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# The Battle of Chickasaw Bayou

*by Robert L. Durham*

It was Christmas Eve, 1862. A grand ball was being held at the William Balfour House in Vicksburg, Mississippi, for the Confederate officers of the garrison and the gentlemen and ladies of the town. The officers were dressed in their gray uniforms, decorated with gold braid and trim of buff, blue, red, or yellow, depending on their rank and branch of service. The belles, in their rich, gaily colored gowns, made the war seem far away. There were flashes of color as they made their way through the intricate steps of the Virginia Reel and the quadrilles. They danced and celebrated merrily, not aware of two telegraph operators who were watching the Mississippi River for enemy vessels on this cold and drizzly night.<sup>1</sup>

L. L. Daniel, a telegraph operator whose duty was to keep the Mississippi River under observation, manned an observation site at Point Lookout, Louisiana. At about 8:45 p.m., he sighted a Federal gunboat heading south on the river, the first of a fleet of Union gunboats and troop transports. Reaching his office just after midnight, Daniel hurriedly telegraphed the operator at DeSoto, across the river from Vicksburg. This operator was Philip H. Fall, who immediately crossed the river, his small boat tossed about by the waves. Soon thereafter, wet and mud-covered, Fall arrived at the ball and made his way through the dancers to Major General Martin Luther Smith, the acting commander of Vicksburg in Lieutenant General John Clifford Pemberton's absence. Pemberton was at Grenada, Mississippi, facing off against Union Major General Ulysses S. Grant. Once given this warning, Smith made the announcement that "This ball is at an end; the enemy are down the river."<sup>2</sup>

Smith sent Brigadier General Stephen Dill Lee with about five thousand men to defend the Walnut Hills region, north of Vicksburg,

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen D. Lee, "Details of Important Work by Two Confederate Telegraph Operators, Christmas Eve, 1862, Which Prevented the Almost Complete Surprise of the Confederate Army at Vicksburg," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, Volume 8 (Oxford, 1904): 53.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 53-54.

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leaving approximately sixteen hundred men to defend the city.<sup>3</sup> Lee hurriedly set his men and many slaves to work preparing rifle pits and artillery parapets. They also cleared most of the willows and other trees to construct abatis in any place that was not defended by swamp or bayou. They left stumps that were three or four feet high and interlaced the branches they had cut, forming an almost impenetrable barrier. The branches, draped with Spanish moss, would later provide cover for the sharpshooters and skirmishers on both sides.<sup>4</sup>

Little did the Confederates know that the Union fleet was no longer steaming downstream; it was anchored at Milliken's Bend, Louisiana, a few miles up-river from Vicksburg. The infantry force on board the transports was the Expeditionary Force, Army of the Tennessee, consisting of approximately thirty thousand Union soldiers commanded by Major General William Tecumseh Sherman. He detached the brigade led by Brigadier General Stephen Gano Burbridge of Brigadier General Andrew Jackson (A. J.) Smith's division. Sherman ordered Burbridge to move inland and destroy part of the Vicksburg, Shreveport, & Texas (VS&T) Railroad near the Tensas River. Burbridge also burned a great deal of cotton, corn, and cloth. When the fleet moved south again, Sherman left A. J. Smith at Milliken's Bend to follow when Burbridge returned.<sup>5</sup>

On Christmas Day, the Federal fleet moved down to the mouth of the Yazoo River. There, Sherman detached Brigadier General Morgan Lewis Smith with one of his brigades on the Louisiana side of the Mississippi to destroy more of the VS&T Railroad.<sup>6</sup> Sherman was in no hurry as he moved down-river; perhaps he should have been. He had departed his headquarters at Memphis, Tennessee, on December 20, and stopped at Helena, Arkansas, to pick up Brigadier General Frederick Steele's division. They moved leisurely down the river, stopping now and then to acquire firewood. They also stopped each night.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, the commander of the Army of the Tennessee, Ulysses S. Grant, was north of Grenada, Mississippi, with forty thousand men, moving south against General Pemberton, who commanded the

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<sup>3</sup> Gary Gildner, *Letters from Vicksburg* (Greensboro, NC: Unicorn Press, 1976), 83.

