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"THEY FOUGHT SPLENDIDLY!":
THE STRUGGLE FOR PORT HUDSON

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Department of History

by

Lawrence Lee Hewitt
B.A., University of Kentucky, 1974
A.A., Jefferson Community College, 1975
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1977

December 1984
For

J. Larry Crain,

who determined the subject,

and

Carol J. Greenfield,

who restored my determination to finish.
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This dissertation examines the Confederate occupation of Port Hudson, Louisiana, and the Union efforts to capture the bastion during the period August 1862-July 1863. Though it recounts the garrison life of the soldiers, it emphasizes the strategic importance the village held for the opposing governments. Throughout the period under consideration, the Confederate government's objective in garrisoning Port Hudson and Vicksburg was to maintain the vital Red River supply-line. That waterway facilitated the east-west flow of manpower, munitions and foodstuffs between the heart of the Confederacy and the Trans-Mississippi. The United States government recognized the importance of this supply-line and made control of the Mississippi River one of its primary goals shortly after the outbreak of hostilities. Furthermore, this study discusses the monumental impact the struggle for Port Hudson, especially the Union assault of May 27, had on the course of the Civil War.

Within the framework set forth above, this study explores the events which brought about the Confederate occupation and fortification of Port Hudson; the relationship between the Confederacy's twin bastions of Port Hudson and Vicksburg, Mississippi; the unsuccessful efforts
of Union Admiral David G. Farragut and Major General Nathaniel P. Banks to circumvent the importance of the garrison by controlling the mouth of the Red River and thereby to force the Confederates to evacuate the village due to hunger without the necessity of a costly siege; and the consequences wrought by the Confederates' surprisingly successful defense of Port Hudson when finally besieged. The evidence for these matters includes judgments expressed by the opposing commanders, their subordinates of every rank, civilians, and both contemporary and modern historians.

Primary sources, including military orders and reports, diaries and letters, and newspapers, provided the bulk of the material consulted in my work. I have supplemented these items with memoirs of participants and regimental histories.
Introduction

Port Hudson, Louisiana, is little remembered today; yet it holds a distinct place in our nation's past. Located seventeen miles north of Baton Rouge, the village was the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River and the site of the longest bona fide siege in American military history. It was here, too, that Negro soldiers in the regular United States Army first participated in a major assault.

Control of the Mississippi River was a key objective of Union strategy at the beginning of the Civil War. As the war entered its second year, only Vicksburg, Mississippi, remained in Confederate hands. The Southerners capitalized on their successful defense of that city to expand their control over the river. In August 1862 they occupied Port Hudson and constructed a bastion stronger than Vicksburg. Together these fortresses denied safe use of the Mississippi to the Federals. At the same time the Confederates safeguarded the vital Red River connection with the Trans-Mississippi. The garrison at Port Hudson achieved these objectives for almost a year—only capitulating after Vicksburg had fallen.

History has overlooked Port Hudson for two reasons:
its downfall followed so closely Robert E. Lee's repulse at Gettysburg and Ulysses S. Grant's capture of Vicksburg and, moreover, the participants in the Port Hudson campaign did not include any of the more famous figures of the Civil War. Numerous unit histories and individual memoirs describing the struggle for Port Hudson began appearing within a few months of the garrison's surrender. But the first scholarly work devoted to the Confederate occupation of Port Hudson was not published until 1963.

Edward Cunningham's *The Port Hudson Campaign: 1862-1863* attempted to elevate Port Hudson from obscurity. The effort proved unsuccessful for several reasons, particularly because the author failed to make use of significant manuscript collections scattered about the country and because his treatment was too brief for such a complex subject. In 1983 the first part of a proposed two-volume history of the Port Hudson campaign was published by David C. Edmonds, a professor of economics. In *The Guns of Port Hudson: The River Campaign* (February-May 1863), Edmonds' thorough research is apparent, despite inaccurate footnotes and the absence of a bibliography. Unfortunately, he overcompensated for Cunningham's compression. Cunningham dealt with the eleven-month Confederate occupation of Port Hudson in 126 pages; Edmonds required nearly twice the space to cover one-fourth the time. Regrettably, the latter's fact-filled account has considerably less analysis than
Cunningham's work. Furthermore, The Guns of Port Hudson leaves the reader wondering how and why the struggle for Port Hudson actually began. Not only does Edmonds fail to relate Port Hudson into the overall war effort, especially the defense of Vicksburg, he also virtually ignores the first six months of Confederate occupation.

Some people might agree with Professor Edmonds estimate that a history of such an event requires two volumes. I, however, believe that the sheer length of such a monograph would only perpetuate the obscurity of Port Hudson. Instead, I chose to cover the entire Confederate occupation, with an emphasis on the strategy employed by both sides, in one volume. The reader interested in battlefield tactics and heroics, particularly after the assault of May 27, will be disappointed. The additional material required for what Bell Irvin Wiley described as the greatest deprivation experienced in the Confederacy would defeat the purpose of this dissertation. I made my decision in an effort to bring Port Hudson into the forefront of Civil War history—a position it justly deserves. Gettysburg and Vicksburg are regarded as the turning points of the war. Yet, Gettysburg did not assure Lee's final defeat or Vicksburg Grant's eventual triumph.

---

Although tactically a small engagement, the struggle for Fort Hudson had a momentous impact on the war, particularly in regard to Grant's victory at Vicksburg.

