

“Personal Recollections  
OF THE  
Vicksburg Campaign.”

**U. S. Army Military History Institute**

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

OF THE

VICKSBURG CAMPAIGN,

A Paper Read Before the

OHIO COMMANDERY

OF THE

MILITARY ORDER

OF THE

LOYAL LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES,

BY COMPANION

MANNING F. FORCE,

Late Brigadier General. Brevet Major  
General U. S. Volunteers.

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On the 22d of February, 1863, Logan's Division embarked at Memphis, and next day landed at Lake Providence, above Millikin's Bend. I commanded the 20th Ohio, in Leggett's Brigade, Logan's Division. Lake Providence is a portion of a former bed of the river, left by a change in its course. The bank of the lake was bordered by live-oaks, trailing with gray moss and with glistening magnolias. We camped in an old cotton-field. The ground was so wet that every tent had a board floor, and most had an extension of the floor in front, making a porch. The lake gave bathing and fish, and at evenings the band would play on a batteau sailing on the water. It was an ideal camp.

About a week or less after their arrival a furious cannonade was heard in the night in the direction of Vicksburg. In a few days we learned the cause. On the night of the 2d of February the ram Queen of the West had run by the batteries of Vicksburg and Warrenton; but it shortly after ran aground in the Red River, and was captured. On the night of the 13th the iron-clad Indianola, with its heavy armament of two 11-inch and two 9-inch guns, ran by. But, on the night of the 24th, it was attacked by the Queen of the West and another ram, aided by two smaller boats. The Indianola, leaking from the blows of the rams, began to sink,

surrendered, and was towed near the shore, a few miles below Vicksburg, and grounded in ten feet of water. The enemy had control of the river below the city.

Some soldiers, taking an empty barge, placed on it barrels, in the likeness of smokestacks, and a hogshhead for a turret, and set it afloat at 3 A. M. The semblance of a monitor, in the gloom of night, slowly passed by the batteries. All the guns of Vicksburg opened upon it. It could not sink, and placidly floated on. It rounded the point at daybreak, just as the Queen of the West was coming up stream. The appearance of a monitor in the Mississippi was too much. The Queen of the West, with its consort ram, turned down stream, took refuge in the Red River, and never returned to the Mississippi. The harmless barge, carried by an eddy to the lower mouth of the canal, rested there, just two-and-a-half miles from the Indianola. A working party, busied in raising the iron-clad, watched uneasily the stranger. Some soldiers of the 15th Corps pushed the barge out into the current. The working party, seeing a monitor coming for them, set the Indianola on fire and blew it up, and the river below the city was again free.

The 20th was not engaged in any of the bayou expeditions. But when Sherman was up Steele's Bayou extricating Porter's gun-boats, we were sent from the Mississippi across the country at a point where the bayou comes near to the river, and had a slight taste of that service. We picked and slopped our way over the submerged land to the bayou, and to where we found little protruding hummocks of earth, on which we could huddle in groups out of the water. There we squatted two days, when news was brought that the gun-boats were released, and we returned.

About the 20th of April, I was sent, with the 20th Ohio and the 30th Illinois seven miles out from Millikin's Bend to build a road across a swamp. When the sun set the leaves of the forest seemed to exude smoke, and the air became a saturated solution of gnats. When my mess sat down to

supper under a tree the gnats got into our mouths, noses, eyes and ears. They swarmed upon our necks, seeming to encircle them with bands of hot iron. Tortured and blinded, we could neither eat nor see. We got a quantity of cotton and made a circle around the group, and set it on fire. The pungent smoke made water stream from our eyes, but drove the gnats away. We then supped in anguish, but in peace. I sent back to camp and got some musquito netting from a sutler. Covering my head with many folds I slept, waking at intervals to burn a wad of cotton. Many of the men set by the fire all night fighting the gnats, and slept next day.

In the woods we found stray cattle, sheep and hogs. A large pond was full of fish. We lived royally. Here the men first saw alligators. A soldier, a farmer-boy, told his first experience. He said he was standing by the pond when he saw a long, monstrous mouth, lined with teeth, rise from the water. Then the scaly monster appeared, saw him, came ashore and made for him. He climbed a tree. The creature crawled around the tree, snapping its jaws and beating the earth with its tail, till, a group of soldiers coming up, it retreated to the water.