<sup>4</sup> Committee of the Regiment, *The Story of the Fifty-Fifth Regiment Illinois Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War 1861-1865* (W. J. Coulter, Clinton, 1887): 192.

<sup>5</sup> United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 1, Volume 17, Part 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), 605; hereafter OR. All references are to Volume 17, Part 1 unless otherwise noted.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Gildner, 77.

Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana. Most of the forces detailed to defend Vicksburg were with Pemberton. The Federal campaign plan was for Grant to keep Pemberton occupied while Sherman moved against Vicksburg. If Grant kept pressure on Pemberton, the Southern commander would not be able to send any of his soldiers to reinforce the Rebel troops at Vicksburg. If Pemberton broke away completely, Grant would follow him to Vicksburg and reinforce Sherman.

Unknown to Sherman, the plans for the Union campaign fell apart on the same day Sherman left Memphis. Confederate cavalry leader, Major General Earl Van Dorn, raided behind Union lines, and on December 20, 1862, he struck and destroyed Grant's supply depot at Holly Springs, Mississippi. Grant abandoned his part in the campaign but was unable to communicate this information to Sherman, since Sherman had already left Memphis.<sup>8</sup> If Sherman had known, he probably would either have abandoned his role in the campaign or moved more expeditiously because he needed to take Vicksburg before reinforcements from Pemberton could arrive. Any delay was in the Confederacy's favor.

On December 21, Pemberton had ordered Brigadier General John C. Vaughn to take his brigade of East Tennesseans to reinforce the defenders of Vicksburg. On Christmas Eve, learning that the Federal fleet was at the mouth of the Yazoo River, Pemberton ordered Brigadier General John Gregg's brigade to Vicksburg. The next day, he sent the 40th Alabama Regiment to report to Lee. Once these troops reached Vicksburg, there would be a little over thirteen thousand men to defend the town; the Confederates would still be outnumbered, but not by as much, and they held a strong position. Pemberton reached Vicksburg at noon on December 26 and assumed command of the city, while confirming Lee as commander of the troops defending the Walnut Hills.<sup>9</sup>

The Yazoo River/Chickasaw Bayou area north of Vicksburg was cut up by swamps, bayous, and lakes. Since describing this expanse is almost impossible, the reader should refer to the map accompanying this article.

On December 26, under the cover of the gunboats that shelled the banks of the Yazoo River up to Snyder's Mill, Sherman disembarked most of the Union troops at Johnson's Plantation.<sup>10</sup> The next day, he landed

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<sup>8</sup> U. S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant, Volume 1* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982): 225.

<sup>9</sup> United States War Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, Series 1, Volume 23* (Government Printing Office, Washington, 1897-1922): 611; Hereafter *ORN*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Steele's division at the mouth of Chickasaw Bayou. To get into position, the Federal forces first had to push the Confederate troops away from their forward points at Mrs. Lake's plantation and Thompson Lake. Later in the day, Union Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter reported the action taken by the Navy: "We have had stirring times to-day, engaging the Yazoo batteries and taking up the torpedoes. The old war horse, Benton, had been much cut up, and the gallant, noble [Lieutenant Commander William] Gwin, I fear, mortally wounded. He was struck in the right breast with a large rifle shot, which tore off all the muscles of his right arm."<sup>11</sup>

All the approaches were commanded by Confederate sharpshooters who manned the Chickasaw Bayou levee running along the bayou on its opposite bank, with a road immediately behind that led to Yazoo City. This levee and road formed a natural parapet. The road also offered a means of quickly shifting troops to reinforce the different sectors. Behind the levee was a strip of table land upon which were rifle pits and artillery batteries. Further behind the table land was a "high, abrupt range of hills [Walnut Hills] whose scarred sides were marked all the way up with rifle trenches, and the crowns of the principle hills presented heavy batteries."<sup>12</sup>

