point at the same time as Davis, resulting in a lifelong friendship. Bragg had not performed well as department commander, but his performance was made worse by Polk's intransigence on the battlefields at Perryville, Murfreesboro and Chickamauga. This did not stop Davis from promoting Polk to Lieutenant-General, when his performance did not merit the rank he already had. It was unfair of Davis to expect Johnston to retain Polk at Bragg's expense. Johnston was willing to support Bragg, who had proven to be a good organiser of his army, but he did not succeed as an army commander in battle and so he had been promoted to a level that he could not sustain. He was better suited to organising and training new recruits into effective units for the front line, rather than leading on the front line himself. As a result of Davis keeping Bragg and Polk in position, the high command of the Army of Tennessee reached an impasse that only had bad results for the Confederacy during 1863. Davis, as the commander-in-chief, should have separated them long before he did, thereby freeing up Johnston. Whilst

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185 and p. 308.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 185 and pp. 308-309.

the command problem in Tennessee remained unresolved during the Vicksburg Campaign, the other adjacent department to Mississippi also had an unresolved command problem.

The command in Arkansas was not conducive to assisting the desperate situation developing at Vicksburg. Woodworth argued that Holmes was uncooperative and inadequate, owing his position to his personal friendship with Davis.¹² Woodworth's analysis was limited and worthy of further development. Holmes was an old friend of Davis' from West Point and was another whom the President would never treat badly, because of this long association. When Holmes was placed in charge of the entire Trans-Mississippi department, it was an astonishing promotion for someone who had been pedestrian in the East. Davis was forced to do something after complaints about Holmes from the Trans-Mississippi. Again, as with Polk, this did not stop Davis from promoting Holmes to Lieutenant-General, when his performance did not merit the rank he already had. Davis responded to the complaints by putting Kirby Smith in charge, promoting him over Holmes, again to avoid an unpleasant decision. The President hindered Kirby Smith at the outset of his new role by insisting that he find a senior position for Holmes, whose poor command decisions led to the loss of the Post of Arkansas in January 1863 and the heavy defeat at Helena in July 1863. Holmes did not inform Davis of either defeat, leaving the President to write for clarification after he had heard from other sources. Despite this weak leadership, Davis left Holmes in command in Arkansas, where an old friendship again was given priority over the needs of the Confederacy.

The decision that Davis made to promote Kirby Smith was the one good top-level command decision he made during the Vicksburg Campaign. Woodworth did

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 123.

not comment on the merits of this promotion. Davis had promoted Kirby Smith to East Tennessee, nurtured him through the crisis with Bragg after the invasion of Kentucky and then promoted him to the Trans-Mississippi. Kirby Smith had listened to Davis, after his complaints about Bragg in Kentucky; with the result that the President knew that he was to be trusted politically. Arriving in Louisiana to find Banks in hot pursuit of Taylor in the Red River Valley, it was understandable that he concentrated on that campaign. A decision to ignore Banks would have put Shreveport at risk to save Vicksburg. Whilst this would have been a better decision for the Confederacy, Kirby Smith could not make a decision that would alienate local political and military support. By the time he arrived in his new theatre command, all he could have done to assist at Vicksburg was to allow Walker's division to attack Grant's supply line in April 1863. With Taylor outnumbered by more than six-to-one, Walker's division reduced the imbalance to two-to-one, but Kirby Smith, even then, needed more troops that were not available. Apart from this small error of judgement that had extenuating circumstances, Kirby Smith developed into a competent leader well-versed in the political as well as the military command of his department. These attributes were required for top-level theatre command and were demonstrated in the Trans-Mississippi, but in Mississippi, the commander was failing to make an impact.

Davis had absolute faith in Pemberton's abilities, despite extensive protests from South Carolina in the summer of 1862 and his stubbornness in continually defying orders from Richmond. Woodworth argued that the promotion of Pemberton was risky because of his failure in South Carolina and that it was a big step into an important command.¹³ Woodworth's argument can be extended with further details. Davis gave a great deal of licence to his commanders to run their departments as they

