

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Battle of Port Gibson

Other Names/Site Number: Battle of Thompson's Hill; Battle of Magnolia Hills

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: N/A

Not for publication:

City/Town: Port Gibson

Vicinity: X

State: MS County: Claiborne Code: 21

Zip Code: 39180

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X
Public-Local: X
Public-State: X
Public-Federal:

Category of Property

Building(s):
District:
Site: X
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1
1
-
-
2

Noncontributing

39 buildings
2 sites
- structures
- objects
41 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1 *

* The one contributing property that was specifically identified in the original Port Gibson Battlefield National Register nomination (1972) was the Shaifer House, which remains extant.

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this _____ nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

- I hereby certify that this property is:
- Entered in the National Register
 - Determined eligible for the National Register
 - Determined not eligible for the National Register
 - Removed from the National Register
 - Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic:	DEFENSIVE	Sub:	agricultural field
	AGRICULTURE		battle site/ fortification
Current:	AGRICULTURE	Sub:	commercial forest

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification:

Materials:

Foundation:

Walls:

Roof:

Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Appearance.

The site of the Battle of Port Gibson lies approximately four miles west of the historic town of Port Gibson in Claiborne County, Mississippi. The area encompassing the battlefield, which includes approximately 3,400 acres, is currently heavily wooded and is generally in rough terrain.

The battlefield area lies in a region dominated by loess soil. This geological feature, which is characterized by steep hills and steep-sided gullies, was formed during the Pleistocene era as glaciated materials were deposited on the eastern uplands of the Mississippi River valley by wind and water. Although the steep, loess slopes formed as a result of these deposits are highly erodible if exposed to the elements, they are capable of maintaining very stable vertical profiles. As a result, roads situated on the ridge tops are characteristically "sunken" as rapid erosion on the roadbed drops the road level below the surrounding land. This gives these roads the appearance of steep-sided trenches. With trees overhanging the roads in many places, the scenery is often striking. As early as the 1850s, Frederick Law Olmstead described one such road as having "high banks on each side, coped with thick and dark, but free and sportive hedges, out of which avenues of trees grow carelessly and bend angel-like over the traveler."¹ Further erosion of the road beds has only heightened this effect. In May, 1863, these ridge top roads played a significant part in the movement of the contending forces.

Loess soil is also highly fertile, which encouraged the development of both commercial plantations and subsistence farms prior to the Civil War. Thus, except for the deep valleys and ravines, much of this area, including the battlefield site, was under cultivation and cleared of trees. The plantations established in the region typically included a main house and a cluster of outbuildings, including slave quarters.

Commercial agriculture in the 19th and early 20th centuries took its toll on the landscape, as the highly dissected slopes were further eroded by cultivation and habitation. As early as 1848, Solon Robinson, while traveling from Vicksburg to Port Gibson, described the effect of agriculture on the loessial topography:

The road today, lying over the most uneven surface ever cultivated, passed much land "worn out" and abandoned to the washings of the rains that fills the whole surface of an old field, in a few years, with impassable gullies. On the road side, a few miles before reaching Port Gibson, there is a gully big enough to bury a small town. These hills are all composed of an alluvial [sic] deposit, with nothing to prevent washing. As soon as the roots are decayed they dissolve with greater rapidity than though composed of salt.²

After World War II, with the mechanization of agriculture, the highly eroded, loess soil could not support large farm machinery. As a result, the battlefield area was rapidly abandoned and returned to forest lands. In addition, much of the labor force, especially the African American population that historically resided on the plantations, moved to other, more economically viable areas. In the latter part of the 20th Century, the advent of hunting clubs and commercial timber operations helped restore economic viability to the area's landowners while retaining many of the historic terrain features. For example, most of the sunken roads are still unimproved and retain their nineteenth century alignment and character, with the exception of the Bruinsburg Road, running along the northern perimeter of the battlefield area, which has been paved and modernized. The Bruinsburg Road generally follows its historic alignment, however.

¹ Frederick Law Olmstead, A Journey in the Back Country in the Winter of 1853-4, I, (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1907), 28-29.

² Herbert Anthony Kellar, II, Solon Robinson, Pioneer and Agriculturalist, (Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1936), 292-293.

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CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

The only existing nineteenth century house on the battlefield is the antebellum Shaifer house located on the Rodney road. It was here that the first shots of the battle were fired. The house is a one and a half story, vernacular, frame structure built of cypress. Currently in fair condition, it is owned and maintained by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Initial archaeological investigations have identified the remains of a number of outbuildings associated with the Shaifer plantation, as well as other archaeological sites associated with non-extant historic structures. These include the following sites:

1. Perkins House Site. Used as the temporary headquarters of General Grant during the initial stages of the battle, the Perkins House site is located on the north side of Widows Creek.
2. Magnolia Church Site. Located southeast of the Shaifer House. The Magnolia Church congregation was disbanded after 1865, but the structure was used by a black Baptist congregation until the 1950s, when it burned. The Magnolia Church Ridge was the scene of heavy fighting on the morning of May 1, 1863. The site of Magnolia is now owned by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
3. Foster House Site. On the north side of the historic Rodney Road (present-day Shaifer Road), the Foster House was on a ridge a short distance east of the Magnolia Church site.
4. Andrews Slave Cabins Site. The site of the Andrews plantation slaves' cabins is northeast of the Plantation Road. During the battle, the Virginia Botetourt Artillery occupied the ridge upon which the cabins stood.³

In addition, there are five recorded archaeological sites within the NHL boundaries for the battlefield site. Historic sites 22-Cb-601, 22-Cb-714, 22-Cb-715, 22-Cb-716 and 22-Cb-717 all have minor prehistoric components according to the site forms in the state archaeological inventory files. Four of these components are of unknown chronological position and there are no notes on the specific artifacts that were found. There is also no discussion of the prehistoric artifacts within the report prepared by the consulting firm who did the field work (White Star Consulting 1996). The fifth site, 22-Cb-601, yielded a micro blade core, indicative of Middle to Late Archaic occupation (ca 6000-3000 years ago) and some aboriginal ceramics that were neither classified nor collected.

According to data recorded on the Widow's Creek U.S.G.S. quadrangle map, only one small, intensive level survey was performed within the battlefield area. This survey was of a two-acre borrow area (CRS # 99-178). Nothing was found. From a review of the site data for the rest of Claiborne County, it would seem likely that there are components representing all recognized archaeological periods within the NHL boundaries. Survey 90-050, of a gas pipeline route, traverses the Widow's Creek quadrangle map about a mile south of the Southern boundary of the NHL and recorded eleven prehistoric sites whose assemblages consisted mostly of a few chert flakes and/or fire cracked rock and ceramics. Considering the fact that the pipeline route and the NHL are in similar physiographic settings, similar sites would probably be found there with an adequate survey. Smaller sites like these are probably the results of short term occupation by parties of hunter/gatherers. Due to the land use history of the area and the erosive nature of the soils, many of these sites would probably be severely altered from prehistoric times if not totally destroyed. Larger, more permanent sites would be expected on level ground near Bayou Pierre or Centers Creek.⁴

As archeological sites are counted as part of the battlefield, the contributing resources are 2: the battlefield and the Shaiffer house.

³ White Star Consulting, "The Entering Wedge": A Preservation Plan for the Port Gibson, Mississippi Battlefield, (Madison, Alabama, 1996), 45-58.

⁴ Sam McGahey, Chief Archaeologist, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, personal communication.

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NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

The battle site contains a scattering of non-historic buildings and other structures. Most of these are modest houses constructed in the middle to later years of the twentieth century. There are also two commercial buildings, a church, two non-historic cemeteries, a reconstructed and relocated log building (# 20), and a sawmill complex (#17). These non-historic properties do not substantially affect the integrity of the battle site. The noncontributing properties comprise 39 buildings (two of which are on one property, identified as #17a and #17b) and 2 sites (two small cemeteries, #12 and #18), for a total of 41 noncontributing elements. They are identified as follows:

1. house, south side of Rodney Road (0.1 mile east of the intersection with Bessie Weathers Road). A one-story wood-frame house, built circa 1930, clad in brick veneer.
2. Magnolia Missionary Baptist Church, south side of Rodney Road (0.1 mile west of the intersection with Bessie Weathers Road). A one-story church of concrete block construction, built in 1970.
3. Mobile home, south side of Rodney Road, circa 1970s-80s.
4. Mobile home, south side of Rodney Road, circa 1970s-80s.
5. Mobile home, south side of Rodney Road, circa 1970s-80s.
6. A. B. Trim House, Trim Hill Drive (a short cul-de-sac that leads southwest off of Rodney Road about 0.3 mile west of the intersection with Bessie Weathers Road). A one-story wood-frame house built in 1952.
7. house on Trim Hill Drive. A one-story wood-frame house, built about 1955.
8. house on Trim Hill Drive. A one-story brick house, probably built in the 1970s or 1980s.
9. mobile home, Trim Hill Drive, circa 1970s-80s.
10. double-wide mobile home, 2083 Rodney Road, circa 1970s-80s.
11. double-wide mobile home, 2087 Rodney Road, circa 1970s-80s.
12. cemetery, south side of Rodney Road (2.5 miles west of the intersection with Bessie Weathers Road). A modest 20th century cemetery.
13. house, south side of Rodney Road (3.2 miles west of the intersection with Bessie Weathers Road). A one-story wood-frame house, circa 1955.
14. double-wide mobile home, 4179 Rodney Road, circa 1970s-80s.
15. mobile home, located on the west side of the old Andrews House road, circa 1970s-80s.
16. house located on the west side of the old Andrews House road. A one-story concrete-block house, circa 1960s.
17. sawmill complex, north side of Rodney Road. This complex consists of two concrete block buildings (17a and 17b) and a sprawling array of open sheds, circa 1960s.
18. Lee Cemetery, located north of the sawmill complex. A small family cemetery containing four marked graves dating from 1941 to 1966.
19. house, 6033 Rodney Road. A one-story blond-brick house, circa 1960s.
20. Bayou Pierre Church, Lookout Point, north side of Rodney Road. A log building, constructed at this location in the 1960s from parts of an early 19th century log house moved from another site.

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21. commercial building, north side of Bessie Weathers Road (about 0.1 mile west of the intersection with Rodney Road). A one-story concrete-block building used as a nightclub, circa 1960s-70s.
22. commercial building, south side of Bessie Weathers Road (about 0.1 mile west of the intersection with Rodney Road). A two-story concrete-block building, circa 1960s-70s.
23. house, 1048 Bessie Weathers Road (north side). A one-story wood-frame house, circa 1950s.
24. double-wide mobile home, 1057 Bessie Weathers Road (south side), circa 1970s-80s.
25. house, 1058 Bessie Weathers Road (north side). A one-story wood-frame house, circa 1960s.
26. mobile home, behind 1058 Bessie Weathers Road (north side), circa 1970s-80s.
27. mobile home, 1059 Bessie Weathers Road (south side), circa 1970s-80s..
28. house, south side of Bessie Weathers Road. A two-story wood-frame house with a brick Gothic-arched porch, circa 1940s-50s.
29. Brown House, south side of Bessie Weathers Road. A one-story wood-frame bungalow built about 1940.
30. house, 1098 Bessie Weathers Road (north side). A one-story wood-frame house, circa 1960s.
31. house, 1115 Bessie Weathers Road (south side). A one-story wood-frame house, circa 1960s.
32. house, 1122 Bessie Weathers Road (north side). A one-story wood-frame house, circa 1960s.
33. house, 1130 Bessie Weathers Road (south side). A one-story wood-frame house, circa 1960s.
34. house, 2050 Bessie Weathers Road (west side). A one-story Masonite-clad house, circa 1970s.
35. house, next-door to 2050 Bessie Weathers Road (west side). A one-story Masonite-clad house, circa 1970s.
36. house, Bessie Weathers Road (west side). A one-story wood-frame house, partially clad in stone veneer siding, circa 1970s.
37. house, Bessie Weathers Road (east side). A one-story Masonite-clad house, circa 1970s.
38. house, Bessie Weathers Road (west side). A one-story wood-frame house, clad in asbestos siding, circa 1960s.
39. house, 2196 Bessie Weathers Road (west side, north of the intersection with Shaifer Road). A one-story brick-veneer house, circa 1980s.
40. house, Shaifer Road (north side, west of the intersection with Bessie Weathers Road). A one-story brick-veneer house, circa 1980s.