On the morning of December 27, Brigadier General Francis (Frank) Preston Blair Jr.'s Union brigade was detached from Steele's division. Steele was ordered to advance between Chickasaw Bayou and Thompson's Lake with his other two brigades. Steele said: "While we were cutting the roads through the timber to the levee Admiral Porter called for troops to cross the river and disperse about 400 sharpshooters who were concealed on the west side of the river impeding the progress of the gunboats." Steele sent the 17th Missouri.<sup>13</sup>

When the 17th Missouri returned, General Steele continued his forward movement. Steele stated, "Our progress was considerably retarded by the timber felled across the levee." Soon, they came to deep water, which turned out to be Thompson's Lake. They were on the wrong side of the lake; they should have been between the lake and the bayou. It was too late in the day to retrace their steps, so they bivouacked, with no fires.<sup>14</sup>

Charles Willison of the 76th Ohio told of an unexpected hazard: "Moving forward, our way was through a field overgrown with cockle-

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 574, 576.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 606.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 651.

<sup>14</sup> *OR*, 651.

burrs, a great thicket of them higher than our heads and crowned with the dry burrs which showered down on us at a touch. Midway in this my cap was knocked off and that instant my head was a mass of the prickly things which I had no time to stop and detach. I simply had to clap my cap on top.”<sup>15</sup>

Brigadier General David Stuart’s brigade followed Blair’s brigade until they came to an open field. Stuart was under the command of Morgan L. Smith, who ordered him to send a regiment to investigate some woods on the right of the open field. Stuart dispatched the 55th Illinois accompanied by the 58th Ohio from Blair’s brigade and described their advance: “They crossed a bayou near at hand on a fallen tree,”<sup>16</sup> single-file. When they got to the woods, they ran into Confederate skirmishers. Stuart immediately crossed the remainder of his brigade, which drove the enemy skirmishers across Chickasaw Bayou. When the Union forces reached the bayou, they were met by a heavy volley and forced to take cover in the abatis, where they lay under severe gunfire throughout the night.<sup>17</sup>

The Northern division of Brigadier General George Washington Morgan advanced to the Lake house, where it found a heavy force of the enemy in a wooded area across Chickasaw Bayou. A two-hour battle ensued before the Confederates retreated. Night was coming on, so the men camped at the battle site.<sup>18</sup>

The next morning, December 28, Morgan L. Smith’s Union division found itself facing a narrow sand spit at an Indian mound that would provide a way across the bayou. The Confederates had thrown down abatis along the Federal side of the bayou and occupied the parapet behind the levee, with a system of rifle pits and batteries providing crossfire. Union forces would have to fight their way through these defenses before they reached the bluff.

Smith investigated the crossing during the early morning fog of December 28. According to a member of the 55th Illinois, he “proceeded to the edge of the brush that fringed the slashed timber, took out his glass and began to look into the lifting fog to get a view across the bayou . . . Presently he put up his glass, calmly reined his horse to the rear and returned as he came . . . He had, while looking through his glass, been shot

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<sup>15</sup> Charles A. Willison, *Reminiscences of a Boy's Service With the 76<sup>th</sup> Ohio* (Menasha, WI: George Banta, 1908), 36; Committee, *55<sup>th</sup> Illinois*, 188.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 635.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 637, 649.