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

saw fit and he interpreted Pemberton's refusal to obey orders as part of doing his best to defend the South Carolina coastline, even though Pickens believed that Pemberton was out of his depth. Davis had a problem in Mississippi with the wayward command of his old friend Van Dorn. Again Davis avoided an unpleasant decision by promoting Pemberton to Lieutenant-General, which was beyond the level justified by his capability, in order to avoid replacing Van Dorn. Pemberton's successes in December 1862, against Grant and Sherman, were the high points in his career and occurred just as Davis was visiting Mississippi, so it was understandable that Davis was pleased. Grant and Sherman regrouped and returned with a stronger campaign in 1863. Pemberton did not cope with the enemy progression in thinking and he eventually proved that the rigours of the Vicksburg Campaign were beyond his capabilities. Examples of this were: the dissipation of his forces, his passivity, his quick abandonment of the Yazoo River bluffs, his poor orders that led to the battles of Port Gibson and Raymond, his failure to use his terrain advantages, his blundering before Champion Hill, his badly sited defences at the Big Black and his insistence on keeping a large garrison in Vicksburg, when a larger field army was needed. Pemberton was caught between the superior political orders of Davis and the local tactical orders of Johnston. After the loss of Vicksburg, the clamour for Pemberton's removal was widespread and he tried to post-rationalise his reasons for the 4th July surrender to justify himself. Davis still believed in Pemberton's capabilities despite overwhelming evidence and then tried to appoint him as a corps commander with the Army of Tennessee. The backlash in Tennessee was swift and strong, so the President backed down. After the volume of complaints, his faith in Pemberton never faltered, but he was unwise to have attempted to place him in another senior command so soon after the rawness of the Vicksburg defeat. Pemberton had not just

been outclassed by Grant, he had proven that he had failed to make the grade as a department commander, but the President did have alternative options.

The list of those generals not known to Davis personally expanded as the war demanded more and more resources. Woodworth did not evaluate this topic in relation to Vicksburg Campaign. Candidates were often overlooked, because their performances were in distant locations in the West and it took time for them to come to Presidential attention. Davis did not appreciate the talent of Bowen who did not rise to higher rank, because less able generals barred his way; a general whose capabilities were noted by Ballard (2004) and whose merit was developed fully by his biographer, Tucker (1997).¹⁴ Pemberton recommended Bowen for promotion, having to make a second request after Port Gibson, when the first was not acted upon. Davis was unable to receive sufficient information to understand that Bowen was the only general achieving superior results in Mississippi, so he failed to recognise the ability of this exceptional general. This was because during the whole war Bowen had been in the West; his pre-Civil War military experience had been militia duty in Missouri and although he had attended West Point, he was too young to have participated in the Mexican War. Bowen was also hampered because of his charges against Van Dorn, a friend of the President and a fellow Mississippian. Bowen should have been in overall command in Mississippi, but the system of promotion according to Davis' personal whim, a right that the President vigorously defended, meant that he was promoted too late. Bowen was capable of organising impregnable defensive works, he understood the locating of guns, and he was an exceptional leader of large forces in combat. Bowen proved his ability at Corinth, Grand Gulf, Port Gibson and Champion Hill. Davis, however, thought well of Van Dorn, a factor that did not enhance

¹⁴ Michael B. Ballard, *Vicksburg: The campaign that opened the Mississippi*, The University of North Carolina Press, (Chapel Hill, 2004). Phillip T. Tucker, *The Forgotten "Stonewall of the West": Major General John Stevens Bowen*, Mercer University Press, (Macon, 1997).

Bowen's chances of promotion. Davis believed that he had limited alternatives, but the lengthy distances and slow communications during the Civil War contributed to his inability to recognise Bowen's talent as it emerged.

In the Department of the Trans-Mississippi and in the Department of the West, Davis had allowed the top-level command roles to evolve with distinctly different natures. He had also hampered his Trans-Mississippi commander with Holmes and his Department of the West commander with Van Dorn, Pemberton, Bragg and Polk. These subordinates were unchallengeable in their positions because of the President's personal regard. One overriding consideration drove Davis to make three of his appointments in the West. He avoided having to take unpleasant decisions to replace old friends or trusted generals by promoting: Pemberton to avoid replacing Van Dorn, Johnston to avoid replacing Bragg and Kirby Smith to avoid replacing Holmes. So the lack of co-ordination between the departments in Mississippi, Tennessee and Arkansas, respectively, arose primarily from Davis' personal relationships that interfered with the effectiveness of both of his theatre commanders in the West, but particularly Johnston.