There are also some ruins of abandoned houses and some sheds and similar minor structures that were not counted. Because of the thickness of vegetation in the area, it is possible that there may be some other noncontributing buildings or structures that were not visible and are thus not included on this list.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:

Applicable National Register Criteria: A X B X C D
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A B C D E F G

NHL Criteria: 1

NHL Theme(s): VI. Shaping the Political Landscape
 3. Military Institutions and Activities

Areas of Significance: Military

Period(s) of Significance: May 1, 1863

Significant Dates: May 1, 1863

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: N/A

Historic Contexts: VI. The Civil War
 C. War in the West

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The Port Gibson battlefield is of national significance under criterion 1 of the National Historic Landmarks program. Criterion 1 is met because the battle of Port Gibson marked the beginning of the final phase of the Vicksburg Campaign, a complex, offensive movement which propelled the Union commander, Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, into national prominence and was key to the final Union victory. The surrender of Vicksburg on July 4, 1863, and the opening of the Mississippi River to Union commerce and military traffic had a profound effect on the outcome of the Civil War.⁵ The battle of Port Gibson was recognized in the 1993 Civil War Sites Advisory Commission's *Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields* as a Priority 1 (Class B) battlefield site. According that classification, Port Gibson has national significance due to the battle's "direct and decisive influence" on the Vicksburg Campaign.⁶

Criterion 1: Significant Events

During the final months of 1862 and in the spring of 1863, Union forces under the overall command of Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant made several attempts to bypass the Confederate defenses posted on the bluffs above the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers. Foiled by topography and the successful maneuvering of Confederate forces, Federal efforts to capture Vicksburg and open the Mississippi River had stalled by the spring of 1863. In an effort to find another way past the imposing batteries controlling the river, Grant moved his army down the Louisiana side of the Mississippi. On April 30-May 1, Grant effected a large-scale amphibious landing on the east bank of the river at Bruinsburg, Mississippi. With a foothold established on the Mississippi side of the river at Bruinsburg, Grant felt "a degree of relief scarcely unequalled," as "all the campaigns, labors, hardships and exposures from the month of December previous to this time that had been made and endured were for the accomplishment of this one object."⁷

After establishing a beachhead at Bruinsburg, Grant's next task was to move his army inland. Opposing this movement was a smaller command under Confederate Brig. Gen. John S. Bowen. Although outnumbered, Bowen's forces could have wrecked Grant's inland campaign at the outset with a victory at Port Gibson. Following an all-day fight in rough terrain on May 1, 1863, however, Bowen's men were forced to retreat and Grant's foothold in Mississippi was secured.

An 1843 graduate of West Point, Grant served in the Mexican War. Resigning his commission in 1854 Grant spent the next six years involved in a series of unproductive business ventures. At the outbreak of the Civil War Grant offered his services and was appointed colonel of the 21st Illinois. Soon appointed a brigadier general, Grant saw action at Belmont, Shiloh and in the Corinth Campaign prior to the Vicksburg Campaign. As overall commander of the Union forces in the West, engaged in the effort to capture Vicksburg and secure the Mississippi River, Grant's true ability as a military strategist emerged, as he successfully conducted a series of forced marches, complex combined operations and well-executed battles to reach his goal. In the fall of 1863, Grant repeated his success as an army commander at Chattanooga, and in March, 1864, was promoted to Lieutenant General and made Chief of the Armies. Moving to the eastern theater of operations, Grant directed a relentless campaign of attrition against the Army of Northern Virginia, and on April 9, 1865,

⁵ Code of Federal Regulations, 36, Part 65, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1988), 292.

⁵ Civil War Sites Advisory Commission Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields, (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service), 17, 49.

⁶ Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant, Volume I, (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1885), 480-481.

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accepted the surrender of that army by Robert E. Lee. After the Civil War, Grant was appointed Secretary of War by President Johnson, and in 1868 was himself elected president. Serving two terms, Grant's presidential administration is unfortunately viewed by most historians as corrupt, although Grant himself was known to be an honest man. U.S. Grant's home in Galena, Illinois, presented to him by grateful citizens after the Civil War, was designated an NHL in 1960; his boyhood home in Georgetown, Ohio, was designated an NHL in 1985.

A native of Kentucky, John A. McClernand was raised in southern Illinois and had a strong dislike for abolitionists. A lawyer by training and a politician by profession, McClernand was elected to the House of Representatives and ran unsuccessfully for the speakership in 1860. Hoping to win political power by enlisting in the war effort, McClernand was at times bombastic and contemptuous of military protocol. He especially disliked graduates of West Point. While difficult to get along with, McClernand was at least willing to fight and eventually developed into a capable officer in the western theatre. Although Grant disliked and distrusted McClernand, he had a natural ability as a corps commander in the Army of the Tennessee. As such, he was awarded the lead as the Union army crossed at Bruinsburg. At Port Gibson, it was McClernand's XIII Corps which bore the brunt of the fighting. While not tactically innovative, McClernand did not fail Grant at Port Gibson. Later, during the Siege of Vicksburg, Grant's personal dislike of McClernand rose to the surface and McClernand was dismissed from command. After the Civil War, McClernand, a lifelong Democrat, served as chairman of the National Convention in 1876.⁸

Narrative of Events⁹

Frustration and death plagued the Union Army of the Tennessee throughout the winter of 1862-1863, as it maneuvered under the command of Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant to seize the fortress city of Vicksburg. The Confederate citadel on the Mississippi River remained defiant, seemingly impervious to capture by Union land and naval forces. From Yazoo Pass and Holly Springs in north Mississippi, to Lake Providence in Louisiana, along the banks of Chickasaw Bayou north of the city, and the abortive canal across De Soto Point opposite Vicksburg, Grant's efforts had ended in failure. The only result of his operations thus far being an ever lengthening casualties list. The Northern press ridiculed Grant and clamored for his removal. Even members of the Cabinet urged President Abraham Lincoln to find a new commander for his western army. The president, however, answered those critical of Grant by saying, "I can't spare this man, he fights. I'll try him a little longer."¹⁰

At forty-one years of age, Grant was at a crossroads in his life. He was no stranger to adversity. Having battled his way to national prominence at Belmont, Fort Donelson, and Shiloh, he struggled with rumor and innuendo to establish a reputation of respectability. Cognizant of the criticism which swirled around him in both military and political circles, Grant appeared stoic, but confided the torment he felt to his wife Julia. Determined to persevere, he ignored the critics and remained focused on his objective – Vicksburg. After months of frustration and failure, Grant examined his options.

The first was to launch an amphibious assault across the Mississippi River and storm the Vicksburg stronghold. The second was to pull back to Memphis and try the overland route once again. And the third option was to march the army down the west side of the river, search for a favorable crossing point, and

⁸ Ezra J. Warner, Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 183, 293.

⁹ This narrative is an edited version of an article entitled "Prelude to Victory: The Battle of Port Gibson," by Terry Winschel, Historian, Vicksburg National Military Park. It was first published in the February 1994 issue of Blue and Gray Magazine. It is used here with the permission of the editors of Blue and Gray Magazine.

¹⁰ John Fiske, The Mississippi Valley in the Civil War, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1900), 225.

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transfer the field of operations to the area south and east of Vicksburg. In characteristic fashion and with grim determination, Grant boldly opted for the march south.¹¹ On March 29, 1863, he directed Maj. Gen. John A. McClernand of the XIII Corps to open a road from Milliken's Bend to New Carthage on the Mississippi River below Vicksburg. The movement started on March 31, and with it the Vicksburg campaign began in earnest.

On March 31, a task force commanded by Col. Thomas W. Bennett of the Sixty-ninth Indiana left its encampment at Milliken's Bend with instructions to reconnoiter the road to New Carthage. Informed that the road was passable, McClernand dispatched additional troops to make necessary repairs to the road. Over the next several days the entire XIII Corps took up the line of march and slogged its way south over muddy roads. The troops marched along natural levees, down the west side of the river, building bridges and corduroying roads practically each step of the way. Progress was slow and the work backbreaking, but by mid-April McClernand secured New Carthage for use as a forward staging area.

Such a movement by large numbers of troops was difficult to conceal from the eyes of roving Confederate cavalry. Rumors of the Federal advance reached the ears of Brig. Gen. John S. Bowen, Confederate commander at Grand Gulf, 25 miles below Vicksburg. Bowen acted instinctively when the rumors were confirmed and on April 4 sent Col. Francis M. Cockrell across the river to make contact with the enemy. Ordered to keep his superior apprised of the Federal movements, Cockrell crossed the river with the First and Second Missouri Infantry Regiments and a section of artillery. Quickly making contact with the head of McClernand's column, the aggressive colonel sent Bowen frequent and fairly accurate reports of the Federal movements. Bowen, in turn, notified Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton in Jackson of the developing threat and braced himself to meet the Union onslaught should it be aimed at Grand Gulf.

On April 16, while Grant's army marched south through Louisiana, part of the Union fleet commanded by R. Adm. David Dixon Porter prepared to run by the Vicksburg batteries. At 9:15 p.m., lines were cast-off and the vessels moved away from their anchorage with engines muffled and all lights extinguished to conceal the movement. As the boats rounded De Soto Point, above Vicksburg, they were spotted by Confederate lookouts who spread the alarm. Bales of cotton soaked in turpentine and barrels of tar which lined the shore were set on fire by the Confederates to illuminate the river and silhouette the boats. Although each vessel was hit repeatedly, Porter's fleet successfully fought its way past the Confederate batteries with the loss of only one transport and headed toward a rendezvous with Grant on the Louisiana shore south of Vicksburg.

On April 25, the XVII Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. James Birdseye McPherson, took up the line of march south from Milliken's Bend. By the end of April, the XIII Corps and two divisions of the XVII Corps, along with Porter's gunboats, were poised for a strike across the Mississippi River. It was Grant's intention to force a crossing of the river at Grand Gulf and move on fortress Vicksburg from the south and east. To prevent Confederate reinforcements from being sent to Grand Gulf and thus improve his chances for a successful crossing, Grant ordered the XV Corps to make a demonstration towards Snyder's Bluff, northeast of Vicksburg. The XV Corps, which was still encamped at Milliken's Bend and Young's Point, was commanded by Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman, Grant's most trusted and experienced subordinate. The demonstration, made April 29-May 1 in conjunction with naval forces on the Yazoo River, was a feeble effort which made little impression on the Confederates.

Pemberton, and many of his subordinates, however, continued in the belief that the Federal movement against Vicksburg would be launched north of the city. Even though the bulk of Porter's fleet was below Vicksburg, Sherman's demonstration served to strengthen that belief. So firm were Pemberton's expectations that the reports emanating from Grand Gulf, which detailed the Federal movements in Louisiana, were not taken

¹¹ Historian Edwin C. Bearss writes emphatically of Grant's decision, "The third alternative was full of dangers and risks. Failure in this venture would entail little less than total destruction. If it succeeded, however, the gains would be complete and decisive." Edwin C. Bearss, The Vicksburg Campaign, (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside House, Inc., 1986), Vol. II, 21.