*Battles And Leaders Of The Civil War, Volume III. New York: The Century Company, 1887.*

by a rebel sharp-shooter, the bullet striking him near the top of the hip bone and ranging across the back to the spine; yet such was his splendid nerve that the wound, almost mortal, did not cause a tremor of the voice. He fell from his horse when out of sight of his men, and was carried to the boats." Stuart assumed leadership of the division but was placed under the control of A. J. Smith, who was more experienced.<sup>19</sup>

On Stuart's right was A. J. Smith's division. Smith placed Burbridge's brigade next to Stuart, with orders to build rafts to cross his men over the bayou. A. J. Smith's other brigade, commanded by Colonel William J. Landram, was to engage the enemy from the road that led to Vicksburg by moving skirmishers forward into the abatis.<sup>20</sup>

Steele's division was moved to the west side of Thompson's Lake to link up with General Morgan. Frank Blair's brigade, although part of Steele's division, was treated by General Morgan as an autonomous unit. Morgan ordered Blair to move his brigade forward to the left of General M. L. Smith. Colonel John B. Wyman of the 13th Illinois Infantry was killed around this time, "shot through the breast, from left to right, by a rifle-ball which was found lodged in the underclothing on the right side of

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 607; Committee, *55<sup>th</sup> Illinois*, 192.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

his body,”<sup>21</sup> and Lieutenant Colonel Adam B. Gorgas assumed command of the regiment.

Sherman’s skirmishers and sharpshooters tried to force their way through the abatis. The fight settled down into a fire fight between the artillery and skirmishers on both sides. Some of the skirmishers covered their hats and uniforms with the Spanish moss they took from the abatis, making a natural camouflage.<sup>22</sup>

Captain Jacob T. Foster, commander of the 1st Wisconsin Light Artillery, got into a duel with an enemy battery. He described their time under fire: “Here the bursting of shells, the crashing of trees, the thunder of our own guns, and the showering of bullets seemed enough almost to drive us back, but bravely did our men stand their ground, and although many of them were knocked down, strange to say none were hurt, but several were severely shocked for a moment. Lieutenant Nutting had a shell to burst in the ground about 2 feet under him, raising him several feet into the air and completely stunning him for several minutes without otherwise injuring him.”<sup>23</sup>

That night, Stuart sent out a scouting party that discovered an old ford. He described the terrain: “The enemy had obstructed [the ford] by felling heavy trees which formed an impassable entanglement. On the opposite shore [of the bayou], the bank was near . . . 20 feet high and deeply underworn by the water.” There were Confederate rifle pits across the bayou, on the left of the ford, which commanded the crossing perfectly. There was also a battery opposite the ford. Stuart had the abatis cleared that night by a working party.<sup>24</sup>

Stuart was ordered by Sherman to advance skirmishers to keep the Confederate troops occupied. One of his regiments detailed for this purpose was the 55th Illinois. According to one of its members, “They were directed to scatter out among the logs and keep up an incessant fire at the top of the levee beyond.” The companies were sent out one company at a time. When it became F Company’s turn, “It was led forward by Captain Casper Schleich. With his arm outstretched for the purpose of directing one of his followers to a place of safety, apparently not thinking of his own peril, he

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<sup>21</sup> Committee of the Regiment, *Military History and Reminiscences of the Thirteenth Regiment of Illinois Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War in the United States 1861-1865* (Women’s Temperance: Chicago, 1892), 239.

<sup>22</sup> Committee, *55<sup>th</sup> Illinois*, 194.

<sup>23</sup> *OR*, 643.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 635.



was struck fair in the breast by a bullet, and with a gush of blood from his great heart he fell dead into the arms of his comrades.”<sup>25</sup>

The Federals attempted to build a pontoon bridge across one of the bayous on the morning of December 29.<sup>26</sup> In the words of F. H. Mason of the 42nd Ohio Infantry, “every effort was made to lay the bridge, under a heavy fire from the enemy’s artillery and sharp-shooters, but the boats were heavy, the enemy’s shells sunk two of them, and the bridge would not span the bayou.”<sup>27</sup>

The rest of the Federals started the morning as the subjects of an artillery barrage against their entire line. Captain Foster of the 1st Wisconsin Light Artillery described the cannonade: “The cannonading was opened at 7:30 a.m. and was truly terrific to us. Shell after shell burst among us and in the air just in front, sending in our midst a hail-storm of bursting shell.”<sup>28</sup>