In the preface of Cunningham's book, T. Harry Williams wrote: "The Confederates at Fort Hudson, by their dogged resistance, stalled the Union victory schedule and thereby prolonged the conflict." Ironically, the reverse is true. When the fighting ended on May 27 with the opponents deadlocked, Union commander Nathaniel P. Banks had no alternative but to besiege the garrison. Consequently, he could not join Grant at Vicksburg. Despite a recent claim to the contrary by Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, Union General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck desperately wanted the armies of Grant and Banks combined, with the latter in command. Had Banks reached Vicksburg in June of 1863—following his dispersion of Confederates in western Louisiana and a quick, glorious victory at Port Hudson—he would have been hailed as the conquering hero. As ranking officer, Banks would have assumed overall command of the combined armies and received the credit for capturing the doomed city. Until Banks met with disaster on some


battlefield, he would have blocked Grant's rise to supreme command—thus prolonging the war.

The Confederates also hastened the ultimate defeat of their cause in a more tangible manner. The failure of the initial Union attack brought about the participation of black troops in the assault. The newspaper coverage of the charge by black troops at Port Hudson proved pivotal in convincing northern whites to accept the enlistment of nearly 180,000 black soldiers in the Federal army. Though generally stationed in rear areas, the Negroes freed white troops for active duty. By the spring of 1865, black troops nearly equaled Confederate infantrymen present for duty. In addition, this fresh source of manpower appeared when the war-weary North had grown tired of the seemingly endless list of casualties. Consequently, the Southerners' stubborn defense on May 27 significantly altered the course of the Civil War.

The mighty Mississippi River flowed south through the Confederacy like a dagger aimed at her heart. Even at the outset of the war, Winfield Scott, the Union's first general-in-chief, recognized the importance of securing the Mississippi--and New Orleans--for the North. President Abraham Lincoln agreed. Not only would Northern control of the river divide the newly united Confederate States of America, it would clear shipment of produce by disgruntled midwestern farmers. Yet neither Scott, nor his successor George B. McClellan, made much headway toward claiming the waterway during the first year of the war.

Federal efforts to secure the Mississippi made the river of critical importance for the Confederate leaders. At the beginning of the war the primary concern of the Confederate government consisted of repelling Union invasions until the aggressors exhausted themselves. A dual objective was to retain territory--a nation that cannot secure its own borders confesses its inability to protect its citizens.

Strategically, the defense of New Orleans was
essential. Located near the mouth of the river, New Orleans was by far the most populous city in the Confederacy, and its leading financial and commercial center. When the war began, the Confederacy moved swiftly to secure it. Thousands of volunteers poured into New Orleans; the authorities in Richmond shipped in scores of cannon. Everyone in the South felt that a force advancing from the Gulf of Mexico could not take New Orleans because brick fortifications guarded every approach; rather, the threat to the city lay up-river.

The northernmost Confederate garrison on the Mississippi occupied Columbus, Kentucky, almost a 1000 miles upstream. But the loss of Forts Henry and Donelson in February 1862, forced the Confederates to abandon this position. Foreseeing the possible evacuation of Columbus, the South had garrisoned New Madrid, Missouri, Island No. 10, Fort Pillow, Tennessee, and Vicksburg, Mississippi, all for the purpose of defending New Orleans. Even before losing any of these, General Pierre G. T. Beauregard, commander of the Army of the Mississippi, recommended to Major General Mansfield Lovell, commander of the defenses along the lower Mississippi, "the fortification of Port Hudson as a measure of precaution against the fall of our defenses north of
Memphis." Acting upon Beauregard's suggestion, Lovell constructed the earthworks for a battery at Port Hudson in early April.

But before cannon and troops could arrive, disaster struck. On April 24 the Union navy succeeded in passing Forts Jackson and St. Philip on the river below New Orleans. The city fell within a week. Land forces followed and the United States Army occupied much of southern Louisiana. By mid-June only Vicksburg remained under Confederate control.

Under naval attack from north and south, this bastion too seemed certain to fall, allowing the Union to achieve its first objective. Responsibility for defending Vicksburg fell upon General Braxton Bragg, the departmental commander. Bragg sent Major General Earl Van Dorn to take charge of Vicksburg's defense and provided him with the necessary reinforcements. Van Dorn thwarted all Union efforts to drive him from the city, and by mid-July the strategic situation in the area had changed drastically, with the Union forces adopting a defensive posture.

Wanting to strengthen his hold on Vicksburg, Van Dorn sought to fortify Port Hudson. The Federal navy had hardly


2. Ibid., 771.
Illustration No. 1

LOWER MISSISSIPPI VALLEY
left Vicksburg when Van Dorn issued orders for an offensive into southeastern Louisiana. He wrote President Jefferson Davis, "I want Baton Rouge and Port Hudson...." If the Confederates could capture the Federal garrison at Baton Rouge, they would secure navigation of the Red River (a vital east-west supply line), allow for the fortification of Port Hudson and simplify the reoccupation of New Orleans. Brigadier General Daniel Ruggles, district commander with headquarters at Tangipahoa, Louisiana, had earlier requested reinforcements for such an expedition. On July 26 Van Dorn dispatched Major General John C. Breckinridge with just under 4,000 troops to take command in southeastern Louisiana.