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seriously until the situation became critical. By April 28, Bowen considered the situation at Grand Gulf to be just that--critical. That day, from his lookout atop Point of Rocks, above Grand Gulf, Bowen watched in awe as the invasion armada prepared for action.¹²

Fortunately for Bowen, his fortifications were strong. At 7 a.m., the Union fleet pulled away from Hard Times Landing and steamed into action. The gunboats, which included "City Series" ironclads--Carondelet, Louisville, Mound City, and Pittsburg, each mounting 13 guns, bombarded the Grand Gulf defenses for five hours in an attempt to silence the Confederate cannon and clear the way for a landing by Grant's infantry.

The bombardment raged in unabated fury throughout the morning hours. The powerful ironclads hammered away at the earth forts sending solid shot and shell crashing among the Confederate defenders. Although his guns silenced Grand Gulf's Fort Wade, Porter's fleet failed to quiet the guns at Fort Cobun. In the exchange of fire with Bowen's batteries, the gunboats were hit repeatedly and the fleet sustained heavy damage. Bitterly disappointed, Porter was forced to disengage his vessels and declared, "Grand Gulf is the strongest place on the Mississippi."¹³

Not wishing to send his transports loaded to the gunwales with troops to attempt a landing in the face of enemy fire, Grant disembarked his command and continued the march south along the levee at the base of Coffee Point. That evening, as the infantrymen and wagons headed toward Disharoon's plantation, Porter's fleet again cast-off from Hard Times and moved down river at forced draft. Screened by the gunboats, which bombarded the forts with solid shot and shell, the transports and barges slipped past the Confederate batteries unscathed. Looking now to cross his army at Rodney, Grant was informed that there was a good road ascending the bluffs east of Bruinsburg (midway between Grand Gulf and Rodney). Elated by this intelligence, Grant seized the opportunity and decided to hurl his army across the mighty river and onto Mississippi soil at Bruinsburg.

By daybreak on April 30, the fleet rounded to the levee at Disharoon's plantation, where the army had spent the night, and infantrymen were quickly loaded. At 8 a.m. the fleet cast-off with steam whistles blowing and signal flags snapping in the breeze. As the mighty armada moved downstream, one soldier noted of the invasion force, "The decks were covered with anxious soldiers, the guns were cleared for action, and the crews were at quarters." All eyes watched the shore for signs of enemy presence, and the soldiers and sailors were greatly relieved to find only a lone citizen at the landing to greet them. The landing was made unopposed and a band aboard Benton struck up "The Red, White, and Blue" as soldiers of the Twenty-fourth and Forty-sixth Indiana jumped ashore.¹⁴

Not a shot was fired as the Federal soldiers landed. Throughout the day, Union troops were shuttled across the river in what was the greatest amphibious operation in American history up to that time. Grant later wrote:

When this was effected I felt a degree of relief scarcely ever equaled since. Vicksburg was not yet taken it is true, nor were its defenders demoralized by any of our previous moves. I was now in the enemy's country, with a vast river and the stronghold of Vicksburg between me and my base of supplies. But I was on dry ground on the same side of the river with the enemy. All the

¹² U. S. War Department, War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (hereafter cited as O. R.), (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series 1, Vol. 24, Part 3, 797.

¹³ U. S. War Department, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1895-1829), Series 1, Vol. 24, 627.

¹⁴ History of the Forty-sixth Regiment Indiana Volunteer Infantry, (Logansport, Indiana: Wilson, Humphreys, & Co., 1888), 56.

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campaigns, labors, hardships and exposures from the month of December previous to this time that had been made and endured, were for the accomplishment of this one object.¹⁵

Elements of the Union army pushed inland and took possession of the bluffs, thereby securing the landing area. By noon, most of the XIII Corps--17,000-strong--was ashore. McClelland's disdain for administrative details, however, soon jeopardized the operations for rations had not been issued to his men prior to embarkation. Precious time elapsed before the necessary three days' rations were brought ashore and distributed to the troops, after which the column was formed and placed in motion. By late afternoon of April 30, 22,000 soldiers were ashore and the inland campaign began.

The long blue column was formed and under a merciless sun pushed out from the landing area and up the steep bluffs. Charles B. Johnson of the 130th Illinois, a hospital steward from Greenville, observed "For two miles the road ran through the river bottom, then up a long hill of red clay [loess soil], next by quiet farmhouses and cultivated fields, through pretty wooded groves and up quiet lanes, all bearing the marks of peace, and resting in supposed security from the inroads of invading armies."¹⁶

The march was a difficult one for the Federal soldiers who were laden with 60 rounds of munitions and more rations than could be carried in their haversacks. First Lt. Samuel C. Jones of Company A, Twenty-second Iowa, recorded the method by which extra rations were carried: "The bayonets were placed on their guns and run through the meat, so each man had his extra ration of meat fixed on his bayonet. Then at a right shoulder shift, we proceeded on our march." Men of other units did the same and, as Lieutenant Jones observed, "the whole army could be seen for miles, worming its way over that vast flat country with the bayonets gleaming in the sunshine, and the ration of meat in its place. It was picturesque and beautiful to behold."¹⁷

The soldiers reached the top of the bluffs where a panorama beautiful in the extreme opened before their eyes. Off to their left, amidst vast fields of cotton, was one of the largest, most ornate mansions in the ante-bellum South--Windsor. Built between 1859-1861 by Smith Coffee Daniell, II, Windsor epitomized the opulence associated with the Southern aristocracy. General McClelland established his headquarters at Windsor while many Union soldiers availed themselves of the stately oaks and rested in the shade. At Windsor, McClelland made the decision to "push on by a forced march that night" in hopes of securing the bridges across Bayou Pierre at Port Gibson.¹⁸

The march was resumed at 5:30 p.m. with Col. Samuel Merrill's Twenty-first Iowa in the lead. Instead of taking the Bruinsburg Road, which was the direct road from the landing area to Port Gibson, Merrill's Hawkeyes led the column south to Bethel Church where they turned left onto the Rodney-Port Gibson road. Darkness soon settled over the fields and scattered forest and the pace of the march slowed to a crawl. First Sgt. Charles A. Hobbs of the Ninety-ninth Illinois recorded of his experience that night:

The moon is shining above us and the road is romantic in the extreme. The artillery wagons rattle forward and the heavy tramp of many men gives a dull but impressive sound.

¹⁵ Grant, Vol. 1, 480-481.

¹⁶ Charles B. Johnson, Muskets and Medicine; or Army Life in the Sixties, (London: F. A. Davis, Co., 1917), 78-79.

¹⁷ Samuel C. Jones, Reminiscences of the Twenty-second Iowa Volunteer Infantry, (Iowa City, Iowa, 1907), 29.

¹⁸ Lt. Col. Henry C. Warmoth of McClelland's staff noted of the Widow Daniell and her family, "The old woman and the young ones too, spitfires. Treated us very uncivilly." Paul H. Hass, "The Vicksburg Diary of Henry Clay Warmoth: Part II," Journal of Mississippi History, Vol. XXXII, 64; O.R., Series 1, Vol. 24, Part 1, 143.

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In many places the road seems to end abruptly, but we come to the place we find it turning at right angles, passing through narrow valleys, sometimes through hills, and presenting the best opportunity to the Rebels for defense if they had but known our purpose.¹⁹

To provide greater security for the column as it advanced through the night, Merrill recalled his skirmishers and replaced them with a 16-man patrol led by Lt. Col. Cornelius W. Dunlap. Ordered to "go forward until fired on by the enemy," the men of the advance guard knew they would eventually find the Confederates, but where and when? As they pushed through the darkness, the tension was unbearable. Shortly after midnight, the vanguard moved down a steep hill, crossed Widows Creek, and started up a long grade toward the A. K. Shaifer house.²⁰

Back at Grand Gulf, Bowen had watched helplessly as the fleet passed his batteries on the evening of April 29. It was imperative that he redeploy his force to counter the Federal threat to his downstream flank. But without massive reinforcements he was almost powerless to contest a crossing of the river. Fortunately, the sounds of heavy firing at Grand Gulf convinced the post commander at Vicksburg to send the troops which Pemberton had ordered held in readiness to assist Bowen. Marching orders were issued to the brigades of Brig. Gens. Edward D. Tracy and William E. Baldwin.²¹ Tracy's brigade of Alabamians, 1,500-strong, left their camps near Warrenton, just below Vicksburg, and headed toward Hankinson's Ferry on the Big Black River. Moving out at sunset on April 29, Tracy's men soon found the night march a grueling one as the roads were wet and both man and beast mired in mud. Yet, the Alabamians managed to reach the river shortly after midnight where they rested for several hours before pushing on toward Grand Gulf.

Along with Tracy's men marched the Virginians of the Botetourt Artillery (6 guns)--the only unit from Virginia to participate in the Vicksburg campaign. Sgt. James L. Burks of the Virginia battery suffered through the march and recalled:

We reached Big Black about 12 o'clock at night and were engaged from that time until daylight marching about one mile. We had to pass through mud in which the guns would sink up to the axel-trees and the horses mired so deep that they couldn't pull out at all and had to be taken out.

The guns and caissons had to be pulled out by hand, having to take the ammunition chest off before they could be moved at all. We finished ferrying our battery over about daylight on the morning of the 30th and then moved on towards Grand Gulf without stopping to feed the horses.²²

Also hastening to Bowen's assistance was the brigade commanded by William Baldwin.²³

¹⁹ Diary of C. A. Hobbs, Regimental Files, 99th Illinois, Vicksburg National Military Park.

²⁰ The Shaifer House is 13 miles from the landing site. George Crooke, The Twenty-first Regiment of Iowa Volunteer Infantry: A Narrative of its Experience in Active Service, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: King, Fowle, & Co., 1891), 55.

²¹ Bowen reported the action to his superiors in Jackson, after which he received the following telegram from Pemberton: "In the name of the army, I desire to thank you and your troops for your gallant conduct to-day. Keep up the good work by every effort to repair damages to-night. Yesterday I warmly recommended you for a major-generalcy. I shall renew it." O.R., Series 1, Vol. 24, Part 1, 576.

²² Jerald H. Markham, The Botetourt Artillery, (Lynchburg, Virginia: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1986), 27.

²³ Captured at Fort Donelson in February, 1862, Baldwin was again surrendered at Vicksburg and was paroled. After his second exchange, he was killed in a fall from his horse on February 19, 1864.

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Positioned north of Vicksburg when the marching orders arrived, Baldwin's men quickly broke camp and took up the line of march. Although they had a long and difficult road ahead of them, the men moved out in high spirits with the anticipation of battle. At 2 a.m., the men halted and rested until sunrise at which time the march was resumed and the brigade pushed across the Big Black River at Hankinson's Ferry. Once south of the river, William Pitt Chambers of the Forty-sixth Mississippi Infantry noted of the march:

The roads were now more level, the air seemed purer and the spirits of the men were wonderfully elated. Again and again we made the echoes ring with our shouts. Jest and repartee were heard on every side and altogether "Baldwin's Cavalry"...enjoyed themselves better than in any march they had ever made. But physical fatigue will dampen the ardor of the most elastic spirit, and as the long hours dragged by with no orders save "close up!" the enthusiasm seemed to die away and a great weariness of limb overtook us.²⁴

Bowen did not wait for the arrival of reinforcements to redeploy his command in an effort to meet the Federal threat. On the evening of April 29, he ordered Brig. Gen. Martin E. Green with a small strike force of 450 men from Grand Gulf to picket the roads leading from Port Gibson south to Natchez and west to Rodney. Upon receipt of orders, Green moved quickly to carry out his assignment by sending the strike force beyond Port Gibson. Green arrived in person at Port Gibson at daybreak on April 30 and immediately began reconnoitering along the Rodney road. He found the terrain near Magnolia Church (approximately 3 1/2 miles from Port Gibson) suitable for a delaying action. Bowen also examined the area and approved of Green's selection of ground.