On the night of April 16, the gunboats passed down, under a cannonade that shook the earth. It was necessary at least to attempt to send transports down with supplies. The crews of the steamboats were unwilling to float their frail vessels along the face of the batteries which lined the shore for miles. Soldiers, mainly from Logan's division, volunteered to serve as deck-hands, firemen, engineers, pilots and captains. Six steamboats, and towing twelve barges, were so manned and started on through the gauntlet of fire on the night of the 22d. Bonfires along the shore lighted up the river. Miles of artillery thundered at the helpless vessels. But only one was sunk—the rest passed through.

On the 25th April, Logan's division marched. The 20th Ohio had just drawn new clothing, but had to leave it behind. Stacking spades and picks in the swamp, they took their place in the column as it appeared, taking with them only the

scanty supplies they had there. Six days of plodding brought them over nearly seventy miles to the shore of the river opposite Bruinsburg. I find in one of my letters "we marched six miles one day, and those six miles by evening were strewn with wrecks of wagons and their loads, and half buried guns. At a halt of some hours, the men stood in deep mud, for want of any means of sitting. Yet when we halted at night, every man answered to his name and went laughing to bed on the sloppy ground."

Troops were ferried across the river to a narrow strip of bottom-land which intervened between the river and the lofty, precipitous bluff. A roadway, walled in with high vertical banks, cut through the bluff, led from the river bottom up to the table land above. A small force could have held this pass against an army; but it was left unguarded, and the army marched up.

The 13th corps was in advance. Our brigade did not reach the field of Port Gibson till the battle was over; but was sent in the dark of early night a few miles in pursuit of the retreating force. All through the campaign, the army always marched over and beyond the field of battle before halting for the night.

The morning of 3d of May, the 17th corps marched north towards Hankinson's Ferry. At Willow Springs, Lieut. Maury of Gen. Bowen's staff was captured, and it appeared there was a force in our front. The corps halted, deployed, reconnoitred. Our brigade, commanded by Gen. Dennis, Gen. Leggett being away on leave of absence, was detached and marched west towards Grand Gulf. Gen. Grant and Gen. Rawlins as well as Gen Logan, accompanied the brigade. About noon, we began to pick up stragglers of the enemy and learned that Grand Gulf had been evacuated and the garrison was crossing the Big Black at Hankinson's Ferry. Grant and Rawlins pushed on to Grand Gulf, to communicate with the fleet and to establish a shorter line to his base. The brigade, finding a road leading to the north of east, made a sharp turn and pushed for the ferry. The men became ex-

hausted. The captain of the leading company told his men to halt. I told him to move on, the General was unwilling to halt yet. I heard a soldier think aloud, rather than say, "he must be a hard-hearted man." When we halted for a short rest, though the men were famished for water, not one had strength to go to the bottom of the hill to a large spring. The mounted orderlies, and men mounted on officers' horses, gathered up canteens and brought water. The march resumed, brought us after our long detour back into the main road in front of the corps which was cautiously feeling its way.

I was standing with McPherson, Logan and Dennis when we reached the road, and McPherson said, "Gen Logan, you will direct Gen. Dennis to send a regiment forward with skirmishers well advanced, rapidly towards the Ferry." Gen. Logan said, "Gen. Dennis, you will send a regiment forward with skirmishers well advanced, rapidly towards the Ferry." Gen. Dennis said, "Col. Force, you will take your regiment forward with skirmishers well advanced, rapidly towards the Ferry." The men forgot their fatigue, quickly pushed over the few intervening miles and reached the Ferry just in time to drive away a party of the enemy that was chopping away the floating bridge across the river.

A few days later, all captured wagons were sent to the rear to bring up rations, and all army wagons, except some at brigade and superior headquarters, to bring up ammunition. The regiments had no transportation or tents. I used to try to put the 20th in such position at night that there would be a tree in the rear under which I could sleep. I impressed a number of mules and mounted three squads of men, each under command of a sergeant. The surgeon was authorized to dismount any man, and put in his place a man who was exhausted, or foot-sore—so there was no straggling. When we halted on the march for rest, the squads gathered up canteens and got water; so no man left the ranks. And the mules carried officers' blankets.

On the 12th of May, the 17th corps marched on the road toward Raymond, Logan's division leading, Dennis' brigade

in advance. The 30th Illinois was deployed with a skirmish line in front, on the left of the road, the 20th Ohio in like manner on the right. About noon we halted; the 20th Ohio in an open field, bounded by a fence to the front, beyond which was forest and rising ground. An unseen battery on some height beyond the timber began shelling the field. The 20th advanced over the fence into the woods. Another brigade came up and formed on our right.