On July 28 Breckinridge joined Ruggles just north of Tangipahoa at Camp Moore and advanced on Baton Rouge. Because a large number of the Confederates remained at Camp Moore due to illness, and many more dropped out along the march, Breckinridge reached the outskirts of Baton Rouge with only 2,800 men. Federal naval vessels anchored before the city bolstered Yankee land forces, but Breckinridge counted on the C.S.S. Arkansas to eliminate this additional


4. Q.R., XV, 76, 747, 1235.
hazard. The Confederates attacked at dawn on August 5, crushed the Union left wing and pushed on toward the river. But the devastating fire of the Union fleet brought their advance to a halt, and Breckinridge listened in vain for the guns of the Arkansas to engage the enemy vessels. The Confederate ship had developed engine difficulties four miles above the city, and the crew set her afire to prevent her capture. When Breckinridge learned the fate of the Arkansas, he abandoned any hope for resuming the attack and withdrew from the field.

Although repulsed, Breckinridge did not allow the campaign to end in failure. A few days later, fulfilling Van Dorn's wishes, he ordered Ruggles to occupy Port Hudson. With heavy guns mounted along the precipitous eighty-foot bluff, the Confederates would have a southern anchor on the Mississippi below the mouth of the Red River. If they could hold Port Hudson and Vicksburg, east-west communications via the Red River would remain open. The trans-Mississippi states provided thousands of recruits for depleted regiments serving east of the river. Texas grain and beef cattle, Louisiana salt, sugar and molasses, and European products shipped via Mexico, all flowed down the Red River. Small

arms, cannon, ammunition and currency moved westward on the 6
waterway. The Confederate government could not afford to
lose so important a lifeline. The Red River was an avenue
between east and west, guarded on either side by two
bastions, Vicksburg and Port Hudson, that flanked and
protected each other.

Port Hudson, located on the east bank twenty-five miles
up-river from Baton Rouge where the Mississippi made a
150-degree turn, had grown up with the swelling flow of
cotton from the surrounding area. The state legislature
authorized its incorporation in 1832, and the following year
construction started on a railroad link with Clinton,
nineteen miles to the northeast. Approximately 30,000 bales
of cotton and 2,000 hogsheads of sugar passed through the
port annually. Some twelve or fifteen business
establishments sprang up along the bluff, but the town never
became a social center. Remaining a paltry village of about
200 inhabitants, it contained, in addition to the stores,
only four or five houses and a Methodist church. The
Mississippi steadily shifted its course southward and away
from the town before the war. By 1862 the principal
steamboat landing had moved half a mile to the south. The

6. O.R., XV, p. 808, XVII, pt. 2, p. 752; Richard Taylor,
Destruction and Reconstruction; Personal Experiences of the
Late War, ed. by Richard B. Harwell (reprint ed., New York,
Baton Rouge Weekly Gazette and Comet, December 3, 1862.
Illustration No. II

PORT HUDSON'S ENVIRONS
railroad relocated its Port Hudson terminus and depot at the new landing. A hotel sprang up nearby and a ferry service operated to the west bank. Roads ran north to Bayou Sara and Jackson, east to Clinton, and south to Ross and Springfield landings and Baton Rouge.

The terrain immediately around Port Hudson varied immensely. Across the Mississippi a broad alluvial plain bordered the river. A plateau stretched eastward from the village into extensive fields of sugar and cotton. A mile and a half below Port Hudson a ravine, about 300 yards wide and eighty feet deep, ran northeast from the river. This ravine bounded the plateau on the south. Just north and northeast of the village the gently rolling fields became almost impassable. Canyon-like ravines—many forty to sixty feet deep—and dense woods stretched for a few hundred yards to Little Sandy Creek. Above the bend in the river a marsh, bordered on the north by Big Sandy Creek and on the west by Thompson’s Creek, covered much of the old river-bed. Thus fortified by nature, Port Hudson presented a formidable
stronghold.


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Chapter 11

"Everything is fair, they say, in love and war."

On the morning of August 15, 1862, the 4th Louisiana Infantry marched north along the Baton Rouge and Bayou Sara road. Holding their rifles at route step, they moved at an easy pace. Battle-hardened veterans of Shiloh, Vicksburg and Baton Rouge, they carried little baggage besides their indispensable blanket, slung over one shoulder. When they passed a house, the residents lined the roadside for their first glimpse of soldiers on active duty in their neighborhood. The citizens cheered them heartily for their recent exploits, but at the same time must have felt some foreboding, for this sight meant an end to their life of relative peace and tranquillity amid the bloody conflict.

The column turned westward on the Port Hudson road.

Two miles before they reached that village a field of corn stretched far off to the south. An officer inquired of a resident standing nearby the name of the plantation owner, and was answered, "It is Slaughter's field." "It will be the field of Slaughter yet, or I am much mistaken," responded the officer. He could not have imagined the truth in his half-serious prophecy.

Experienced soldiers know that they can forage better in advance, rather than in the wake of an army. Some six or eight members of the 4th entered Port Hudson early and learned from a citizen that some sailors from the U.S.S. Essex had come ashore at the landing to destroy the flatboats used in ferrying supplies from the west bank. Seeing an opportunity to earn the thanks of their commander and gain promotion, the Louisianians decided to ambush the Federals. His comrades in position, Private John R. Nesbit approached the enemy officer, Fourth Master Spencer Kellogg, and demanded that he cease destroying the flatboats. Kellogg, angered by the impudent Confederate, announced that he would capture him, and proceeded towards Nesbit, followed by three sailors. Nesbit led them past his hidden companions, who jumped out with their rifles pointed at the Federals; the latter, armed with pistols, gave up without

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2. [Wright], Port Hudson, 5.
firing a shot.