At dusk, Green advanced his small brigade (approximately 1,000 men) and posted his regiments athwart the Rodney road with the Sixth Mississippi (Col. Robert Lowry) on the right, followed to the left by the Twelfth Arkansas Sharpshooter Battalion (Capt. Griff Bayne) astride the road, the Fifteenth Arkansas (Lt. Col. W. W. Reynolds), and the Twenty-first Arkansas on the left extending the line into the Widows Creek bottom. The four guns of the Pettus Flying Artillery were posted just north of the road near the Foster house. Lt. William D. Tisdale and four men of the Twelfth Arkansas Sharpshooter Battalion were ordered forward by Green to establish an outpost near the A. K. Shaifer house, 600 yards farther west. There his men settled down for the night in full expectation of meeting the enemy on the morrow.

The terrain selected by Green was ideal for defense. A maze of ridges, flat-topped and of equal height, ran in all directions. Although the ridge tops were cultivated, they were separated by steep-sided and extremely deep ravines that were filled with a tangled, almost impenetrable mass of cane, vines, and trees. Visibility from the ridge tops was excellent, but, as historian Edwin Bearss so vividly describes, "upon descending into the ravines the jungle closed tightly about, so that each man's world became a tiny green-walled room only a few yards across." Such terrain features would prevent the Federals from bringing their overwhelming superiority of numbers into full play and would help to neutralize the powerful Union artillery. (The Federals would have a clear advantage with 58 pieces of artillery compared to Bowen's 16 guns.)²⁵

Green's brigade was strengthened by the addition of Tracy's Alabama brigade which arrived at 10 p.m., having marched 40 miles in 27 hours. Posted on the Confederate right, astride the Bruinsburg road, Tracy placed the Twenty-third Alabama (Col. F. K. Beck) on the left, followed to the right by the Thirty-first Alabama (Col. D. R. Hundley), Thirtieth Alabama (Col. C. M. Shelley), and the Twentieth Alabama (Col. Isham W. Garrott) on the right with his flank anchored on a prominent knoll overlooking Bayou Pierre. The Forty-sixth Alabama

²⁴ William Pitt Chambers, "My Journal," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, Vol. V, 262-263.

²⁵ Bearss, Vol. II, 357.

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commanded by Col. M. L. Woods would not arrive on the field until the morning of May 1. Supporting Tracy's line were two sections (4 guns) of the Botetourt Artillery positioned in center of the line.

The hours passed slowly and tension mounted as rumors of the Federal advance spread like wildfire. At 12:30 a.m., on May 1, Martin Green rode forward to see that Lieutenant Tisdale and his men were alert. Riding into the yard at the A. K. Shaifer house, Green was amused to see Mrs. Shaifer and the women of the house frantically loading a wagon with all their household items. The general tried to calm their fears by telling them that the enemy could not possibly arrive before daylight. Just then, the crash of musketry shattered the stillness and several bullets buried themselves in the wagon-load of furniture. Contrary to Green's assurances the enemy had arrived. The women were terrified and, screaming with fright, leaped into the wagon and whipped the animals toward Port Gibson.²⁶

Green quickly mounted and, after ordering Lieutenant Tisdale to contest the enemy advance, rode hard to Magnolia Church to alert his brigade. Just east of the church, where Green's main line of resistance was posted behind a worm fence, Lt. John S. Bell of the Twelfth Arkansas Sharpshooter Battalion waited nervously for the Federals. He later recalled:

We could hear the enemy forming, and it was so still we could hear every command given. Our men had orders not to fire until word was given. Soon we could see their line of skirmishers coming down the road and could hear them say there was no one here, it was only a cavalry scout. When they were within 50 yards the word "fire" was given.²⁷

Several Federal soldiers crumpled to the ground as Green's line opened fire and Colonel Dunlap's Hawkeyes recoiled under the murderous volley. The other companies of the Twenty-first Iowa were quickly brought forward and the guns of the First Iowa Battery thundered into position, dropped trail, and opened fire. Col. William M. Stone, commander of the Second Brigade, Fourteenth Division, of McClelland's XIII Corps, ordered up his three remaining regiments. Stone deployed the Twenty-third Iowa to the left of and in line with the Twenty-first Iowa, and formed the Twenty-second Iowa and Eleventh Wisconsin in a second line behind the guns. Adding strength to the Federal deployment were three cannon of the First Indiana Battery which soon arrived and dropped trail abreast of the Iowa battery, but south of the road. In a matter of moments the Hoosiers added their deadly rounds of canister to the fray.

A spirited skirmish ensued which lasted until 3 a.m. The night, however, was so dark that the only targets either army had were the muzzle flashes of the enemy guns. Fearful lest their men fall into a trap, Union officers decided to wait until dawn before deploying additional troops. The Confederates held their ground, and for the next several hours an uneasy calm settled over the woods and scattered fields. Soldiers of both armies rested on their arms, but few slept. Throughout the night the Federals gathered their forces in hand and both sides prepared for the battle which they knew would come with the rising sun.

Grant was anxious to complete the river crossing and hurry McPherson's troops to McClelland's support. With the sound of battle audible in the distance, the crossing continued. Huge fires were built to illuminate the landing area and guide vessels ferrying troops across the river. Nonetheless, at 3 a.m., the transports Horizon and Moderator collided. Horizon sank taking with her the guns, horses, and equipment of Company G, Second Illinois Light Artillery. Reluctantly, Grant suspended the crossing for the night, but, with first light, the crossing resumed and the troops rushed to the field where battle had been joined.

²⁶ Mrs. Shaifer was sister of then Confederate Col. Benjamin Grubb Humphreys of the Twenty-first Mississippi Infantry Regiment which served in William Barksdale's brigade of the Army of Northern Virginia, and her son was at Port Hudson with Company B, First Mississippi Light Artillery.

²⁷ The Pine Bluff Commercial, December 17, 1904.

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At dawn, May 1, Union troops began to move in force along the Rodney road from the Shaifer house toward Magnolia Church. At the same time, Maj. Gen. John A. McClernand, commander of the XIII Corps and senior officer present on the field, ordered the division of Brig. Gen. Peter Osterhaus to advance along a connecting plantation road to the left toward the Bruinsburg road along which Tracy's Confederates could be seen in force.²⁸ With skirmishers well in advance the Federals began a very slow and deliberate advance around 5:30 a.m. The skirmishers posted by both Tracy and Green immediately began to contest the advance and the bloodshed began in earnest.

McClernand directed most of his force along the Rodney road against Green's position on the Confederate left. His lead division, which had opened the battle at midnight, was led by Brig. Gen. Eugene Asa Carr. Already partially deployed with Stone's brigade north of the road, Carr called up his remaining brigade led by Brig. Gen. William P. Benton which moved into position on the right, south of the road. It was Carr's intention to swing his right brigade forward and seize Magnolia Church ridge 450 yards to his front. Supported by the 12 guns of the First Iowa and First Indiana batteries, Carr ordered his men forward at 6:30.

Green watched in dismay as the Federals surged through the ravines and canebrakes south of the road and, in spite of a "galling fire of shell and musketry," probed for his left flank. The skirmishers clad in butternut and gray were forced to fall back to the main line 200 yards east of Magnolia Church. As Union soldiers solidified their newly won position near the church, sharpshooters peppered the Confederate line with a heavy and accurate fire. Benton reported, "Now came the 'tug of war' in good earnest." In the deadly firefight which erupted, soldiers of both armies went down with horrifying frequency and the once peaceful setting of Magnolia Church became a killing ground.²⁹

It was not long before Green's entire line became hard pressed and the artillery unit supporting him out of ammunition. At 7:00 a.m., Green sent a courier to Tracy requesting that he send an infantry regiment and a section of the Virginia battery. It was Green's opinion that "he could not sustain his position on the left fifteen minutes unless re-enforced," and added, "if the left was not sustained the right would be cut off from all chance of retreat." Although his main line was not yet engaged, Tracy reluctantly acquiesced. Lt. William Norgrove of the Botetourt Artillery limbered up his section of 12-pounder howitzers and went rumbling down the road behind the Twenty-third Alabama Infantry.³⁰

Shortly after Norgrove's section was sent to the left, the six 10-pounder Rodman rifles of the Seventh Michigan Battery supporting Osterhaus' advance moved into position on a ridge 1,500 yards from Tracy's line. The artillerymen clad in blue unlimbered trail and opened fire. The Virginians of the Botetourt Artillery, however, responded quickly--and on target--with their two 12-pounder Napoleons, disabling one of the Rodmans and inflicting casualties of two killed and two wounded. Despite the "galling fire" of Confederate artillery, Capt. Charles H. Lanphere held his Wolverines grimly to their task and in short order hurled a destructive fire of their own at the Virginians. The artillery duel raged in unabated fury for 45 minutes, but the powerful Michigan battery soon gained the upper hand. Lanphere would later boast in his report that the shells from his battery

²⁸ Alerted by the night battle, Tracy realigned his regiments to a position south of and parallel to the Bruinsburg road.

²⁹ O.R., Series 1, Vol. 24, Part 1, 626.

³⁰ The Confederate wings were separated by the deep and impenetrable valley of Centers Creek. All lateral movements or communications between the wings were via the junction of the Rodney and Bruinsburg roads, two miles west of Port Gibson. The roundabout distance of almost four miles took at least one hour for a marching column to travel.

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landed among the enemy with "great effect."³¹ As the Michiganders methodically began pounding the Virginians' position, Osterhaus deployed his troops into line of battle astride the plantation road with Brig. Gen. Theophilus T. Garrard's brigade in the lead followed by the one commanded by Col. Lionel A. Sheldon. Regiments from Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio quickly formed their lines. Regimental and national colors were uncased and fixed bayonets glistened in the morning light as the troops dressed their lines and prepared to advance. These veteran units went forward with a rush and, raising a mighty cheer, surged into the ravines before them. Order was difficult to maintain in such rugged terrain and gaps opened in the Federal lines. Regiments soon became separated from one another in the dense vegetation and the advance ground to a halt as it came up against Tracy's line of Alabamians.

With the advance temporarily checked, Union sharpshooters were ordered forward in an effort to develop Tracy's line and silence the Confederate artillery. Inching their way forward through the tangled jungle, the sharpshooters soon found their prey. Exposed on the forward slope of a ridge, near several slave cabins, men and horses of the Botetourt Artillery began to go down at an alarming rate. Fearing for the safety of the battery, Lt. Phillip Peters sent Sgt. Francis G. Obenchain to General Tracy requesting that the caissons be sent to the rear and that the infantry open fire. Tracy, not wishing to develop his line and, therefore, its weakness, denied the request. The Virginians stood to their post and fired their weapons with determination and skill. The odds, however, were against them. A second time Obenchain was sent to Tracy with the same request, and a second time denied.