Davis' unreasonable intransigence

The South prior to the Civil War was dominated by politicians with strong convictions, who would not bend an inch to compromise with the North. Davis had participated in this intense debate as a Southern moderate. He had cut his political teeth in an era of conviction politics in the South where honour demanded that an opinion, once expressed, was always defended, whatever the consequences. W. C. Davis' (1991) study offered a perceptive analysis of Davis' personality and the effect

that it had on his Presidency.¹⁵ Davis' stubbornness and need to prove he was always right developed at times into an unreasonable intransigence, when his mind could not be changed whatever evidence was put before him. Only an exceptionally determined politician could have ignored the blunt and accurate opinions expressed by his contemporaries. Woodworth argued that Davis' personality withstood massive pressure.¹⁶ He was unable to compromise, in the manner of Lincoln, because he could not change this ingrained aspect of his personality or the culture of honour in which he operated, even when his decisions significantly contributed to the eventual fall of Vicksburg.

Davis did not display the political skills required of the President, when he reacted badly to challenges to his authority. W. C. Davis observed that Davis was rigid in his decision making and that his personality prevented him from bending his principles to get the best out of his generals.¹⁷ In Virginia in 1862, Davis did not see that his role was to get the best out of Johnston and he appeared more concerned to win an argument. When Johnston was promoted to the West, the friction continued between them and after the loss of Vicksburg, Davis again sought to prove he was right rather than acting as a politician should. Because his honour was frequently challenged, Davis did not use the necessary political skills to get the best performance out of Johnston. The President's unreasonable intransigence had overridden the political duty required of him by the Confederacy.

In South Carolina, Davis was extraordinarily stubborn when he persevered with Pemberton, far beyond a reasonable period, despite the express wishes of Pickens and Porcher Miles. Other historians have not analysed Davis' doggedness in

¹⁵ William C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis, The man and his hour*, Louisiana State University Press, (Baton Rouge, 1996), pp. 689-704. This was a paperback edition of the 1991 original.

¹⁶ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, p. 310.

¹⁷ W. C. Davis, *Davis*, p. 693 and p. 696.

trying to keep Pemberton in command. Even after agreeing to replace him, Davis kept him in South Carolina for three months longer than he should have done, despite further recommendations from Lee and Cooper. Because Davis believed in Pemberton's ability, he ignored all other factors inhibiting him. Davis should have taken more time to assess what was actually occurring in South Carolina, rather than believing that Pemberton's detractors unreasonably opposed him. Pemberton had not achieved anything of note to justify the resulting promotion to Mississippi, except having Davis' favour. Davis had again been unreasonably intransigent in keeping Pemberton in command for so long, against the wishes of so many detractors.

In November 1862, Davis created the Department of the West that never functioned in the way that it had been designed. Woodworth was adamant that Davis should have removed Johnston if he could not get action from him, but the problem was deeper than this.¹⁸ Johnston was a reluctant commander who complained about his role continuously, with some justification. Davis refused to listen to Johnston's concerns and even though it was obvious to his contemporaries, he persevered with a structure he believed in, but which Johnston never used effectively. The President had decided that he wanted the Department of the West and he had decided that he wanted Johnston to command it. Irrespective of Johnston's performance, Davis clung to the belief that this structure was correct. The final result of the Vicksburg Campaign demonstrated Davis' unreasonable intransigence in persevering with theatre command in the Department of the West when he should have made changes to obtain Johnston's co-operation long before he was forced into relieving him.

Davis had an unusual belief that the rank of a commander would determine his authority in the field. Other historians have noted that Davis unjustly promoted

¹⁸ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, p. 310.

generals to solve command problems, but none has linked the series of decisions the President made to avoid unpleasantness with his favoured generals.¹⁹ Davis would rather keep a favoured general in command by promoting another general above him than taking an unpalatable decision. This introduced complexity into command structures that should have been simple. It caused confusion and delays whilst clarification was sought and it led to unpredictable results. There were conflicting pressures that meant that command was often not resolved in the way that Davis expected, but on other occasions his restrictions on commanders, notably Johnston during the Vicksburg Campaign, meant that the authority of the rank was diminished. In September 1862, Van Dorn and Price were each ordered to advance from northern Mississippi into Tennessee, but Price had been ordered by Bragg, so he did not accept Van Dorn's authority until Davis eventually intervened. Similarly, Kirby Smith accepted Bragg's leadership in Kentucky, but rescinded it as soon as he retreated into East Tennessee on the grounds that as a departmental commander, now back in his own department, he reported directly to the War Department. For departmental boundary reasons, Johnston could not order Kirby Smith or Holmes to assist at Vicksburg, even though he outranked them. Most telling of all, Johnston could not persuade Pemberton to obey his orders, because his supposed subordinate had a dual reporting line to the War Department and chose to obey Davis' orders. Davis' actions created these confusions in rank during the Vicksburg Campaign and he was often unaware of the consequences of adhering to his principle that his commanders should voluntarily co-operate in the best interest of the Confederacy. The President was unreasonably tenacious, in refusing to issue direct orders, because he would not bend this principle.