Proud of their achievement, the Louisianians marched their prisoners to headquarters. But instead of congratulating them, Brigadier General Daniel Ruggles, commanding the post, seethed with anger. He threatened to have them shot for alerting the Yankee warship of their presence. An armed guard took the Louisianians to a cabin on the edge of the bluff, where a sentinel paced steadily to and fro at the entrance. Realizing that they were in serious trouble, the men resolved to tunnel their way out. They succeeded, slipped past the guard, and slid down the bluff. Reaching bottom, the fugitives made a wide circuit of the town and returned to camp, where their comrades supposed they had fallen behind during the march from the Comite River three days before. Ruggles had neglected to get their names and, keeping the escapade to themselves, all escaped punishment.


The incident did not end there. Commodore William D. Porter, commander of the Essex, wrote Major General Benjamin F. Butler, Union commander of the Department of the Gulf, about the ambush. Porter believed that local guerrillas had captured his men. He stated further that

the next day they [sailors] were hanged....
I would ask you, under the circumstances, that retribution be carried out, and would respectfully suggest that for each seaman of mine hanged one guerrilla be shot, and for my officer ten.

No hangings occurred, but Butler mentioned the matter in a letter to Major General Richard Taylor, commander of Confederate forces in western Louisiana:

...I do not believe the report made by Commodore Porter. If true, it only adds another example of the infelicity of employing such partisan forces; if false, it shows the damage of reprisals and retaliation upon any report whatever.

The Confederates had not heard the last of Porter’s fantasies.

The 4th Louisiana camped between Mr. Slaughter’s and Fort Hudson the 15th and 16th, and entered the village on the 17th. At noon the men stacked their arms and pitched their tents in the common, just east of the church in the

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5. O.R.N., XIX, 186.

center of town. The only infantry present, the Louisianians performed guard duty. They kept away from the river to avoid drawing fire from Federal naval vessels. A detachment of the 30th Louisiana followed shortly to join the 4th.

Upon their arrival, all the troops came under the command of General Ruggles. A native of Massachusetts, Ruggles graduated from West Point in 1833, fought in the Seminole War of 1839-40 and distinguished himself during the Mexican War. He remained in the U.S. Army until May 7, 1861, when he cast his lot with the Confederacy--his Virginia in-laws being the deciding factor. Commissioned a brigadier general on August 9, he served in Virginia and at New Orleans before leading a division at the Battle of Shiloh. There he amassed the largest concentration of field artillery ever assembled in the western hemisphere. Ruggles blasted the Federals with sixty-two cannon, an immense contribution to the Confederate successes on April 6. He afterwards served in district command in Mississippi and

7. William Y. Dixon, Diary, August 16, 1862, William Y. Dixon Papers, Louisiana State University Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Kendall, "Recollections," 1091-92, 1095. Kendall is incorrect on date of Confederate occupation.
Louisiana, prior to assignment at Port Hudson.

Ruggles hurried to secure Port Hudson. He drew supplies via Williams Bridge and Clinton, and commandeered all railroad transportation between Clinton and Port Hudson. Major General John C. Breckinridge had given him full authority to procure any tools, Negroes, or other means he might require to construct earthworks. Breckinridge's chief engineer, Captain James Nocquet, reported to him for temporary duty. Within a few days Nocquet had some of the works ready to receive heavy cannon, which Major General Earl Van Dorn assured Breckinridge would arrive shortly.

The Confederates debated the design of the fortifications. The first proposal called for a large star fort, adjacent to the river, with a uniform line of batteries on that front. The remaining sides would form a semi-circle of salient and retiring angles. This design would provide concentrated fire and require only a small garrison to defend it. On the other hand, it would enable an investing force to concentrate its fire on so small an


9. O.R., XV, 81, 795, 800, 1220; Breckinridge, G.O. No. 18, August 13, 1862, Ruggles Papers, Duke University.
area as to make it untenable, unless constructed with casemates similar to those in a stone fort. They promptly rejected the idea.

The second proposal was to build a series of lunettes flanking each other at a distance of 400 yards. These detached works would expose an attacker to a deadly direct, cross and flanking fire, while at the same time allowing the garrison to sally forth in good order and launch vigorous counterattacks. But strong reserves required between each lunette would have little protection against the enemy's fire. The third plan consisted of a continuous line of parapet and ditch. This design constituted the best type of earthworks for withstanding a siege, but the planners concluded that any attacker would attempt to storm the position and would be unprepared to conduct a siege. Consequently, they decided on the second plan.

The first lunette was constructed four miles below Fort Hudson on the Baton Rouge road, and six more followed in quick succession. They were to be built as far as Little Sandy Creek. Everyone felt that the precipitous terrain which stretched from the creek to the Mississippi River—strengthened with felled trees in the ravines—would prove enough to allow a line of infantry to hold that sector. This line of defenses would have stretched eight miles and, according to military experts of the day, would
require a garrison of 35,000 men with a minimum of seventy pieces of artillery.

Following Van Dorn's instructions, Breckinridge divided his forces between Port Hudson and the Comite River. This division enabled him to guard the roads leading to Camp Moore and Clinton. From his camp on the Comite, Breckinridge accompanied the last of the troops ordered to Port Hudson and took charge.

A Kentuckian, Breckinridge had enjoyed an exceptional political career prior to the war. Elected vice president of the United States in 1856 at the age of thirty-five, he made an unsuccessful bid for the presidency in 1860. When Kentucky sided with the North in the fall of 1861, Breckinridge headed south. Though he lacked any military experience, he received a brigadier general's commission the following month. He saw action at Shiloh and Vicksburg, prior to commanding Confederate forces at the Battle of Baton Rouge.