The skirmishers from Alabama began falling back in the face of enemy pressure and Tracy's main line opened fire. The scattered fields and forest were soon ablaze from massed volleys and quickly obscured by the thick smoke of battle. Sergeant Obenchain was yet again sent to Tracy requesting that the caissons be run to the rear for safety. The sergeant recalled that while speaking to Tracy, "a ball struck him on back of the neck passing through. He fell with great force on his face and in falling cried 'O Lord!' He was dead when I stooped to him." Edward Tracy was the first of several Confederate generals to die in defense of Vicksburg.³² Col. Isham W. Garrott of the Twentieth Alabama assumed command of the brigade and was determined to hold firm the Confederate right at all hazards.³³

Federal pressure continued to mount all along the line as McClernand threw in additional brigades upon their arrival from Bruinsburg. Determined to drive the Confederates before him, McClernand directed the greater part of his corps forward on the Rodney road. As the blue lines slowly felt their way forward, Bowen arrived from Grand Gulf to survey the situation and take personal command. At a glance, he realized the enemy was present in overwhelming numbers. Yet, his keen eye for terrain features convinced him that if reinforcements would arrive in time he could possibly check the Federal advance.

Green's line was on the verge of collapsing when, at 8:30 a.m., the Twenty-third Alabama arrived and was quickly sent to extend Green's right as it was in danger of being turned. Lieutenant Norgrove and his section of howitzers also arrived on Green's front, wheeled his guns into position on a ridge near the Foster house, east of Magnolia Church, and there entered the fray. The Virginians were joined by Lt. John R. Sweaney's section of the Pettus Flying Artillery which had found enough ammunition to return to the field. The Southern guns, however, were exposed to a hail of iron and Union artillery hammered their position with telling effect. One

³¹ Ibid., 591.

³² The other generals who died in defense of Vicksburg were: Brig. Gen. Lloyd Tilghman, killed at Champion Hill on May 16; Brig. Gen. Isham W. Garrott, killed on June 17; Brig. Gen. Martin E. Green, killed on June 27; and Maj. Gen. John S. Bowen, who contracted dysentery during the siege, died on July 13.

³³ Letter, Francis G. Obenchain to William Rigby, July 4, 1903, Regimental Files, Botetourt (VA) Artillery, Vicksburg National Military Park.

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member of Norgrove's section, Pvt. John Smith, volunteered to climb to the roof of a nearby building to get a better view of the Federal batteries. While doing so he was shot in the hip and fell hard to the ground. Smith, unlike many of his comrades that day, recovered from his wound.

Both Bowen and Green realized that the key to their position was Magnolia Church ridge from which the Federals now raked their line with a murderous fire. If not retaken, it would only be a matter of time before the Confederate line was forced back. Reacting instinctively, Bowen directed the Twenty-third Alabama and Sixth Mississippi forward to drive back the Union artillery and enable the Twelfth Arkansas Sharpshooters Battalion to seize the ridge. Shouting, "Follow me! Let's take that battery!" General Bowen spurred his horse forward and was followed by his men who raised the "Rebel yell." Sweeping through the open fields near the Foster house and into the tangled ravines before them, his men were exposed to a most destructive fire from Federal batteries, the guns of which were doubled charged with canister. Although the regiments advanced bravely with grim determination, they were hurled back by the deadly canister and withering volleys of musketry from Stone's brigade. Their ranks thinned and badly bleeding, the Confederates fell back to the main line. Capt. William C. Thompson of the Sixth Mississippi wrote, "As we went back we were amazed and shocked to see how many of our men were lying dead or wounded in the path of our advance."³⁴

The battle increased in fury as more Northern soldiers entered the fight against Green. Brig. Gen. Alvin P. Hovey's division arrived and was quickly deployed into line of battle near the Shaifer house. Forming line with the brigades of Brig. Gen. George McGinnis on the right and Col. James L. Slack on the left, Hovey advanced his division along the Rodney road and into the gap between Benton and Stone. Presenting now a solid front from near Widows Creek on the right to near Centers Creek on the left, the Federal line extended well beyond Green's flanks. The Confederate line was threatened with envelopment and Green pleaded for additional men to help hold his tenuous position. Bowen, however, had none to provide and sent couriers dashing off toward Port Gibson and Grand Gulf in search of desperately needed reinforcements.

Racing through town, the courier came upon Baldwin's brigade which was just entering the outskirts of Port Gibson. Reigning in his horse, the courier greeted Baldwin with news of impending disaster. The brigadier immediately ordered his men forward at the double-quick and guided his troops through the streets of town. William Pitt Chambers of the Forty-sixth Mississippi observed the panic in Port Gibson and later wrote:

It was an exciting time! The loud peals of artillery rent the sky and reverberated along the hills till their echoes blended with the sharp din of musketry....In the streets all was confusion. Men with pale faces were running hither and thither, some with arms and seeking a command, women sobbing on every side, children in opened eyed wonder clinging to their weeping mothers not understanding the meaning of it all, and negroes with eyes protruding like open cotton bolls were jostling each other and every body else and continuously asking about "dem Yankees."

The ladies cheered us through their tears, and besought us to drive the invaders from their homes. One lady while she prayed Heaven to protect us, said we felt as near to her as though we were her own sons going forth to battle. The wounded, too, were meeting us, some in vehicles and some on litters, and many a poor fellow with a shattered limb or a gaping wound would wildly hurrah for the "brave Mississippians."

West of town, the men were greeted by General Bowen who had ridden from the field to personally urge them forward. Baldwin reported: "The brigade passed through the town at a rapid pace, and thence marched in

³⁴ William R. Thompson (ed), "From Shiloh to Port Gibson," Civil War Times Illustrated, October 1964, 23.

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double-quick about 2 miles southwest, on the Rodney Road, when we found our troops falling back from all points, pressed by greatly superior numbers.”³⁵

As Baldwin’s men rushed toward the field of battle, Green’s position astride the Rodney road on the Confederate left eroded. Sharpshooters of the Eighteenth Indiana crept close to the Confederate line and began firing on the artillerymen with deadly accuracy. Lieutenant Norgrove went down, shot twice through the body. George Obenchain of the Virginia battery also went down “riddled with balls.” So many of the battery horses were downed that it was impossible for the Virginians to withdraw the guns, if necessary, except by hand. The intrepid Virginians, however, continued to coolly work their cannon with lethal effect.³⁶

By 10:00 a.m., McClellan had massed three divisions astride the Rodney road--the divisions of Hovey and Carr in the front line and that of Brig. Gen. Andrew Jackson Smith held in reserve near the Shaifer house. In places, Union regiments were stacked two, three, and four deep. Referred to as an “exponent of brute force,” the pugnacious McClellan sought to overwhelm the enemy by a direct frontal attack. Before the deployment was complete, however, the impatient Hovey ordered two regiments forward in an effort to take the Southern artillery. In an instant, the men of the Thirty-fourth Indiana and Fifty-sixth Ohio leaped over a fence and advanced “with loud shouts and fixed bayonets, toward the battery.”³⁷

The cannoneers of the Botetourt Artillery were ready for them. The gunners had by this time switched to canister and trained their cannon on the advancing lines. Firing their howitzers with great speed and at pointblank range, the Virginians raked the ground before them and broke the charge. In the face of this “intense and concentrated” fire, the blue line fell back to the shelter of the ravines, but only for a short time.³⁸ “At this juncture,” wrote General Hovey, “I gave the command ‘forward’ as loud as I could.” The entire Federal line advanced as regiments from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Ohio surged forward in overpowering numbers. One soldier boasted, the movement was “executed with the wildest enthusiasm.” Rushing through the dense forest amidst a hail of lead, the men of the XIII Corps plunged into the ravines, through the canebrakes and scampered up the opposite slope. Bursting into the open fields near the Foster house, they surged toward the Confederate guns which stood only a few yards away. The advance was so rapid that the Mississippians of the Pettus Flying Artillery barely had enough time to limber up and retire. The Virginians were not as fortunate. With only two horses left, they double shotted their weapons with canister for a final volley. Before the lanyards were pulled, however, the cannoneers were shot down or captured and the section swept away. The captors, Company K, Eleventh Indiana, quickly turned the guns on the fleeing Confederates and “delivered a few effective shots.”³⁹

The Confederate left collapsed. As Green’s men scrambled to the rear without semblance of order, Baldwin’s brigade arrived and began setting up a new line between White and Irwin branches of Willow Creek, a mile and a half east of Magnolia Church. As the men scurried into position, William Chambers observed, “Louder roared the cannon and din of the musketry grew more deafening. We met our flying squadrons, regiments cut to pieces till a remnant only were driven from their position by a force fivefold greater than their own.” With the knowledge that additional troops were en route from Grand Gulf, Bowen was confident he could hold on the left long enough with Baldwin’s brigade and ordered Green’s weary soldiers to regroup on the march and move

³⁵ Chambers, 263-264; O.R., Series 1, Vol. 24, Part 1, 675.

³⁶ Obenchain to Rigby, July 4, 1903.

³⁷ Bearss, Vol. II, 379; O.R., Series 1, Vol. 24, Part 1, 602.

³⁸ O.R., Series 1, Vol. 24, Part 1, 603.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

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out the Bruinsburg road to assist Garrott. Bowen was determined to prevent Grant from cementing his grip on Mississippi soil--he would fight for every inch of ground.⁴⁰

At Magnolia Church Generals Grant and McClernand inspected the field and surveyed their spoils of war.⁴¹ Two 12-pounder howitzers, three caissons, three ammunition wagons complete with teams, and more than 200 prisoners had been seized in the opening clash. The colors of the Fifteenth Arkansas were also captured.⁴² Amidst cheers of victory, John McClernand and Illinois Gov. Richard Yates took a few moments to congratulate the troops and do some campaigning of a different nature. Grant was not amused by the stump speeches and with quiet authority suggested that the advance be resumed. McClernand directed his divisions forward in pursuit of the enemy and, once reformed, the lines moved forward at noon.

As the morning hours witnessed Green being driven from his position by the principal Federal attack, the Alabamians under Garrott's command held their tenuous line on the Confederate right against steadily mounting pressure. At 8:15, the Northern soldiers of Osterhaus' division came on in splendid array, their lines neatly dressed with skirmishers well in advance, their battle flags blowing in the breeze above them, and their bayonets glistening in the sunlight. It was a sight the Alabamians had seen before on several hard fought fields, a sight they had come to respect, and a sight which would live long in the memories of men who survived the conflict.

The sight was also a familiar one to the Virginians of the Botetourt Artillery who stood in the middle of the brigade's line coolly working their guns. The section commander, Lieutenant Peters, was a veteran of the Mexican War. "[He] was not only a brave man, but the coolest man I ever saw," recalled one member of the battery. "Not for a moment did he ever lose his measure of mind." Peters kept his men posted at their guns even after "a wheel of a Napoleon was shot down. The rim and fellie shot in two and another one put on. Afterwards, axle of same gun was cut in two and gun fell. The flying splinters slightly wounded some of its detachment."⁴³

The battle had been raging for hours when the battery commander, Capt. John Johnston (nephew of Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston), arrived on the field. He had been sitting as a member of a court martial at Vicksburg when the battery went to Port Gibson. At the same time, the battery's remaining section, which consisted of two 6-pounders commanded by Lt. William Douthat, arrived and was sent to the aid of their struggling comrades.

With Federal fire increased by the addition of Lt. Charles B. Kimball's six 20-pounder Parrott rifles of the First Wisconsin Battery, the Virginians' position soon became untenable. Lieutenant Peters, with his hands behind his back, walked up to Sergeant Obenchain and said, "This is hot. And it was," wrote Obenchain years later. The sergeant continued, "William Couch #2 at right hand napoleon, was first to fall, cut almost in two at the waist. David Lieps was the second, shot just above the left eye while ramming down a charge. Frederick C. Noell shot in top of the head."⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Chambers, 264.