¹⁹ See the section in this chapter on the "Competence of the Confederate Western generals".

Davis was aware that others disagreed not just with his appointments, which he took as personal attacks, but also with aspects of his personality, where there was no doubt that there was a personal attack. The most direct challenge to Davis came from Confederate Senator James Phelan, noted by Ballard, who had complained about Pemberton's leadership in early December 1862.²⁰ However, Phelan had again complained fiercely after the loss of Vicksburg. This time, he widened the attack to criticise Holmes, but in a perceptive analysis, he also summarised and questioned Davis' personality when it came to standing by his friends and being blind to their and his own, shortcomings. Davis ignored this criticism, as he normally did, because he always thought he was right. He would rarely accept advice or change his opinion, because he thought he was the best person to orchestrate the military organisation for the war. By ignoring this extensive criticism, Davis again demonstrated that he was unreasonably tenacious.

In the East at the time of the Vicksburg Campaign, Lee was faced with Northern commanders who advanced with superior numbers, were defeated, and then retired to rethink strategy. Lincoln, in most cases, ruthlessly replaced these failed commanders. This was a trait not shared by Davis, who tended to persevere with his chosen generals even when they developed a track record of sub-standard performance, particularly if he believed in their capabilities or they were old friends; a point argued by Woodworth.²¹ Once the Civil War was underway, the demand for generals far outstripped the supply available, so Davis needed extreme circumstances to even consider a replacement. When good or bad performances were reported, Davis' response was mostly based on his own understanding of the capabilities of his generals. Davis' judgement was often poor and his attitude was that it was better to

²⁰ Ballard, *Vicksburg* p. 119.

²¹ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, p. 314.

work with a general he knew, where he could work around any flaws, rather than take the risk of another untried general who was not guaranteed to perform better and who needed time to assimilate his new command. Davis was a loyal supporter of his commanders, to the point that he displayed an extraordinary degree of will in keeping them in command. However, Davis would need to be more flexible to combat new warfare tactics as they emerged in the West.

Confederate response to Grant in Mississippi

President Davis had a deep understanding of the profession of arms, because he had been trained at West Point, he had fought on the frontier, he was a hero of the Mexican War, and he had been Secretary of War under President Franklin Pierce. With this background, he was uniquely placed to lead the Confederacy through the Civil War, but tactics changed rapidly during the conflict. As these changes emerged in the West an appropriate Confederate response was needed. Davis did not understand the development of hard war in the West nor Grant's determination to eliminate Confederate armies.

Grant began waging war against the Confederacy in its entirety, not just against the military. Grimsley (1995) defined hard war as applying substantial military force to target civilian resources with the intent of destroying the economy and morale of the citizens.²² Grant applied these hard war policies, but by also targeting the elimination of Confederate armies, the steps taken badly affected civilians in the process. For instance, those civilians trapped within Vicksburg during the siege fell outside of Grimsley's definition of civilians affected by hard war. In accordance with the hard war definition, during the Vicksburg Campaign, civilians

²² Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, (Cambridge, U. K., 1995), p. 3.