Around 10:30 a.m., the Union forces opened a cannonade on the Confederate lines, which lasted for an hour and a half, allowing the Federals time to arrange their forces into assault columns. Confederate Colonel Winchester Hall of the 26th Louisiana Infantry described the bombardment from the Confederate side: “A terrible storm of shot and shell now burst upon us, and in its fury it seemed as if no living thing about us could escape. When at its height I cried out at the highest pitch of my voice: ‘That’s the music!’” This simple statement seemed to calm his troops.<sup>29</sup>

When the cannonade was over, the Union troops were ordered to assault all along the line. However, most of the regiments on the flanks were not able to penetrate the abatis, so the main attack was on the center of the Confederate line. Blair’s brigade waded back to the east side of Chickasaw Bayou before the offensive. According to Lieutenant Simon T. Josselyn of the 13th Illinois, “General Blair rode along as we were about crossing a muddy bayou, and said: ‘I’ll see if you can stand mud and water as well as you can stand fire.’”<sup>30</sup> Blair formed his brigade

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 635; Committee, *55<sup>th</sup> Illinois*, 193.

<sup>26</sup> *OR*, 647.

<sup>27</sup> F. H. Mason, *The Forty-Second Ohio Infantry: A History of the Organization and Services of that Regiment in the War of the Rebellion* (Cobb, Andrews and Company: Cleveland, 1876), 24.

<sup>28</sup> *OR*, 643.

<sup>29</sup> Winchester Hall, *The Story of the 26<sup>th</sup> Louisiana Infantry in the Service of the Confederate States* (Old South Books: Leavenworth, KS, 1890), 46.

<sup>30</sup> *OR*, 655; Committee, *13<sup>th</sup> Illinois*, 241.

in a wood between Thompson's Lake and the bayou.<sup>31</sup> When he had them formed in a double line, he ordered the men forward. Colonel John F. DeCourcy, of Morgan's division, positioned his brigade along the abatis, in a double line of battle. Brigadier General John Milton Thayer of Steele's division arrayed his Iowa brigade in a column with the 4th Iowa in the lead. They were to support DeCourcy's brigade. Thayer went in person with the 4th Iowa and ordered each of the other regiments to follow the regiment in front of it.

When the order to advance was given, DeCourcy's two right regiments (22nd Kentucky and 42nd Ohio) "found themselves immediately engaged under a hot fire in the toils of a nearly impassable abatis of heavy timber." John Harrington of the 22nd Kentucky Infantry wrote in a letter home: "One poor fellow received a ball full in the forehead who was right in front of me he turned over gave a rattling groan and expired."<sup>32</sup> DeCourcy's two left regiments (54th Indiana and 16th Ohio) had an easier approach to the bayou and raced down the road in column formation. The rugged Westerners surged over a corduroy bridge that spanned the bayou and formed a line of battle in a belt of land that the soldiers dubbed the "Bloody Triangle." They fought across the Triangle to the County Road at the base of the Chickasaw Bluff but were unable to advance farther.<sup>33</sup>

Between Blair's formation and the enemy "was an entanglement formed by cutting down small cotton trees, leaving the trees entwined among the stumps. The bed of the bayou (a feeder stream of Chickasaw Bayou) was about 100 yards wide, quicksand, and about 15 feet wide, water 3 feet deep. The bank on the opposite side was steep and obstructed by abatis, crowned by a line of rifle pits." Another line of rifle pits was behind the first.<sup>34</sup>

Blair led his troops through the abatis and across the stream into the "Bloody Triangle." Albert H. Sibley of H Company, 13th Illinois said: "The front was bold and magnificent, and the battle maintained with courage and splendor – if such things can be called splendor, that take men's lives."<sup>35</sup> Blair and his men fought their way past the two lines of rifle pits.