All at once the woods rang with the shrill rebel yell, and a deafening din of musketry. The 20th rushed forward to a creek and used the farther bank as a breastwork. The timber between the creek and the fence was free from undergrowth. The 20th Illinois, the regiment next to the right of the 20th Ohio, knelt down in place and returned the fire. The enemy advanced into the creek in its front. I went to the lieutenant-colonel, who was kneeling at the left flank, and asked him why he did not advance into the creek. He said "we have no orders." In a few minutes the colonel of the regiment was killed. It was too late to advance, it was murder to remain; and the lieutenant-colonel withdrew the regiment in order back behind the fence. I cannot tell how long the battle lasted. I remember noticing the forest leaves, cut by rifle balls, falling in thick eddies, still as snow flakes. At one time the enemy in our front advanced to the border of the creek, and rifles of opposing lines crossed while firing. Men who were shot were burned by the powder of the rifles that sped the balls.

In time the fire in front slackened. We ceased fire and advanced. The ground rose into a hill beyond the creek; dead and wounded were found where they had fallen or crawled behind trees and logs. We emerged into open ground upon a hill top, and were greeted by cheers of the brigade at the crossing of the creek below. The enemy was in retreat. A battery covering its rear opened fire upon us, I made the men lie down behind a ridge, and the exploding shells sprinkled them with earth while the first sergeants were making out reports of casualties. Notwithstanding the

admirable protection of the bank of the creek, twenty per cent. of the regiment were killed and wounded.

Soon the column advanced. We fell into place when it came up, and were halted on the hither side of Raymond. In a few minutes the earth was sparkling with fires, over which coffee was making in tin cups and little chunks of salt pork were broiling. The sweet savor told that supper was nearly ready, when order came to march through the town and go on picket on the farther side. Every man picked up his smoking cup, and the stick which bore his sizzling bit of pork, and we incensed the town with savory odor as we marched through.

I used often to hear it said that the western army could fight, but had no discipline. It had so much of discipline as is comprised in obedience to orders, and that is the cream of discipline. On the 14th of May, two days after the battle of Raymond, was the battle of Jackson. The 20th Ohio was assigned to the duty of defending the trains from some apprehended attack. I was informed that a soldier had misbehaved at the battle of Raymond—in a matter of no moment, except that it was a breach of discipline. I constituted myself a court martial, being the only field officer then with the regiment. I heard the case and passed sentence while the man stood beside my horse, and leaning over the saddle to screen a bit of paper from the driving rain, wrote the record in lead pencil. The orderly who at once took it to brigade headquarters, brought it back approved.

Two days after, on the 16th, as we were marching to attack Pemberton's army on Champion's Hill, the 17th corps found the road entirely blocked up with the train of Hovey's division. An order removed the wagons out of the way, jammed them against the trees that lined the road, and gave free passage for troops.

Champion's Hill is a considerable eminence about a mile across, I should think, from east to west. It is steep, its sides are roughened by knobs, gullied by ravines, and covered with forest. Low flat land encircles the north and west

faces. Hovey, following the road, attacked the north east face; Logan's division, following, debouched upon the low land north of the hill. The 20th Ohio, being in advance, deployed, marched near to the base of the hill, and lay down to wait till successive regiments should arrive and form the line. A part of the enemy's force high up on the hill, just in prolongation of the line of the regiment, kept up a dropping fire, and every few minutes a soldier would rise bleeding and be ordered back to the hospital to have his wound dressed. There was in front of the line a large and very tall stump. The adjutant and I, sending our horses away, stood behind this stump and observed that its shelter made a species of shadow of the fire. We found we could pace to and fro fifty yards, keeping in line with the stump, and while the rifle balls rattled against the stump and whistled by our sides, we were shielded.

By the time the line was formed, a hostile line advanced from the timber at the base of the hill to confront us. We charged, pushed them into the timber and up the slope, and took position in a ravine parallel with a ravine in which the enemy in our front halted. The firing was very heavy; a staff officer, who came to make some inquiries, all the time he was talking to me, involuntarily and unconsciously, screened his eyes with one hand, as one would shield his eyes from a driving rain. When our ammunition was about exhausted, a heavy force appeared in our front. The line gave evidences of a readiness to recoil; symptoms of wavering began to appear in one company of the 20th Ohio; but an order to fix bayonets steadied the men, and the regiment stood at support arms, with a line of steel bristling above the edge of the ravine. Fortunately for us, the force we saw was a fresh division, going to reinforce Pemberton's line where it was shattered by Hovey's victorious assault.