⁴¹ Grant arrived on the field around 10 o'clock, just in time to witness McClelland's successful assault. He then established his headquarters at the home of Caleb Perkins, situated 1,000 yards west of the Shaifer house.

⁴² The Fifty-sixth Ohio claims to have captured the flag of the Botetourt Artillery, a claim that was denied by the Virginians. The record shows that the battery flag was surrendered at Vicksburg on July 4, 1863.

⁴³ Francis G. Obenchain to William T. Rigby, July 16, 1903, Regimental Files, Botetourt (VA) Artillery, Vicksburg National Military Park.

⁴⁴ Obenchain to Rigby, July 4, 1903 & July 16, 1903.

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Into this destructive fire went the section of 6-pounders under Lieutenant Douthat. "I tried to stop the section of 6 pound guns which had come upon me unexpectedly," wrote Obenchain. "Because of the already dead and wounded horses and the difficulty in turning, I was afraid the horses, just coming in, would become unmanageable, and just that thing did happen." "In a moment," recalled a member of the battery, "horses and gun carriage was one pile and we found it impossible to unlimber the gun. It was a horrible sight." Indeed, it was; yet the Virginians struggled frantically to free the guns and managed to get one 6-pounder into action.⁴⁵

By mid-morning, Osterhaus and his brigade commanders had untangled their regiments and resumed the advance. With Sheldon on the right and Garrard on the left, the Federals pushed forward astride the plantation road and into the valley of Centers Creek. Moving to the right oblique, Osterhaus' line swung like a huge door forcing the Confederates to slowly yield ground. On the extreme left, the 120th Ohio under Col. Marcus Spiegel surged across the Bruinsburg road and drove hard toward Garrott's flank overlooking Bayou Pierre. Spiegel reported, "I then charged upon them with the regiment, and quickly drove them from the bank to the knoll, where they rallied and made a stand, which only increased the determination of my brave boys. Rushing up the bank, we drove them pell-mell from behind the knoll."⁴⁶

The Alabamians reluctantly fell back to the next ridge about 10 o'clock and reformed along a road near the Andrews house. Garrott constricted his line to present a strong front, but realized he could not hold for long unless heavily reinforced. Compounding his problems was the plight of the Virginia battery which had suffered terribly thus far at the hands of Union sharpshooters and artillery. As the Virginians withstood a galling fire from the enemy batteries, one member of the company observed that "Lieutenants Peters and Douthat [were] killed by the same shell. Lieut. Peters having upper front part of his head and Douthat back part of his head carried away." Adding to the horrors of the day, Sergeant Obenchain heard an "agonizing shriek," which he took to be a woman's voice. Sgt. James P. Wright was ordered to investigate the voice. Obenchain wrote, "To my astonishment I found it came from a soldier at the bottom of the ravine just in front of second napoleon. For the first time I walked to edge and looked in. Two had been mortally hurt by a shell that had prematurely exploded."⁴⁷

Although in desperate need of artillery support, Garrott mercifully ordered the Virginians to withdraw their guns. He later wrote of the situation, "Captain Johnston had exhibited distinguished gallantry, and his command had bravely stood by their guns; but by 10 o'clock the enemy's fire of artillery and sharpshooters had become so deadly that it seemed impossible for them to remain longer on the field without being sacrificed." The Virginians sadly left their dead and those who were seriously wounded on the porch of a building near which the guns had stood all morning. There was little time to mourn their loss as the two remaining guns were quickly limbered and withdrawn from the front line. As the guns were pulled to the rear, Captain Johnston, who was in ill health, turned command of the battery over to Sergeant Obenchain and rode to Port Gibson.⁴⁸

Obenchain halted his guns and ordered a count made of the ammunition. The horses were also looked over at this time to see if any were too badly wounded for further service. This was quickly done, and the guns assumed a position one-half mile behind the Confederate line. Although the Virginians had suffered terribly, they would be called upon to render further service this day.

⁴⁵ Obenchain to Rigby, July 16, 1903.

⁴⁶ O.R., Series 1, Vol. 24, Part 1, 679.

⁴⁷ Obenchain to Rigby, July 16, 1903.

⁴⁸ O.R., Series 1, Vol. 24, Part 1, 589.

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Without artillery support, Garrott's men found it impossible to stop the powerful Federal advance which now pushed east astride the Bruinsburg road. At this critical moment, the Alabamians were forced to slow their rate of fire and take more careful aim as munitions were running low. "At 11 o'clock," observed Garrott, "heavy columns of the enemy could be distinctly seen, and it appeared evident that if they could be brought up to make a charge that our slender force would be overwhelmed by vastly superior numbers." Garrott dispatched Adjutant John S. Smith of the Twentieth Alabama to General Bowen with an urgent request for reinforcements and desperately needed ammunition. He then implored his men to hold on until succor arrived.⁴⁹

Perhaps sensing the plight of his comrades on the firing line, Sergeant Obenchain of the Virginia battery returned to the field to ask for instructions. The sergeant reported to Colonel Garrott and pointed out to him where the guns were halted. Garrott asked the Virginian if he could once again assume his original position as the Confederate line was hard-pressed. Obenchain said that he could if so ordered, but Garrott slowly replied, "No that would not do you would all be murdered." The colonel then ordered Obenchain to use his judgment in selecting a position and beseeched him to "Help us all you can."⁵⁰

The sergeant turned to return to his battery when his horse was wounded. Although the animal was badly hurt, Obenchain spurred his horse toward the battery and rode through a hail of enemy fire. Within minutes, the indomitable Virginian moved his guns forward and dropped trail on a knoll some 600 yards behind the main line. Garrott wrote with admiration in his report that, "Sergeant Obenchain, who had in the forenoon exhibited uniform coolness and unflinching nerve, promptly brought forward what was left of his command and took position as directed." The Virginians soon opened on the enemy and resumed their work.⁵¹

Early in the afternoon both armies regrouped, for the fighting had been furious all morning and the casualties high. At 1:20 p.m., Bowen wired his superiors in Jackson:

We have been engaged in a furious battle ever since daylight; losses very heavy. General Tracy is killed. The Virginia battery was captured by the enemy, but is retaken. We are out of ammunition for cannon and small-arms, the ordnance train of the re-enforcements not being here. They outnumber us trebly. There are three divisions against us. My whole force is engaged.

He emphasized, "The men act nobly, but the odds are overpowering."⁵²

From his Jackson headquarters, Pemberton wired back, "[Maj.] General [William W.] Loring, with nearly two brigades, has started from Jackson to you," and added, "Endeavor to hold your own until they arrive, though it may be some time, as the distance is great." He then advised Bowen, "You had better whip them before he reaches you."⁵³

Fortunately for Bowen, additional reinforcements just then came running up the road in a cloud of dust. The battle-hardened soldiers of Col. Francis M. Cockrell's brigade, who had left Grand Gulf at 10 o'clock that morning, arrived on the field full of fight and were sent to the left to shore up Baldwin's position and help

⁴⁹ Ibid., 680.

⁵⁰ Obenchain to Rigby, July 4, 1903.

⁵¹ O.R., Series 1, Vol. 24, Part 1, 681.

⁵² Ibid., 659.

⁵³ Ibid., 660.

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reestablish the Confederate line. Along with Cockrell's troops came the four guns (two 6-pounders and two 12-pounder howitzers) of Guibor's battery and the two 24-pounder howitzers of Capt. John C. Landis' Missouri battery. The guns were quickly moved into position and prepared to meet the Federal advance. As fate would have it, the brigade was under strength when it reached the battlefield at Port Gibson.⁵⁴

Early afternoon found the Confederate right wing falling back slowly in the face of Osterhaus' gradual, but steady advance. Fearing for the safety of his right flank, Bowen directed the weary soldiers of Green's brigade to reform on the march and hasten to bolster the line astride the Bruinsburg road. The Sixth Missouri (Col. Eugene Erwin) of Cockrell's Brigade was also rushed to the right to steady Green's shaken troops. In reporting the movement of his brigade, Green noted that the march was made "as speedily as the wearied condition of my men would admit."⁵⁵

Arriving on the right shortly after 2:00 p.m., Green moved into position without first consulting Garrott. Rather than assume position on the endangered right, commanding the drainages to Bayou Pierre, his troops assumed position on Garrott's left--his unengaged flank--near the Wheelless house overlooking Centers Creek. As his troops settled into position, Green went to Sergeant Obenchain of the Virginia battery. "He explained in detail our condition," wrote Obenchain, "and was afraid we could not hold the enemy back until night when we would have to retreat." The sergeant continued, "I was to be notified when the retreat was about to be begun and while the retreat was being made I was to do all in my power to hold the enemy in check until our regiments got far enough away when I would be notified to leave the field." Green added that the guns "might be captured, but it was the best that could be done."⁵⁶ It is evident from the placement of his troops and the conversation with Obenchain that the morning engagement took a lot of the fight out of Martin Green which certainly attests to the bitter nature of the Battle of Port Gibson.

The same could not be said of John Bowen, however, whose fiery spirit was intensified as the fighting resumed early in the afternoon. The morning fight taught Bowen that the exposed ridge tops were not suited for a strong defense and directed Baldwin's men into position astride the Rodney road between White and Irwin branches of Willow Creek. In the tangled growth of the creek bottoms, the Confederates would make less conspicuous targets and minimize the effectiveness of both Federal superiority of numbers and the powerful Union artillery.

Baldwin's brigade was deployed with the Thirty-first Louisiana (Lt. Col. S. H. Griffin) on the right, north of the Rodney road, the Seventeenth Louisiana (Col. Robert Richardson) in the center, south of the road, and the Fourth Mississippi (Lt. Col. Thomas N. Adaire) on the left. The line formed a slight salient at the point of which were placed the two guns of Landis' battery. The Forty-sixth Mississippi (Col. Claudius W. Sears) was posted on a hill 600 yards in rear of the line in support of Guibor's battery. Cockrell's two regiments, the Third and Fifth Missouri commanded by Col. William R. Gause and Lt. Col. Robert S. Bevier respectively, were held in reserve and situated to protect Baldwin's left flank.

Shortly after noon, McClelland resumed the advance from Magnolia Church. The divisions of Hovey and Carr, deployed in double line of battle, led the way followed by A. J. Smith's division in column. Combing the area between the Rodney road and Centers Creek, the Federals gathered dozens of Confederate stragglers who attempted to hide in the brush. The advance was slow and meticulous as the troops clambered through the forest and crossed Arnolds Creek. Climbing out of the creek bottom and onto an open ridge, the Federals

⁵⁴ The First Missouri was on detached duty at Coon Island Lake and the Second Missouri was left to man the Grand Gulf fortifications. Consequently, when Cockrell marched for Port Gibson he had only the Third, Fifth, and Sixth Missouri, 4 guns of Guibor's Missouri Battery (under Lt. William Corkery), and 2 guns of Landis' Missouri Battery.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 673.

⁵⁶ Obenchain to Rigby, July 4, 1903.