In August 1862, Confederate armies returned to Kentucky. The authorities in Richmond felt Breckinridge's presence there would contribute more to the war effort than his command of a garrison in Louisiana. Receiving orders to move north with a sizeable portion of his men, Breckinridge

10. [Wright], Port Hudson, 6-7.
11. Ü.R., XV, 80-81, 797, 800.
turned his command back to Ruggles on August 18, and left Port Hudson the next day. The troops moved the following week. With scarcely 1,500 men left at Port Hudson, Ruggles promptly requested reinforcements from Van Dorn.

The garrison needed heavy cannon and experienced artillerists. Ruggles had acquired a 42-pounder smooth-bore cannon which he mounted immediately. The gun was manned by former crewmen of the Arkansas. Those sailors who managed to escape capture following the loss of their vessel, including a few that crossed the river at Port Hudson, had gone to Jackson, Mississippi. There they joined Commander Isaac N. Brown and others whom sickness and wounds had forced to stay behind. Numbering some 400 strong, they proceeded to Port Hudson to man the river batteries.

A severe shortage of heavy cannon plagued the Confederacy, but fortune smiled on Ruggles with the arrival of the gunboat U.S.S. Sumter off Bayou Sara at 8 a.m., August 14. Commodore Porter ordered its commander to remain there and guard the ferry, even though the vessel had severe engine trouble. At 5 p.m. the stock of the anchor parted,

and the ship drifted aground. A falling river caused her to
careen so that her fore and aft 32-pounders fell useless.
Francis Marion Mumford, a former 2nd lieutenant in the
Confederate service, happened on the scene and requested aid
from Port Hudson. When it failed to arrive the following
morning, he demanded that the Federals surrender. Bluffing,
he "granted" them time to consider. The steamer Ceres
happened by and made several unsuccessful attempts to free
the Sumter. Realizing Confederate artillery would soon
arrive, the defenseless sailors abandoned the vessel and
escaped on the Ceres. The Confederates captured about fifty
Negroes, some small arms and medical stores. Shortly after
daylight on the 16th, gunboat No. 7 came in sight and the
Confederates burned the Sumter. The Confederates later
secured the two 32-pounders and sent them to Port Hudson,
where they were mounted by August 29.

Ruggles had yet another reason to celebrate. Following
the Battle of Baton Rouge, Union soldiers began to
confiscate slaves, plunder private homes, and harass
Southern sympathizers. Breckinridge complained to the Union
commander that further violations "of the rules of civilized
war" would force him to "raise the black flag, and neither

14. O.R.N., XIX, 159; Memphis Daily Appeal, August 19, 29,
September 1, 1862; "Heroic Deed of Lieutenant Mumford,"
Confederate Veteran, X (August 1902), p. 365; "Dr. F. M.
444; Booth, Louisiana Soldiers, 111, bk. 1, p. 1090.

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give nor ask quarter." Breckinridge lacked the resources to impose his will on the enemy, but the Confederate forces remaining on the Comite so vexed the Yankees that they feared a second attack on Baton Rouge. Finally, Butler ordered the Union troops withdrawn to New Orleans and proceeded to remove or destroy all machinery in the town.

On August 20 Confederates drove in Union pickets around the city and captured some forty horses and twenty head of cattle. These efforts drew a furious shelling from the gunboats. The Federals evacuated Baton Rouge on the 21st. Ruggles now had the breathing space needed to fortify Port Hudson.

Ruggles had heard rumors of the impending evacuation of Baton Rouge. On August 21 he reported to Van Dorn that if the Federals withdrew, he would "...prepare to move toward New Orleans." Ruggles ordered Brigadier General M. Jeff. Thompson, at Ponchatoula, to repair the railroad and rebuild


17. O.R., XV, 803.
the bridge at Manchac, in preparation for the attack on New Orleans. He also instructed Thompson to advance his scouts toward the Mississippi River to encourage the Federals to evacuate Baton Rouge. Anticipating the withdrawal, the 4th Louisiana started for Baton Rouge at 3 p.m. on the 21st and regained the city on August 23. Fenner's Louisiana battery arrived at Port Hudson shortly after the Federal evacuation of Baton Rouge and proceeded there immediately.

Following the evacuation, the Essex left Baton Rouge and steamed up-river past Port Hudson that same day. By evening the vessel arrived at Bayou Sara needing fuel. Porter found the stockpile of coal on fire. Angered by this act of arson and the previous wounding of sailors on the Sumter, Porter fired two shells into the town, but did no damage. The vessel remained anchored overnight and shelled the town the following morning, but the sailors did not attempt to go ashore. Porter sent the Anglo-American off to New Orleans for coal and dropped down to Port Hudson to await her return. Negro laborers were excavating the water batteries when she came in sight. Although he scanned the bluffs for some time, Porter apparently failed to observe any military activity. Consequently, he did not open fire. Louisiana Lieutenant Howard C. Wright observed that if the

18. Ibid., 803, 1032; Dixon, Diary, August 23, 1862, Dixon Papers; Fannie A. Beers, Memories: A Record of Personal Experience and Adventure During Four Years of War (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1889), p. 233.
Essex had "shelled the heights, it would have given the soldiers all the work of building the batteries, as the Negroes would not have stood the fire." Porter gave a different version: "I could discover no guns at this place, but earthworks were in progress, and whilst destroying these I had the misfortune to burst my heavy X-inch gun." The Anglo-American failed to arrive, and Porter returned to Bayou Sara, where he ordered all remaining buildings destroyed. When Butler questioned Porter's action, the latter claimed that he burned the town only after citizens had wounded several sailors he had sent ashore.