began to be targeted if they were supporting the military. This progressed to deny or destroy food stuffs that had the potential to supply opposition troops, which as a by-product also had a devastating effect on the populace. Grant earned the nickname ‘Unconditional Surrender’ after his victory at Fort Donelson when the capture of the garrison had resulted. In September 1862, he had laid plans to capture Price’s army at Iuka, not just to defeat it in battle. In October 1862, after his subordinate Rosecrans had been victorious at Corinth, Grant had remonstrated with him for delaying one day, before pursuing Van Dorn’s beaten army. In January 1863, the whole garrison at the Post of Arkansas was captured. Yet Davis, Holmes and Pemberton did not assimilate the clues from these earlier operations in the West. Grant had demonstrated that, at Vicksburg, he would not be content with the capture of the city; he wanted to eliminate the Confederate army. Johnston understood this, but he could do nothing to counter Grant with the command structure in disarray and with colleagues who did not understand that they had to change their philosophy. Grant ground down all opposition in the Confederacy and not just the forces immediately facing him. The total destruction of Jackson after Vicksburg fell was the first time in the Civil War that civilian property was damaged for economic and morale reasons rather than as an adjunct to necessary military operations. Making use of superior manpower, there would be no retreat after a reverse, in the manner of the Union forces in the East. This new concept of waging war developed as the Vicksburg Campaign became more intense, but the Confederate response was negligible. The Confederacy needed other advantages to be able to counter Grant’s superior resources.

One advantage that the Confederacy had in the defence of Vicksburg was terrain, as the city was difficult to approach. No other historian has argued that this

was a significant missed opportunity in the defence of Vicksburg. Pemberton did not understand the terrain advantages that existed in Mississippi and Louisiana to well-entrenched defenders. This had been demonstrated to Pemberton in the Delta region of Mississippi, but was not developed into a useful strategy on the Louisiana shore. The undulating terrain in the Vicksburg area also gave substantial advantages to the defenders that would have benefited a well-positioned field army. At Chickasaw Bluffs in December 1862, the presence of bayous below the defences caused Sherman to attack along narrow approach routes. In the Delta region in March and April 1863, the low-lying, swampy terrain ensured that the Confederate defence was assisted. On the west side of the Mississippi River, the terrain was of a similar nature and the lessons from the east bank were not transferred. Two small west bank examples demonstrated how the terrain gave advantages to the defenders: Cockrell's strong position in April 1863 and the Union repulse of Harrison in June 1863. Because of the presence of large bodies of water, this type of terrain was difficult to outflank. Gunboats could not be used, because the waterways were either too shallow or too restrictive for manoeuvre. There was a further type of terrain that assisted the defence, which was sharply undulating, with swamps and heavy undergrowth in the intervening ravines. The countryside to the south and east of Vicksburg and the city defences were composed of this type of terrain. Again the advantage was with the defenders, because the attackers had to approach along or across the ridge tops, through a concentrated field of fire. These defensive advantages existed at Port Gibson, Raymond and Champion Hill, but a deficiency in the size of the Confederate field forces handed the initiative to the North on each occasion. This undulating terrain was easier to outflank, however, as attackers could merely move further inland. The Vicksburg city defences were built along a line of ridge tops, so the

approaches were mostly uphill. These defensive advantages also applied to Sherman's entrenchments when facing Johnston in June 1863 and Grant's entrenchments when facing Vicksburg during the siege. Whilst the Confederate armies were mobile, they could choose the terrain to defend, but once the siege commenced, the terrain also helped the Union. Consequently, the best use of terrain for the Confederate defence was during the west bank operations or just after the Union landing in Mississippi. Failure to use their initial terrain advantage was a major mistake in the defence of the Mississippi River Valley.

The Confederate forces at Vicksburg conducted their defence against Grant's invasion of Mississippi passively, surrendering the initiative to him. Ballard argued that Grant made his plans knowing that he did not have to fear an aggressive response.²³ After Grant landed in Mississippi, Pemberton refused to allow an attack on Grant's flank or rear, requiring the Confederate forces to occupy defences along the Big Black River, rather than harass the Union advance toward Jackson. Grant was given almost free rein until the decisive battle at Champion Hill. This passivity gave Grant plenty of time to ensure that he trapped Pemberton in Vicksburg, whilst taking steps to prevent Johnston from assembling reinforcements. In May 1863, as he marched across Mississippi, Grant was already applying hard war tactics by living off the land and denying food stuffs to the Confederate armies. When Grant decided to move on Jackson rather than directly to Vicksburg, it was because the state capital was a major rail centre and hard war determined that Sherman destroy as much rail track as possible to prevent Confederate reinforcements gathering and also destroy anything of military value. Because Grant approached Jackson from the south-east and then turned toward Vicksburg to approach from the east, the terrain limited

²³ Ballard, *Vicksburg*, p. 290.