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came under artillery fire from Guibor's and Landis' batteries and Confederate skirmishers added their sting. The blue line came to an abrupt halt as McClelland and his subordinates reconnoitered the enemy position and straightened out their line. Puzzled by the enemy disposition, McClelland feared his men were advancing into a trap and brought up reserve units to extend his line. He also called on Grant for reinforcements.⁵⁷ Responding to the situation as if by instinct, Captain Griffiths quickly moved the six guns of his First Iowa Battery into position on the ridge to provide fire support. The six 10-pounder Parrotts of Capt. Ambrose A. Blount's Seventeenth Ohio Battery were also wheeled into position and raked the woods in their front with shell. Under the protective fire of these batteries, McClelland completed his deployment by moving into position the two brigades of A. J. Smith's division, and Stevenson's brigade of Logan's division. Once completed, the former congressman had four brigades deployed along a 2,000 yard front with his left resting on Centers Creek, and three brigades were held in reserve near the center of the line in support of the artillery.⁵⁸

Bowen watched in awe from his command post on the high ground east of Irwin Branch as the Federals deployed overwhelming numbers opposite his thin gray line. The Union line extended well beyond his flanks, yet he was determined to fight for every inch of ground in hope that the reinforcements promised earlier by Pemberton might arrive enabling him to conduct a successful defense of Port Gibson. At 3 o'clock, Bowen wired Pemberton, "I still hold my position. We have fought 20,000 men since dawn, besides skirmishing last night. They are pressing me hard on the right. My center is firm; the left is weak." He then asked in desperation, "When can Loring get here?"⁵⁹

Around 3:00 p.m., McClelland's troops swept off the ridge and crossed White Branch. It was difficult for the soldiers to maintain alignment as they struggled through the dense canebrakes and tangled jungle. Clawing their way up the opposite slope which separated the drainages of White and Irwin branches, the Federals were met by "a most terrific and jarring fire" as Baldwin's men let loose a well-aimed volley. Driven off the forward slope, the blue line instantly dissolved as men scrambled for cover. In "some confusion," recalled one Northern soldier, the men found shelter in the thickets along White Branch. Protected from the blistering fire of Guibor's and Landis' batteries, and a section of the Pettus Flying Artillery, the Federals clung to their position. For the next 90 minutes, a bitter firefight raged as McClelland determined his next course of action.⁶⁰

As his favorite tactic, a frontal assault along the entire line, was being checked by determined resistance, the commander of the XIII Corps directed his subordinates to employ tactics similar to those that had won such sweeping success in the morning near Magnolia Church. Shuffling his units to provide adequate flank protection, McClelland massed 21 regiments on an 800-yard front with the intention of striking straight for the center of the Confederate line.

Reacting to the Federal buildup opposite his center and the slow extension of the enemy's line beyond his left flank, Bowen moved to strike the Federal right flank to prevent it from locating the Natchez road and roll it up.

⁵⁷ At 2:00 p.m., Maj. Gen. James B. McPherson arrived at the Shaifer house with two fresh brigades led by Maj. Gen. John A. Logan. Although Grant insisted that McClelland had more troops than he could effectively deploy on his front, he ordered Brig. Gen. John D. Stevenson's brigade to support the attack up the Rodney road. Logan's other brigade, commanded by Brig. Gen. John E. Smith, was directed to support Osterhaus on the Bruinsburg road.

⁵⁸ From left to right, the brigades were commanded by Col. William Stone, Brig. Gen. Stephen Burbridge, Brig. Gen. George McGinnis, and Col. James Slack. Those in reserve were under Col. William Landram, Brig. Gen. William Benton, and Brig. Gen. John D. Stevenson.

⁵⁹ O.R., Series 1, Vol. 24, Part 1, 659.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 612.

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(Bowen was fearful that the Federals would locate the Natchez road, only 1,200 yards beyond his left, enabling them to push a strong force around his flank and seize Port Gibson.) Colonel Cockrell was directed to move his two regiments into position behind a knoll several hundred yards beyond the enemy flank. To conceal the movement, the Missourians pushed through the dense timber which lined Irwin Branch and reached their objective. Forming his men in column by battalions, Cockrell placed the Fifth Missouri in the lead followed by the Third Missouri. Once in position, Cockrell unsheathed his sword and yelled for his men to charge.

The Confederate movement, however, was not concealed as Bowen had hoped, but was spotted by General Hovey who moved quickly to counter this deployment. Hovey ordered the four batteries of his division (24 guns) into position on the right along the ridge overlooking White Branch.⁶¹ He also shifted several regiments to meet this threat to his flank and called up reserve units. Hurrying into position, the Federals formed their lines and fixed bayonets. "These lines had not more than been formed," reported Col. James R. Slack of the Forty-seventh Indiana, when the enemy charged "with terrific yells, and could not be seen, because of the very thick growth of cane, until they reached a point within 30 yards of my line."⁶²

Pouring out of the creek bottom, Cockrell's Missourians raised the "Rebel yell" as they struck the flank of the Federal line and began rolling it up. The Fifty-sixth Ohio, on the extreme Union right, began to waver almost immediately and yield ground as did the next regiment in line, the Forty-seventh Indiana. Pushing onward, the Confederates slammed into the rugged veterans of the Twenty-ninth Wisconsin whose colonel reported them as "being hotly pressed with great slaughter." To stem the gray tide which swept irresistibly over the field, Union artillery poured canister into their ranks with devastating effect. Capt. George W. Covell of the Third Missouri recalled, "Their artillery opened on us with great rapidity, and as soon as we got within range the infantry poured the Minie balls into our ranks as thick and fast as hailstones from a thundercloud or rain drops in an April shower." Covell had never experienced such a heavy fire and later wrote, "The storm of leaden rain and iron hail which was flying through the air was almost sufficient to obscure the sunlight."⁶³

Confederate momentum soon waned as the four battle-tested regiments of Brig. Gen. William P. Benton's brigade arrived to check their advance. Regiments from other Union brigades were also rushed to the area in a frantic effort to bolster the crumbling line. In the face of such concentrated fire power, the gallant charge ground to a halt and soldiers in blue and gray fired away at one another with "great spirit and pertinacity" at a distance of only 20 yards. One Union regimental commander enveloped by the fury of battle noted, "the pieces of our men became so heated from rapid, continuous firing as to make it impossible for them to continue firing longer with safety to themselves."⁶⁴

From his command post on the high ground east of Irwin Branch, Bowen watched helplessly as the Federals sent large numbers of fresh troops to contain Cockrell's advance. His hopes for success were shattered as he saw the enemy deploy what he believed to be three brigades in front of their artillery to receive the charge. Bowen reported that of these brigades, "The first was routed, the second wavered, but the third stood firm, and, after a long and desperate contest, we had to give up the attempt." Their attack checked, Cockrell's men reluctantly fell back over the ridge to the east where they reformed alongside the Fourth Mississippi. Bowen

⁶¹ The four batteries were: Second and Sixteenth Ohio Batteries, Company A, Second Illinois Light Artillery, and Company A, First Missouri Light Artillery.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 611.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 627; Bearss, Vol. II, 393, note.

⁶⁴ O.R., Series 1, Vol. 24, Part 1, 612-613.

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rode among them offering words of encouragement and praised the valor of his Missourians saying, "I did not suspect that any of you would get away, but the charge had to be made, or my little army was lost." ⁶⁵

Bowen was somewhat relieved when the Federals did not press their advantage by a vigorous pursuit of Cockrell's battered regiments. Yet, he remained concerned about the security of his left flank where the Federals had massed sufficient strength to turn his line. Apprehensive that the enemy may have located the Natchez road and were marching on Port Gibson, Bowen boldly ordered Baldwin's weary soldiers to press forward to ascertain the enemy's strength.

The reliable Baldwin brought the Forty-sixth Mississippi up from its reserve position and placed the men in an open field north of the Rodney road. He endeavored to advance with a line of three regiments with the Forty-sixth Mississippi on the right, Seventeenth Louisiana in the center, south of the road, and the Fourth Mississippi on the left. "Before the dispositions could be entirely completed," he reported, "the enemy opened a sweeping fire of ... shrapnel, completely enfilading the road and covering all approach from my center and right." Compelled by the heavy fire to fall back, Baldwin knew "that an attempt to move forward would result in the destruction of the entire command without accomplishing the object." ⁶⁶ Bowen also realized the futility of further action. At 5:15 p.m. he notified Pemberton, "I still hold my position. I will have to retire under cover of night to other side of Bayou Pierre and await reinforcements." ⁶⁷

The Confederates clung to their position in the creek bottom and desperately waited for the sun to set. Only grudgingly did they yield ground in the face of overwhelming numbers. Unable to shatter such determined resistance, Brig. Gen. John D. Stevenson called on the Eighth Michigan Light Artillery to drive the enemy from his front. The battery was led by the redoubtable Capt. Samuel De Golyer, considered by many as the finest artillerist in the army. A man of tremendous courage and daring, De Golyer unlimbered his four 10-pounder James rifles and two 12-pounder howitzers just below the crest. Rounds of canister were rammed down the guns which were then manhandled up the hill to a point where only the muzzles were exposed. On De Golyer's command the guns opened a "most unexpected and terrible fire" which dispersed the Confederates in "rapid flight." In reporting the action of the Michigan battery, Maj. Gen. John A. Logan wrote that De Golyer's guns "opened a destructive fire of shell and canister upon the enemy, compelling him to retire under cover of brush and timber." ⁶⁸

With Union artillery now in command of the Irwin Branch bottom, blueclad infantrymen poured over the ridge, crossed the creek, and drove Bowen's men slowly up the opposite slope. Within moments, Confederate resistance ceased and the soldiers clad in butternut and gray withdrew singly or in small groups from the field. At 5:30 p.m. Bowen reluctantly gave the order for his force to withdraw from the field via the Andrew's farm road toward Bayou Pierre. As Cockrell's troops took up the line of march, Bowen telegraphed his superiors in Jackson, "I am falling back across Bayou Pierre. I will endeavor to hold that position until reinforcements arrive....Want of ammunition is one of the main causes of our retreat. The men did nobly, holding out the whole day against overwhelming odds." ⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 664; Robert S. Bevier, History of the First and Second Missouri Confederate Brigades, 1861-1865, (St. Louis, Missouri: Bryan, Brand, & Co., 1879), 180.

⁶⁶ O.R., Series 1, Vol., 24, Part 1, 676.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 660.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 643-644, 653.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 660.

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Along the Bruinsburg road, the battle still raged but with similar results. Throughout the afternoon, Osterhaus directed the Union force with uncharacteristic caution. Although he enjoyed numerical superiority over the thin brigades of Garrott and Green, the difficult terrain, dense vegetation, and stiff resistance offered by the Alabamians in particular, led Osterhaus to move with caution. Reinforced in mid-afternoon by the arrival of Brig. Gen. John E. Smith's brigade of Logan's division, the Union force renewed its efforts to flank the Confederates posted north of the road.