McPherson kept extending his line to his right, till Pemberton's line of retreat was endangered, and his army, abandoning the field, pushed in disorder for Vicksburg. As soon as we halted for the night bivouac, report of casual-

ties was called for. My report included two men missing. The report had not long gone to brigade headquarters when I learned that the two men had been sent with wounded to the field hospital, and were temporarily detained there by the commanding officer. I sent to brigade headquarters to correct my report. It was too late; it had already gone on to division headquarters. It has always been a sore point that this report of two missing remains in the records of the war; for they are the only missing reported of the 20th Ohio at any time in the Vicksburg campaign.

Next day, the 17th, Carr's Division of McClernand's Corps, by a splendid charge, carried the fortified bridge-head at the crossing of the Big Black River, and captured 1,751 men and fifteen guns. The bridges, saturated with combustibles, were burned, and the three corps spent the day building bridges across the river at different points. Sherman began crossing in the night; the rest of the army crossed next day. Pemberton abandoned Haines' Bluff, and withdrew his entire force within the defenses of Vicksburg. Haines' Bluff was seized, and we were once more in close communication with the North.

In eighteen days Grant had marched 200 miles, won five battles, four of them in six days, inflicted a loss of 5,000 killed, wounded, and missing, captured eighty-eight pieces of artillery, compelled the abandonment of all outworks, and cooped Pemberton's army within the lines of Vicksburg; while he had opened for himself easy and safe communication with the North. During these eighteen days the men had been without shelter, and had subsisted on five days' rations. The morning we crossed the Big Black I offered five dollars for a small piece of cornbread, and could not get it. The soldier said bread was worth more to him than money. Four thousand five hundred prisoners, who had been gathered on the way, were shipped north from Haines' Bluff, and the army sat down to the siege. Stretched in a thin line, the army lacked several miles of covering the front of the besieged works.

We lost 4,000 killed and wounded in the assaults of the 19th and 22d of May. On the 22d of May the 20th Ohio moved in support of the first brigade of Logan's Division. The brigade reached the base of an earthwork, too high and steep to be scaled, and could neither advance nor retreat. The 20th was placed in a road-cut, which was enfiladed by one of the enemy's infantry intrenchments. But by sitting with our backs pressed against the side of the cut toward Vicksburg, the balls whistled by just outside of our knees. At sunset the company cooks were possessed to come to us with hot coffee. They succeeded in running the gauntlet, and the garrison could hear the jingling of tincups and shouts of laughter as the cramped men ate their supper.

After dark we were recalled and placed on the slope of a sharp ridge, with orders to remain in place, ready to move at any moment, and with strict injunction not to allow any man's head to appear above the ridge. There we lay two or three days in line. Coffee was brought to us by the cooks at meal times. Not a man those two or three days left the line so much as ten feet without a special order. The first night the captain of the right company reported that the slope was so steep where he was that the men, as soon as they fell asleep, began to roll down hill. I had to give him leave to shift his position.

When lying there it sometimes occurred to me, what a transformation it was for these men, full of individuality and self-reliance, accustomed always to act upon their own will, to so completely subordinate their wills to the wills of other men, many of them their neighbors and friends at home. But their practical sense had told them that an army differs from a mob only in discipline, and discipline was necessary for their self-preservation. They had also soon perceived that military obedience is a duty enjoined by law, and, in obeying orders, they were obeying the law; and, besides, their enthusiasm and fire came from the feeling that, like the crusaders of old, they were engaged in a sacred cause.

One day when there was a general bombardment, I was

told a soldier wished to see me. Under the canopy of exploding shells and shrieking balls I found a youth, a boy, lying on his back on the ground. He was pale and speechless—there was a crimson hole in his breast. As I knelt by his side he looked wistfully at me. I said: "We must all die some time, and the man is happy who meets death in the discharge of duty. You have done your whole duty well." It was all he wanted. His eyes brightened, a smile flickered on his lips, and I was kneeling beside a corpse.