When the Anglo-American returned upstream on August 29, her commander, R. K. Riley, observed earthworks along the bluff and at the water line. Failing to see any guns, he continued up-river until sighting a second line of earthworks; then he ordered his rifled 50-pounder to fire. At that moment the Confederates opened fire, with two 32-pounders manned by the former crew of the Arkansas, and eighteen 6- and 12-pounders. This fusillade struck the vessel seventy-three times and wounded the pilot and one sailor. The vessel could not reply to this galling fire

21. Ibid.
because a heavy rain had soaked the cartridge in the 50-pounder, and the howitzer lacked ammunition. The vulnerable wooden boat had no protection for her machinery, and Confederate fire drove many of the sailors from their posts. But Riley pressed on, feeling it "a matter of urgent necessity" to reach Porter.

The same day, Ruggles received orders to turn over command to Brigadier General William Nelson Rector Beall, leave between 2,500 and 2,800 men at Port Hudson and take the balance to Mississippi. Born in Bardstown, Kentucky, on March 20, 1825, Beall entered West Point in 1844. An indifferent scholar, he graduated four years later, too late to see action in Mexican War. He served in both the infantry and cavalry, saw action against Indians and in the disturbances in Kansas (1856-57) and had attained the rank of captain by the opening of the war. Beall had a sincere attachment for the Union and did not resign until August 20, 1861. He entered Confederate service with the rank of captain of cavalry and served under Van Dorn in Arkansas. Commissioned a brigadier general on April 11, 1862, he had little combat or independent command experience when he took

23. O.R.N., XIX, 182-83; P. F. de Gournay, "The Siege of Port Hudson," in "Annals of the War" [Scrapbook of miscellaneous newspaper clippings, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana]. The 42-pounders mentioned by de Gournay were the 32-pounders captured from the Sumter.
charge at Port Hudson.

By the end of the month barely 1000 soldiers remained at Port Hudson. The garrison consisted of the 30th Louisiana, Miles' Louisiana Legion; Boone's Louisiana, English's (without guns), Hoskins', Ralston's and Roberts' Mississippi and Semmes' Confederate (Regular) batteries; and Lewis' and McLaurin's Mississippi Partisan Ranger companies. Hughes' Mississippi Cavalry Battalion patrolled the surrounding area.

On September 2 Semmes' and Fenner's batteries were ordered west of the river, but the latter remained at Baton Rouge. On September 5 Bradford's Mississippi battery was ordered to Port Hudson. After it arrived, Ralston's left for duty west of the Mississippi. Abay's and Herod's Mississippi batteries quickly followed Bradford's to Port Hudson. A 20-pound Parrott gun arrived about September 1. Captured in Virginia, it was sent to Miles' Legion as a gift.


by President Jefferson Davis.

The 12th Louisiana Heavy Artillery Battalion had come from Richmond, Virginia. Confederate authorities selected this unit on the assumption that it could best stand the climate. The commander, Lieutenant Colonel Paul F. de Gournay, had impressed Major General John Magruder during his service on the peninsula around Yorktown, and Magruder wanted de Gournay to raise a regiment of heavy artillery. Five companies made up the original organization. More were to be recruited in New Orleans to fill out the regiment, but the city's fall dashed that plan. One company stayed near Richmond on rocket service. The remaining four hardy and well-drilled companies arrived about September 4. For several weeks they had not a single gun to serve.

The Confederates could not deliver large-caliber guns by boat because the Essex remained above Port Hudson. Instead, they came by rail to Osyka, Mississippi. From

26. O.R., XV, 841, XVII, pt. 2, p. 691; Rowland, Official and Statistical Register of Mississippi, 853; S.O. No. 36, September 9, 1862, "Order Book, Withers Artillery," Colonel William Temple Withers to Lieutenant Colonel James F. Parker, September 4, 1862, Withers Artillery Papers, both in Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi; Claud Estes, comp., List of Field Officers, Regiments and Battalions in the Confederate States Army, 1861-1865 (Macon, Georgia: The J. W. Burke Company, 1912), pp. 96, 135; [Wright], Port Hudson, 8-10.

27. O.R., XV, 794, LII, pt. 2, p. 334; [Paul F. de Gournay], "D'Gournay's Battalion of Artillery," Confederate Veteran, XIII (January 1905), p. 31; [Wright], Port Hudson, 14; de Gournay, "Siege of Port Hudson".
there, the cannon moved over miserable roads through the hilly, piney woods, to Clinton, and thence by rail to Port Hudson. The slow process of hauling the guns weighing several tons each enabled the Confederate artillerists to construct the necessary earthworks prior to a gun's arrival. Consequently, they could place it in position immediately. The men often became frustrated because of the long delay between completion of the earthwork and the arrival of the gun.

Commodore Porter decided to go down-river to New Orleans for supplies and at the same time ascertain the strength of the Port Hudson batteries. Shortly after 4 a.m. on September 7 the Essex, with the Anglo-American lashed to her starboard side, came within range, and the Confederates opened fire with two 32-pounders, a 20-pound Parrott and a few field pieces. They did not expect to injure the ironclad. The Essex replied with three or four rounds, killing one horse in his paddock at the north end of town and striking an empty house. The affair lasted only a few minutes. One shot entered a porthole; smoke and screams poured out. Although Porter conceded no casualties, Confederate sources reported from fifteen to more than thirty-two killed and wounded. Two guns on board the Essex burst during the engagement, including the 10-inch the

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28. [Wright], Port Hudson, 6; Kendall, "Recollections," 1093.
destruction of which Porter attributed to the shelling of the earthworks at Port Hudson in late August.