Pemberton's evacuation route to the north-east. Johnston correctly pointed out that Pemberton should temporarily abandon Vicksburg to gain maximum mobility and then create the largest field army he could muster to beat Grant, at which point he would regain the city. Because Pemberton left a substantial garrison behind in Vicksburg, when he lost the battle of Champion Hill he was forced back into the city, resulting in the siege. Pemberton had not responded adequately to the overland phase of Grant's campaign and the destruction in Jackson hindered Johnston's initial attempts to muster troops. Grant made full use of the initiative he had gained and his hard war tactics prevented Johnston from ever accumulating an effective relieving force.

Johnston was sure that Grant wanted to capture or destroy armies rather than capture places, so to prevent this happening the Confederate armies had to remain mobile. Woodworth noted that Johnston warned Pemberton not to lose the army by becoming trapped in the city, but the rationale was not further argued.²⁴ With Pemberton stationary in Vicksburg, Johnston correctly assessed that Grant could achieve his objectives. With Pemberton mobile, Grant would be forced to pursue and the further he moved from the safety of the Mississippi River, the more vulnerable his own position would be. In July 1863, Johnston proved this when retreating before Sherman, who was unable to follow, as his communications lengthened and he became more vulnerable. Johnston was adamant that the priority for any commander was to preserve his army. Davis did not agree and put high strategic value on the holding of Vicksburg, a location that both he and Pemberton conceived as the most important point in the Confederacy in the West. They were wrong, because preservation of the Mississippi army was the most important issue. The war could

²⁴ Woodworth, *Davis and his generals*, p. 210.

only be prolonged by avoiding the loss of Confederate armies. The only hope of Southern victory was prolonging the war so that Northern public support for its continuance declined. Pemberton and Davis had inadvertently assisted Grant in his objective to capture the Confederate army and only Johnston had understood that the correct response to this tactic was to remain mobile to avoid capture.

There was no agreement in the Confederacy on how the Army of Relief was to be used at Vicksburg. No other historian has sufficiently explored this topic as there has been an assumption that this army would just relieve Vicksburg in some undefined way. Davis and Pemberton expected a break-in to bring in supplies and munitions, so that Vicksburg could be held. Johnston knew that this was impossible. The best time to strike Grant was early in the siege, as the disparity in numbers increased as time passed. Johnston agreed with this assessment, but he knew that a breakout was the only option and Pemberton and Davis would never authorise this, so he did nothing of consequence. Johnston, at best, would have only been able to keep a route open for a short period of time, early in the siege. In any kind of operation, his flanks would have been vulnerable along a narrow corridor, but Johnston's assessment was that Pemberton agreed with Davis and only required the transporting of supplies inward. This alternative of ferrying in supplies was simply not feasible, because it was an even slower process with wagons than the requirements for an infantry breakout. Furthermore Grant and Sherman had applied hard war tactics in the countryside through which Johnston would have had to approach Vicksburg. The area was devoid of foodstuffs and the roads were blocked. Davis had created the situation where Pemberton had decided to remain in Vicksburg, but he was the only person capable of giving effect to an order to breakout. Johnston knew that Sherman's forces in late June 1863 outnumbered his own. They were heavily

entrenched and, therefore, impossible to beat. Johnston continued to assemble the Army of Relief, but he had no use agreed for it that was acceptable to him.

Davis simply did not understand that the form of warfare faced by Pemberton and Johnston had developed from that faced by Bragg and Lee. Grant's hard war thinking was ahead of even his most capable subordinate, but as the Vicksburg siege commenced, Sherman was quick to apply the same progressive thinking to his own command as it faced the Army of Relief. Davis was out of touch with these new developments in the West and he continued to judge Johnston by the standards of military prowess achieved in the East.

Assessment of Southern leadership during the Vicksburg Campaign

Davis' military philosophy was rendered obsolete by the advances in the conduct of war exhibited by the Union leadership during the Vicksburg Campaign. Grant's campaign was evidenced by a level of dynamism and risk-taking previously unseen in the Civil War. Johnston was disheartened by the constrictions arising from the rigidity and formality that Davis brought to the political and military leadership. A more flexible approach could have allowed advances in the performance of Confederate leadership under Johnston, supported by Bowen. Instead, the Vicksburg Campaign exposed the shortcomings of Davis and the weaknesses of Van Dorn, Pemberton, Holmes, Bragg and Polk, whom he insisted held senior roles. The final result demonstrated the full extent of his culpability for the loss of control of the Mississippi River Valley.