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<sup>31</sup> *OR*, 652.

<sup>32</sup> Stuart W. Sanders, "'I Have Seen War in All Its Horrors': Two Civil War Letters of John T. Harrington, Twenty-second Kentucky Union Infantry Regiment." *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 105, no. 4 (2007), 657-77. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.snhu.edu/stable/23387259>: 663.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 649.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 652, 655.

<sup>35</sup> Committee, *13<sup>th</sup> Illinois*, 246.

Above the second line of rifle pits was a group of small willows and some of the Confederates took cover there. The 13th Illinois drove them out in a hand-to-hand fight.<sup>36</sup> The brigade progressed to the levee in front of the county road, but were unable to advance farther. Blair stated that "Some reached the foot of these formidable works only to pour out their lives at their base." His troops were falling fast around him.<sup>37</sup>

General Lee of the Confederate army stated that "As soon as they began to get close to the Confederate line they were literally mowed down by the fire of the infantry in their front and both flanks."<sup>38</sup> Troops from Louisiana captured four colors and 332 Union soldiers before the Federals retreated in confusion.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, the 4th Iowa, of General Thayer's Iowa brigade, had crossed the corduroy bridge over the bayou. According to Lurton Ingersoll, "They carried the first line of works, drove the rebels from their second line, and there remained under a terrible fire waiting for support."<sup>40</sup> When Thayer looked around for his backup regiments, he found that there were none. He re-crossed the bayou and found the second regiment in line, the 30th Iowa. Before it was able to fulfill Thayer's orders, it had been ordered by General Steele to move off to the right to support General Morgan.<sup>41</sup> Each of the other three regiments in line followed the 30th Iowa, according to orders.<sup>42</sup>

Thayer returned to the 4th Iowa, and walked the line, "absolutely shedding tears at sight of so many brave men falling around."<sup>43</sup> "It was nothing but slaughter for it to remain." Thayer ordered the 4th back across the bayou.<sup>44</sup>

J. E. Gaskell of the 17th Louisiana described the Iowans' fight from the Confederate side: "They were within good rifle range from the time they left the old field, and the slaughter was terrible. We rounded up

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<sup>36</sup> W. J. Tenney, *The Military and Naval History of the Rebellion in the United States* (Stackpole Books: Mechanicsburg, PA, 2003), 334.

<sup>37</sup> *OR*, 652.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen D. Lee, "The Campaign of Generals Grant and Sherman Against Vicksburg in December, 1862, and January 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1863, Known as the 'Chickasaw Bayou Campaign,'" *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* (Oxford, 1901), VI, 33.

<sup>39</sup> *OR*, 682.

<sup>40</sup> Lurton Dunham Ingersoll, *Iowa and the Rebellion* (J. B. Lippincott: Dubuque, IA, 1867), 44.

<sup>41</sup> *OR*, 649, 661.

<sup>42</sup> Ingersoll, 86; *OR*, Part 1, 659.

<sup>43</sup> Ingersoll, 86.

<sup>44</sup> *OR*, 659-660.

many prisoners. Those who could get away did not stand upon the order of their going.”<sup>45</sup>

Colonel Hall of the 26th Louisiana said, “Under cover of shot and shell, the enemy advanced, with a force quite sufficient to carry our weak lines, for the men in the pits were in single file, and we had no reserve force. Artillery and infantry, on both sides, soon became hotly engaged. The enemy’s line continued to advance, although every weapon on our side was warm, and every man was doing his best. Some approached within fifty yards of our line, but it was their last assault.”<sup>46</sup>

Farther to the right, Colonel Giles A. Smith’s Federal brigade of Stuart’s division was directed to storm an Indian mound. The troops made it through the abatis, and two regiments were deployed behind the bank of the bayou as sharpshooters. One company of the 6th Missouri was ordered to cross and construct a road up the bank of the levee. When they got to the levee, the men decided that they would have to dig through the levee, and began to do so. While they were working, Smith discovered a narrow path leading up the levee about 100 yards to the left. It was wide enough to allow two men to walk abreast.<sup>47</sup>