It was evident to Colonel Erwin (a grandson of Henry Clay) of the Sixth Missouri that the Federals were making a concerted effort to turn Garrott's right flank. He also sensed that Garrott's left was about to falter under the steady pressure of enemy fire and knew "that unless some assistance was afforded them," the Alabamians "would be driven from their position." On his own initiative, Erwin ordered his men to fix bayonets. The 400 Missourians, led by their colonel, raised the Rebel yell and rushed over the astonished enemy skirmish line. Driving the Federals back, Erwin's men recaptured the two disabled guns of the Botetourt Artillery which had been abandoned earlier in the day. All this was to no avail, however, for the odds against them were too great. The attack was quickly contained and, after 90 minutes of fierce combat, the Missourians soon found themselves in danger of being enveloped. Erwin wrote of the situation, "I reluctantly determined to withdraw from a position which had been so gallantly won and perseveringly maintained." In their hasty withdrawal, the Missourians were compelled to abandon the disabled guns of the Virginia battery.⁷⁰

Around 5:00 p.m., additional Union troops arrived to support Osterhaus on the Bruinsburg road as Brig. Gen. Elias Dennis' brigade of Logan's division reached the field. With such overwhelming numbers at hand, Osterhaus ordered a general advance along his entire line. Fortunately for the battle-weary Confederates, orders came from Bowen to withdraw from the field. Martin Green quickly pulled his regiments out of line and retreated in good order along the Andrew's farm road toward Bayou Pierre. Colonel Garrott was directed to withdraw by the left flank which movement he reported was "immediately executed as rapidly as possible." Capt. Samuel C. Kelly of the Thirtieth Alabama was more candid in his description of the withdrawal as he recorded in the pages of his diary, "We were gaunt and in fine condition for running." The Alabamians fell in behind Green and, after a march of 4 miles, crossed the suspension bridge over Bayou Pierre just as darkness fell.⁷¹

Near sunset, as the grayclad soldiers began their withdrawal from the bloody field, Sergeant Obenchain of the Botetourt Artillery was notified as "the information was necessary to prevent me from firing into our own troops." The Virginians did, however, kill some of their own troops in their efforts to keep Federal pursuit at a distance. When the troops had retired, Obenchain limbered up his two remaining guns and left the field. The sergeant wrote, "Overtaking the rear regiment [Thirty-first Alabama] it gave us the road to pass through and taking position again we marched in that order to the bridge over Bayou Pierre." Once over the suspension bridge, the weary soldiers of Garrott's, Green's, and Cockrell's brigades bivouacked for the night. Col. A. C. Riley with the First Missouri Infantry of Cockrell's brigade arrived from Coon Island Lake and was deployed to protect the crossing assisted by the guns of the Botetourt Artillery.⁷²

Baldwin's men had been cut off from the Andrew's farm road by elements of John Smith's Federal brigade who seized the road before the Confederates could make good their escape. Forced to withdraw to the east through the town of Port Gibson, Baldwin reported, "The enemy pressed closely upon our rear until near the town, when they allowed us to continue our march undisturbed." His tired soldiers crossed Little Bayou Pierre

⁷⁰ Ibid., 670-671.

⁷¹ Ibid., 681; William A. Kelly, "A History of the Thirteenth Alabama Volunteers (Infantry) Confederate States of America," *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, Vol. IX, No. 1, 1947, 135.

⁷² Obenchain to Rigby, July 4, 1903.

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at 9:00 p.m. and set fire to the suspension bridge behind them. On through the long night they marched, over roads crowded with fleeing citizens and crossed Big Bayou Pierre at Grindstone Ford at midnight. Taking no chances in case of Federal pursuit, Baldwin also had his men set fire to the bridge at that point. Finally, at 9:00 a.m. on May 2, Baldwin's footsore infantry staggered into Bowen's camp.⁷³

There was no vigorous pursuit by the Federals as darkness enveloped the fields and forest west of Port Gibson on May 1, 1863. The troops were exhausted by the fierce combat and their strength drained by the heat and humidity. As the soldiers bivouacked for the night, details were sent to collect the wounded and bury the dead. Fred Grant, the general's eldest son who accompanied his father throughout the Vicksburg campaign, had arrived on the field in time to witness the closing action. Out of curiosity, the young boy joined one such detachment and later wrote of his experience:

I joined a detachment which was collecting the dead for burial, but, sickening at the sights, I made my way with another detachment, which was gathering the wounded, to a log house which had been appropriated for a hospital. Here the scenes were so terrible that I became faint and ill, and making my way to a tree, sat down, the most woe-begone twelve-year-old lad in America.

Indeed, dead and wounded soldiers could be seen everywhere as their bloody forms lie scattered in the fields, forests, and creek bottoms. Accouterments of all descriptions littered the field and, as darkness enveloped the scene of carnage, the cries of wounded soldiers pierced the night. Union losses totaled 131 killed, 719 wounded, and 25 missing.⁷⁴

Confederate losses were reported at 68 killed, 380 wounded, and 384 missing. Although the returns are far from complete, Bowen's small force suffered proportionately far greater casualties than the Union Army of the Tennessee.⁷⁵ The Confederate soldiers did indeed do "nobly," fighting for an entire day against an enemy superior in numbers and withdrawing from the field in good order. As Bowen's command was withdrawing from the field of battle, Pemberton relayed the news to Richmond, "A furious battle has been going on since daylight just below Port Gibson....Large reenforcements should be sent me from other departments. Enemy's movement threatens Jackson, and, if successful, cuts off Vicksburg and Port Hudson from the east..." The news was frightening to the most stout Southern heart which yearned to achieve independence. The consequences of Confederate reaction, both politically and militarily, to the deteriorating situation in Mississippi would determine the fate of a nation and her people.⁷⁶

Grant ordered the attack renewed at dawn, but the Confederates had already evacuated the area. The battle was over. For the rugged soldiers of the Union army, however, the inland campaign had just begun. For Grant, victory at Port Gibson not only secured his beachhead on Mississippi soil, but with the Confederate evacuation of Grand Gulf on May 3, he gained that strategic landing as a base to support the next phase of the campaign.

⁷³ In a span of 27 hours, Baldwin's men had marched eight miles to reach the battlefield, fought for seven hours, then marched 21 more miles to reach the safety of Bowen's camp.

⁷⁴ Frederick D. Grant, "A Boy's Experience at Vicksburg," Personal Recollections of the War of the Rebellion: Addresses Delivered Before the Commandery of the State of New York, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, 3rd Series, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), 89-90.

⁷⁵ There are no separate unit reports for Tracy's or Baldwin's brigades, incomplete returns for Green's brigade, and only one unit report from Cockrell's brigade.

⁷⁶ O.R., Series 1, Vol. 24, Part 3, 807.

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From there the road led to Vicksburg, Chattanooga, and ultimately to Appomattox. The Battle of Port Gibson was a prelude to victory.

Effects of the Battle of Port Gibson on the Civilian Population

Just as it is today, Claiborne County was a rural area during the period of the Civil War. The largest incorporated community was Port Gibson, which continues to serve as the county seat. Consequently, only a small number of widely scattered families lived in the area impacted by the Union and Confederate armies when the battle of Port Gibson erupted in fury in the early morning hours of May 1, 1863. Most of the area's residents wisely fled prior to the battle, and, with the exception of the Daniells, who owned Windsor Plantation, and the Shaifers of the A.K.Shaifer house, there is virtually no mention of encounters with civilians in the letters, diaries, and post-war memoirs of Union and Confederated soldiers who participated in the opening clash of the Vicksburg campaign. Thus the impact of the battle on civilians was minimal and no civilians of Port Gibson or the surrounding area were casualties as a result of the battle.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Terrence J. Winschel, Chief Historian, Vicksburg National Military Park, personal communication to the author.

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Vicksburg National Military Park Collection

Diary of C.A. Hobbs, Regimental Files, 99th Illinois.

Letters, Francis G. Obenchain to William T. Rigby, July 4, 1903 and July 16, 1903.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
 Previously Listed in the National Register.
 Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
 Designated a National Historic Landmark.
 Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
 Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State Agency
 Federal Agency
 Local Government
 University
 Other (Specify Repository):

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**Acreage of Property:**

Port Gibson Battlefield Approx. 3,400 acres

UTM References:

UTM Coordinates for the battlefield

	<u>Zone</u>	<u>Northing</u>	<u>Easting</u>		<u>Zone</u>	<u>Northing</u>	<u>Easting</u>
A	15	683220	3537680	E	15	689000	3536840
B	15	684780	3539000	F	15	688340	3534820
C	15	686000	3539000	G	15	686640	3534480
D	15	689000	3537220	H	15	684800	3535100

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary of the battlefield is delineated by the polygon whose vertices are marked by the UTM reference points above. Within this polygon is a boundary conforming as follows: Beginning at UTM Point A, continue generally northeast along on the east bank of Bayou Pierre to UTM Point B. From Point B, the boundary extends east along UTM Reference Line 3539 to Point C. From Point C, the boundary extends south along UTM Reference Line 686 approximately 700 meters to the property line of V&B International, Inc., property. From this point the boundary extends east-northeast along the property line approximately 600 meters to the northeast corner of the V&B International property. From this point, the boundary proceeds southeastward along the property line approximately 700 meters to the southeast corner of the V&B International property. From this point, the boundary extends southwestward along the V&B property line approximately 400 meters to the Rodney Road. From this point, the boundary follows along the south side of the Rodney (Bruinsburg) Road generally eastward approximately 2,500 meters to the intersection of the historic Rodney and Bruinsburg Roads. From this point, the boundary extends northeast approximately 200 meters to Point D. From Point D, the boundary extends south approximately 300 meters to Point E. From Point E, the boundary extends west approximately 300 meters along the southern edge of the Hamilton Allen property, and continues southwestward along the northern edge of the James Beasley property for approximately 300 meters to the western boundary of Section 6. From this point, the boundary extends south along the section line to Point F. From this point, the boundary extends along the northern edge of Section 30, thence approximately 100 meters southwestward along the western edge of Section 30, thence approximately 500 meters along the northern edge of Section 21, thence approximately 500 meters southwestward along the western edge of Section 21, thence to the northern edge of Section 32, angling briefly along the western edge of the section to the north bank of Buck Creek. From this point, the boundary follows the northern bank of Buck Creek for approximately 2,000 meters to the eastern edge of a power line right-of-way. From this point, the boundary extends northwestward along the power line right-of-way approximately 2,500 meters to Point A.

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Boundary Justification:

The boundaries of the Port Gibson battlefield include the area in which combat occurred and/or in which troops movements directly associated with combat occurred. Generally, the boundary is based on existing documentation showing the positions of Union and Confederate forces during the battle. These sources include the Port Gibson Battlefield Preservation Plan (*"The Entering Wedge": A Preservation Plan for the Port Gibson*, White Star Consulting), the 1998 *Profiles of America's Most Threatened Civil War Battlefields* (American Battlefield Protection Program), research by National Park Service Historians Edwin C. Bearss and Terrence Winschel, and published maps (e.g., The Conservation Fund's *The Civil War Battlefield Guide* and Warren Grabau's *Ninety-Eight Days: A Geographer's View of the Vicksburg Campaign*). In addition, the intersection of the historic Rodney Road and Bruinsburg Road has been included in the boundary, as this was the only means of moving Confederate troops from either flank during the battle and is vital to an understanding of the engagement. This intersection was not included in the White Star report or the American Battlefield Protection Program map. Also not included in the White Star report is an area north of the Bruinsburg Road. The area was not designated as a core area by White Star due to a disagreement over the alignment of forces in the Bruinsburg Road sector; the area included in the National Historic Landmark boundary represents the traditional interpretation of the alignment of forces during this phase of the battle.

The boundaries of the proposed NHL area differ from those of the battlefield area as listed in the National Register of Historic Places (1973). This earlier National Register boundary was an arbitrary square measuring two miles on each side. Only a small portion of the existing National Register-listed property is not included within the proposed National Historic Landmark boundary. This portion is in the northeast corner of the National Register property; more recent research has demonstrated that combat or associated movements did not occur in this area. A delineation of the existing NR boundary is included on the enclosed USGS Quadrangle Map.

Due to the nature of the terrain, boundaries for the proposed National Historic Landmark have been fixed to easily identifiable features where possible. These include Buck Creek, Bayou Pierre, a power line right-of-way and the Bruinsburg (Rodney) Road. Where this is not possible, the boundaries follow either UTM Reference lines, Section lines or property lines.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

Date: September 2002

Name/Title: Jim Woodrick
Civil War Sites Historian
Org.: Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History
Street/#: P. O. Box 571
City/Town: Jackson
State: Mississippi
ZIP: 39205-0571
Telephone: (601) 359-6940

Name/Title: Richard Cawthon
Chief Architectural Historian
National Register Program Supervisor
Org.: Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History
Street/#: P. O. Box 571
City/Town: Jackson
State: Mississippi
ZIP: 39205-0571
Telephone: (601) 359-6940