The former crew of the Arkansas got their revenge against the Essex, which a month before had forced them to destroy their vessel above Baton Rouge. The Essex had to undergo major repairs at New Orleans; but the Confederates only learned of their success from an article in Harper’s Weekly several weeks later. Fourteen of their heavy projectiles found their mark, three of them penetrating the ironclad and shattering the 24-inch thick woodwork. Porter reported:

As nearly as I could judge the enemy had in position from 35 to 40 guns of 2-inch, 1X-inch, and VII-inch caliber in three batteries...A land force will be necessary to complete the destruction of this fort, which, if allowed to again be restored, would seriously interrupt the free navigation of the Lower Mississippi.

The Confederates laughed at Porter’s announcement because they had only one gun that large. Lieutenant Wright wrote:

“Everything is fair, they say, in love and war. Flights of fancy are legitimate in the former, why not should they be


Beall began to lay out a new line of fortifications more contracted in scope—a continuous parapet and ditch four and one-half miles in length, just over half the length of the previously adopted plan. A shorter defensive perimeter would allow a smaller garrison to endure more successfully a protracted siege. Beginning on the river just over two miles below the town, the new line gradually curved northward and away from the river until it intersected Little Sandy Creek, a mile east of town. The first three-quarters of a mile of the new line followed the broken edge of the plateau, taking advantage of the terrain. Then it crossed the level fields of Gibbon’s and Slaughter’s for a mile and a quarter. Another quarter of a mile carried it across a deep crevasse; then three-quarters of a mile through rolling fields, where it ended on a hill overlooking Little Sandy Creek. From here the earthworks would follow the edge of the ridge overlooking Little Sandy Creek wherever possible, for about a mile and a half until the defenses struck the river above Port Hudson. Contemporary military experts believed 18,000 to 20,000 men sufficient to defend such a line.

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31. [Wright], Port Hudson, 8.
32. "Fortification and Siege of Port Hudson—Compiled by the Association of Defenders of Port Hudson; M. J. Smith, President; James Freret, Secretary," Southern Historical Society Papers, XIV (1886), pp. 306-307.
Construction of the new line proceeded slowly. The breastworks were the weakest allowed by military engineering, built in the crudest manner, and reveted with fence rails. The soldiers carried the rails and sometimes helped the small force of Negroes that worked on the fortifications. Beall could not entice the local planters to furnish enough slaves to labor on the works. President Davis rejected his request for a proclamation of martial law; but Beall did receive authorization to call upon the citizens in the adjacent counties to contribute the number of slaves needed. Laboring in a desultory manner, the Negroes and soldiers made little progress during the following months.

When Van Dorn moved northward through Mississippi, Ruggles remained at Jackson, Mississippi, in command of that state and eastern Louisiana. On September 11 Ruggles recommended to General Samuel Cooper, Adjutant and Inspector General, an immediate advance on New Orleans. He proposed throwing 20,000 men against the city. Aided by the numerous southern sympathizers in New Orleans, this force would have little trouble defeating the less than 10,000 Federals, who

Ruggles concluded were greatly "demoralized and suffering from the influences of the climate."

The Federals quickly disillusioned Ruggles. On the morning of September 15 they advanced against Ponchatoula. Their aggression forced Ruggles to re-examine their supposed weaknesses. On the 17th he ordered Beall to concentrate his forces at Port Hudson and to leave only one company of infantry, two cannon, and fifteen cavalymen at Baton Rouge. The following day, after detaching the required number, the 4th Louisiana and Fenner's battery left Baton Rouge for Port Hudson. The only other force Beall could detach was "a small guard at Bayou Sara if expedient." By the 21st light batteries had deployed at Troth's house, three miles below Port Hudson, to prevent the enemy from disembarking at the landing there.

Ruggles also received disheartening news regarding his proposal for an advance on New Orleans. The Adjutant-General's Office notified him on the 23rd that Taylor had complete authority over any attempt to recapture New Orleans, and that Secretary of War George W. Randolph "is at a loss to understand why...Ruggles...should give publicity through the medium of the telegraph to suggestions

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34. O.R., XV, 806-7, 817.
35. Ibid., 141, 807; Dixon, Diary, September 18, 1862, Dixon Papers; Beers, Memories, 233.
36. O.R., XV, 809.

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which should have been regarded by him as private...."
The message infuriated Ruggles. New Orleans fell within his jurisdiction, not Taylor's—and no one had informed him of Taylor's instructions regarding that city. About his use of the telegraph, Ruggles curtly replied, "...if the [telegraph] agents are disloyal the plans of the Government are at their mercy." He added that the secretary's sense of justice should induce him to recall the letter of reproach. He got his letter of apology.

The need for manpower led President Davis to order Van Dorn to "keep the [exchanged] regiments which have their headquarters in your district instead of sending them to their former army corps. You will have due care to the safety of Vicksburg, Port Hudson, &c." The first such regiment sent to Port Hudson was the 1st Alabama. The Federals had captured most of the unit at Island No. 10. The ladies of Mobile provided new uniforms, overcoats and blankets, but the men lacked muskets when they arrived at Port Hudson on October 4. Van Dorn undoubtedly sent this unit for its heavy artillery experience. Three companies immediately began to construct batteries, while three

37. Ibid., 810, 822.
38. Ibid., 817.
39. Ibid., 817, 839-40.
provided infantry support. The men finally received weapons, ranging from rifles to flint-locks. The remaining four companies escaped from Island No. 10 and fought in northern Mississippi. Following Colonel I. G. W. Steedman's request, these companies, including the regimental brass band, rejoined him at Port Hudson on November 5.