Smith “immediately ordered the Sixth to cross, which they did in fine style under a heavy fire.” It formed under the levee and waited for the working party to finish cutting its way through. According to Sherman, “The men of the Sixth Missouri actually scooped out with their hands caves in the bank, which sheltered them against the fire of the enemy, who, right over their heads, held their muskets outside the parapet vertically, and fired down.” By now, it was getting dark. Smith deployed two more regiments as sharpshooters and ordered the 6th Missouri to retreat under cover of the darkness and covering fire of the sharpshooters. Even then, they had to retreat one man at a time.<sup>48</sup>

The 60th Tennessee of Vaughn’s brigade was on the extreme Confederate left. They were not attacked but were subjected to a heavy Union artillery barrage. R. L. Bachman of the 60th, with his regiment, “was ordered to move into the blockade of fallen timber . . . for protection. While obeying this order, a shell from the enemy’s battery fell into

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<sup>45</sup> J. E. Gaskell, “Battle of Chickasaw Bayou,” *Confederate Veteran* (Nashville, TN, 1915), XXIII, 128.

<sup>46</sup> Hall, 46.

<sup>47</sup> *OR*, 633-634.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 634; Committee, *55<sup>th</sup> Illinois*, 195; William T. Sherman, *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman* (Da Capo: New York, 1984), I, 292.



*Harper's Weekly. "The Battle At Vicksburg - Gallant Charge Of The Sixth Missouri Regiment." January 31, 1863: 77.*

our company . . . It passed through one man, then exploded, mortally wounding five others. A fragment of the same shell tore the cover off of the haversack of another soldier and broke the bayonet in its scabbard hanging by his side."<sup>49</sup>

Stephen D. Lee, whose horse was killed under him by a cannon shot, was seen everywhere on the Confederate line, especially where the fighting was heaviest. According to A. S. Abrams, "At last, a flank movement was made by our forces, sallying from the breastworks and attacking the enemy on his [left] flank, routing him . . . This coup de etat put an end to the battle, the enemy having been punished too severely to attempt another assault."<sup>50</sup>

General Sherman concluded that he could not break the Confederate line "without being too crippled to act with any vigor afterward." He described the end of the attack: "When the night of the 29th closed in we stood upon our original ground and had suffered a repulse." It rained heavily that night. Willison of the 76th Ohio described what he went

<sup>49</sup> R. L. Bachman, "That Perilous Ride," *Confederate Veteran* (Nashville, TN, 1902), X, 409.

<sup>50</sup> A. S. Abrams, *A Full and Detailed History of the Siege of Vicksburg* (Intelligencer Steam Power Presses: Atlanta, 1863), 13; Gaskell, 128.

through: "Rain poured down in torrents all night and my rubber poncho, which I put up for shelter, did not save me from the thick, sticky, miry clay in which I had to wallow trying to get a little sleep."<sup>51</sup>

Sherman visited Admiral David Dixon Porter that night and suggested that he would hold the present ground and give Porter ten thousand infantry. He wanted Porter to advance up the Yazoo as far as possible, near the battery on Drumgould's Bluff, disembark, and attack the Confederate lines there. He assigned Steele's division and Giles Smith's brigade of Stuart's division to board the transports for this effort. The attack was scheduled to take place at 4:00 a.m. on December 30, 1862. However, when it came time for the fleet to start up the river, "the admiral had found the fog so dense on the river that the boats could not move."<sup>52</sup>

On December 31, Union General Morgan sent a flag of truce, asking for four hours to collect his wounded and bury the dead. The Confederate general granted the four hours, but there was no firing on either side for the rest of the day.<sup>53</sup>