With the vast distances involved, outstanding leaders took time to come to Presidential notice and immediate command problems could not be rectified on the spot, as Johnston had to wait for Davis to communicate his decisions. Discovered

talent needed to be immediately available for promotion, without the formality of waiting for Presidential authorisation. The authority to remove failed or dissenting generals ought to have been delegated, so that Presidential reassignment was required, rather than exacerbating any command problems, whilst waiting for his consideration. Davis would never have consented to these changes. He vigorously defended his right to make all appointments or reassignments of general officers. The Confederacy suffered as a result and the worst effect in the West was during the Vicksburg Campaign.

Only a slight shift in leadership thinking was necessary to have vastly improved the chance of success, by allowing more flexibility in the way the geographical command structure was implemented. An order from Richmond in December 1862, placing the bulk of the garrison from the Post of Arkansas and Walker's division from Pine Bluff, under command from Vicksburg, but remaining sited on the west bank of the Mississippi, would not have disrupted the command structures in place under Kirby Smith in the rest of the Trans-Mississippi. The Southern leadership needed the extra time that an active west bank force could have given and because of the terrain advantage to the defenders, there was no need to ensure parity in numbers with the Union forces. Davis created the rigid departmental boundary along the Mississippi River and more flexibility in its application would have required the introduction of a strategic approach to Confederate inter-departmental and top-level command co-ordination that was entirely absent during the Vicksburg Campaign.

Whilst Davis had the desire to defend the Mississippi River Valley, he failed to turn this into a co-ordinated plan and he failed to provide direct orders to ensure that it was carried out. Davis applied judgement to the West that was reminiscent of

the weak Union leaders in the East. The development of hard war, during the Vicksburg Campaign, was not met by a change in the Southern tactics needed to combat this new method of warfare. Grant's thinking evolved after his earlier failures in Mississippi, and it continued to develop through the Vicksburg Campaign. The senior level Confederate leader in the West who showed an understanding of Grant's new thinking was Johnston and at a lower level this change was also understood by Bowen. Because of Johnston's poor relationship with Davis, his opinions were discounted and he was blamed by the President for inactivity, when the unresolved issues in the West meant there was no unity in the leadership to defend the Mississippi River Valley. The structure under Johnston was determined by Davis and he had no authority to create his own more effective structure. The circumstances surrounding the appointment of Johnston showed that Davis did not understand that he had to have some measure of agreement on the strategy in the Department of the West and he had to give his commander real authority. Johnston did not accept the scope of his command, because it was unworkable. Davis should not have persevered with the command structure or he should have replaced Johnston. Creating the situation where Pemberton was able to report directly to Richmond, rather than directly to Johnston, also contributed to the weakness in command. Johnston was the most capable commander available to defend the West against Grant, but he needed to have a freer rein to organise the command structure and the armies, as he saw fit, and he needed authority over troops on the west bank of the Mississippi River. Anything less played into Grant's hands and demonstrated that Davis' thinking was narrowly focused on Johnston, rather than on the bigger picture of defending against Union aggression.

Davis contributed directly to the loss of Vicksburg by his own shortcomings. He had no real understanding of the impact his own decisions made on the Vicksburg Campaign. Johnston tried to get Davis to see the error of his ways. Politicians also tried, led by Randolph and Phelan. Most of the rest of the Confederate military leadership submitted to the whim of the President and did not challenge his authority. Bowen was a lone voice, at a lower level, who challenged the status quo in Mississippi, who was aware of Grant's capabilities and who saw through the weaknesses in Confederate leadership during the Vicksburg Campaign. The President imposed his outmoded thinking, which resulted in the hampering of Johnston in his efforts to ensure that Pemberton changed his performance to match Grant's evolution. Davis' unreasonable intransigence was the personality defect that prevented his acceptance that Johnston and Bowen had a better understanding of how to combat Grant. Davis was wrong to support Pemberton, his own champion, who suffered his defining defeat at Champion Hill and events thereafter could not be influenced by Johnston, who was unable to prevent the loss of Vicksburg. Whatever his shortcomings in the lead up to the siege, Pemberton could not be blamed for the loss of Vicksburg, once the siege commenced, because he was merely carrying out Davis' wishes. Davis' philosophy had been superseded during the campaign and it ensured that a weak structural framework was created in the West that detracted from the defence of Vicksburg: a structural framework within which none of the other Southern leaders succeeded.

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