In June, Gen. Blair was sent on a reconnoissance up between the Big Black and the Yazoo. Leggett's Brigade (for Gen. Leggett had returned from his absence and resumed command of his brigade on the morning of the battle of Champion's Hill) was in the expedition. One day, when the 20th Ohio was in advance, we came, at a turn in the road, upon two old colored people, man and woman, plump and sleek, riding mules and coming toward us. As they caught sight of the long column of blue coats the woman, crossing her hands upon her bosom, rolled up her eyes and cried in ecstasy, "Bress de Lord! Bress Almighty God! Our friends is come, our friends is come!" On the return we crossed a plantation where the field-hands were ploughing. The soldiers liked mules, and the negroes gladly unharnessed them and helped the soldiers to mount. I said to one, "The soldiers are taking your mules." The quick response was, "An' dey is welcome to 'em, sar; dey is welcome to 'em." Men and women looked wistfully at the marching column, and began to talk about joining us. They seemed to wait the determination of a gray-headed darkey who was considering. Presently there was a shout, "Uncle Pete's agwine, an' I'm a gwine, too!" As they flocked after us one tall, stern woman strode along carrying a wooden tray and a crockery pitcher as all her effects, looking straight to the front. Some one asked, "Auntie, where are you going to?" She answered without looking, "I don't car whicher way I go so I git away from dis yer place."

On returning to the lines Gen. Leggett was transferred

to command the First Brigade, and I was assigned to his vacated place. The saps were made wide and deep enough for the passage of artillery, and batteries were constructed near the besieged works. Gen. Ransom had a battery so close that the embrasures were kept covered by mantelets. A gun would be loaded and pointed and then fired just as the mantelet was removed. The first time a gun was fired from it a storm of rifle balls poured through the embrasure. A gunner jumped on the gun and shouted back, "Too late!"

When the working parties carried the saps to the base of the works, the besieged used to light the fuses of 6-pound shells and toss them over the parapet. They would roll down among the working parties and explode, sometimes doing serious damage. A young soldier of Company C, 20th Ohio, named Friend, on detached service in the division pioneer corps, devised wooden mortars. A very small charge of powder in one of these would just lift a shell over the enemy's parapet and drop it within. These shells caused much perplexity and annoyance. After the surrender there was much inquiry from the garrison how they were contrived.

At night it was common practice for the pickets on both sides to advance unarmed, and sitting together on the ground between the lines pass the night in chat, banter and high discussion. A watch was always left in the lines, and when an officer on either side came along on his tour, warning was given, the conference ceased and the men on both sides slipped back to their places. When day came work was resumed. In the latter part of the siege there was little desultory firing. The men lay with patient, scrutinizing gaze and rifles aimed, and whenever any object appeared above the works on either side a volley of balls whistled by or through it. Private Ruggles of Company H, 20th Ohio, who performed important service through the war as a spy, was presented by Gen. Grant with a Henry rifle. Being detached from the regiment he spent his time along the lines sharpshooting. He would sometimes visit the regiment to tell of his exploits. But one day he came to me quite de-

jected, and said, in lugubrious tones, "Colonel, I aint had no kind of luck to-day. I haint killed a feller."

There was much speculation and discussion about certain small, explosive sounds that were heard. Gen. Ransom and others maintained they were caused by explosive bullets. Gen. Logan and others scouted the idea. One day, one struck the ground and exploded at Ransom's feet. Picking up the exploded shell of a rifle ball, he settled the question. After the siege, many such explosive rifle balls, which had not been used were picked up on former camp grounds of the enemy.

When Gen. Sherman was put in command of an army of observation to guard our rear against Johnston, my brigade was temporarily attached to McArthur's division in Sherman's command. The siege went on. Hundreds of cannon ceaselessly roared. Small arms sheeted over the space between the lines with lead. Rifle balls met in the air and fell to the ground welded together. One such pair was sent by Gen. Grant to Washington; another picked up by a soldier of the 78th Ohio, is in the collection of the Historical Society in Cincinnati.

When Logan's second mine was sprung, the end of the siege was obviously at hand. Negotiations silenced the combat on the 3d of July. The strange silence was oppressive. It seemed a boding silence. On the 4th of July, the fortress capitulated; the garrison marched out and stacked arms. 31,000 men and 172 pieces of artillery were surrendered.

The same day Sherman moved against Johnston. In a few days we heard that also on the 4th of July, Prentiss had bloodily repulsed an assault on Helena, and Lee had withdrawn from the dread field of Gettysburg. A week after Vicksburg, Port Hudson surrendered and the Mississippi was open to the sea. The crisis of the war was over. The end was in sight. To reach it required many days of toil, tribulation and endurance; but victory was in the air; the triumph of the Nation was assured.