Sherman and Porter decided to try on the night of January 1, 1863, for the surprise attack at Drumgould's Bluff. Before the fleet moved, Sherman got a note from Porter: "Inasmuch as the moon does not set tonight until 5.25 the landing must be a daylight affair, which in my opinion, is too hazardous to try." Sherman agreed, and the attack was called off.<sup>54</sup>

The men not on the transports were camped on low, swampy ground that would have been turned into a quagmire if it rained again. There were high water marks on the trees ten to twelve feet above the roots. Sherman could see "no good reason for remaining in so unenviable a place any longer." He gave orders to embark his troops, and they were all on their transports by sunrise of January 2. He could hear trains coming and departing Vicksburg all the time and was sure that more Rebel reinforcements were arriving. There were rumors that Grant had fallen back from Grenada, so there was no chance that he would arrive to reinforce Sherman as planned.<sup>55</sup>

The Union forces did not board their transports without some response from the Confederates. General Lee reported that he: "With the 2nd Texas [Cavalry] and two Tennessee regiments [3rd and 30th], pursued the

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<sup>51</sup> *OR*, 608-609; Willison, 38.

<sup>52</sup> *OR*, 609.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 684.

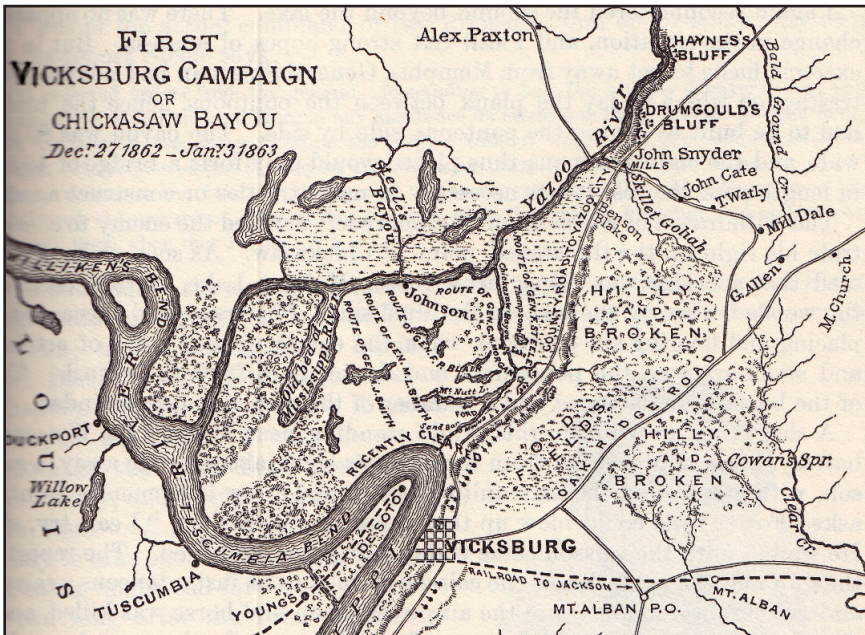
<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 608.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 609-610.



enemy . . . The 2nd Texas was deployed as skirmishers . . . and got close to the boats and opened fire on them, but the enemy had gotten aboard, and were moving off."<sup>56</sup>

On January 3, the Union troops were back at Milliken's Bend. Major General John Alexander McClernand met Sherman there. Outranking Sherman, he took over command. At Sherman's suggestion, they moved up-river and captured Arkansas Post a week later, somewhat mitigating the disaster of Chickasaw Bayou, where they had suffered almost two thousand casualties in contrast to fewer than two hundred for the Confederates. Nevertheless, the Union military was not finished with Vicksburg with the conclusion of the Chickasaw Bayou Campaign. The Federals would return under General Ulysses S. Grant, and they would not stop until Vicksburg was theirs.



*Battles And Leaders Of The Civil War, Volume III. New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1956.*

<sup>56</sup> Lee, "The Campaigns of Generals Grant and Sherman," 35.