On September 30 Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton received notification to go to Jackson, Mississippi, to relieve Van Dorn. Pemberton was to command the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana and act in concert with Taylor if an opportunity arose for attacking New Orleans. Before Pemberton arrived, word reached Ruggles at Jackson on October 3 that 8,000 reinforcements had arrived at New Orleans. Ruggles immediately pointed out the need for additional cannon at Port Hudson. Beall ordered troops from Ponchatoula to Port Hudson. Both men thought the Federals would advance up the Mississippi River. By October 11 Ruggles believed Camp Moore the intended target. When the Yankees landed at Bonfouca, Beall asked Ruggles on October


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20 to send reinforcements to Colonel Mandeville de Marigny at Covington.

It now appeared that the Federals were about to begin a serious campaign in southeastern Louisiana, and Pemberton endeavored to strengthen his hold on that region. Assuming command on October 14, on the 21st he divided the department into three districts. The Third District, assigned to Beall, included that portion of Mississippi between the Big Black and Mississippi rivers and the New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern Railroad, all of Louisiana east of the Mississippi and the counties of Mississippi on the gulf coast. Beall's headquarters remained at Fort Hudson. Pemberton also renewed the request for additional cannon for Port Hudson.

At the time of its creation Beall's entire district had a mere 3,626 troops. Most of the men garrisoned Fort Hudson (2,412) and Ponchatoula (834), with smaller detachments at Baton Rouge, Covington and Camp Moore. With so few soldiers, many lacking adequate weapons, Beall could offer little resistance against the enemy's impending onslaught. Pemberton promised Beall reinforcements on October 22 and

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42. O.R., XV, 821, 839, 1208, XVII, pt. 2, pp. 716-17, 719, 726; Col. A. R. Witt to Ruggles, October 8, 1862 (from Ponchatoula), Daniel Ruggles Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi; Booth, Louisiana Soldiers, III, bk. 1, p. 873.

promptly put troops in motion. Roberts' light battery apparently joined the garrison on the 23rd. The 39th Mississippi and 48th Tennessee reached Fort Hudson on the 27th; the 11th Arkansas came by steamboat the following day; the 49th Tennessee arrived on November 1. Colonel Bart. Jones' battalion and the 15th, 16th, 18th and 23rd Arkansas regiments, consolidated under the command of Colonel Oliver P. Lyles, marched in the same day. The 27th Alabama, three Tennessee artillery companies and 9th Tennessee Cavalry Battalion also joined the garrison during this period. The latter, fresh from a Union prison, arrived without horses and served as infantry until the men secured mounts in December. The artillery companies lacked cannon. Although sometimes referred to as the 1st Tennessee Artillery Battalion, the unit performed infantry duty. Even more unusual, the three captains rotated command of the informal organization. Fragments of regiments that escaped from Forts Henry and Donelson and Island No. 10 earlier in the year arrived to rejoin their released comrades. Recruits for particular units or conscripts assigned to specific
commands provided additional reinforcements.

Additional artillery arrived. By the 24th, thirteen heavy guns lined the bluff. The new cannon included one rifled 32-pounder, six rifled 24-pounders, and one 8-inch and one 10-inch columbiad, the latter having just arrived on the 21st. Two 42- and two 24-pounder smooth bores, an 8-inch sea-coast howitzer and a 30-pound Parrott followed these. The four smooth bores and the howitzer were obsolete and

lacked breech sights.

The increased activity in the area led Pemberton to assign a new commander for the Third District, Brigadier General John Bordenave Villepigue. A South Carolinian of French descent, Villepigue graduated from West Point in 1854 and saw service in the dragoons before resigning on March 31, 1861. He soon became colonel of the 36th Georgia Infantry Regiment. Assigned to duty on the Gulf coast, Villepigue's successful defense of Fort McRae, in Pensacola harbor, brought him recognition. Bragg appointed him to his staff as chief of engineers and artillery. Appointed brigadier in the spring of 1862, he was transferred to General Pierre G. T. Beauregard's command in Tennessee. Beauregard deemed him "the most energetic young officer available" and placed him in charge of Fort Pillow. Villepigue's skillful defense of that position against superior land and naval forces, coupled with his performance at the Battle of Corinth in early October, clearly demonstrated that he could command at Port Hudson. But on arriving there in late October, he quickly succumbed to a "fever." After lingering for several days, he died at 7:55 on the evening of November 9. Beall resumed command

45. O.R., XV, 846; [Wright], Fort Hudson, 9. Wright is mistaken about the order of arrival of the guns and apparently the 20-pound Parrott is listed as a rifled 24-pounder on the October 24 report, which has several errors in the printed version.
immediately. At 2:30 the next afternoon he had Villepigue's body escorted to the railroad depot for shipment to South Carolina and ordered all officers to "wear the usual badge of mourning for thirty days."

Another command change occurred on November 24, one that boded well for Port Hudson. President Davis appointed General Joseph E. Johnston to supreme command of all forces in the western theater. Johnston concentrated on the proper transfer of troops between the Mississippi River and Tennessee in order to defend both successfully. Foreseeing an advance against Port Hudson, he gave that post immediate attention. Beall's 5,500 effective troops could hardly withstand the feared onslaught of 24,000 Federals. Johnston evaluated the situation and met with Davis in Vicksburg in mid-December. Johnston thought that he needed another 8,000-10,000 troops along the Mississippi; sixty-five percent of these he earmarked for garrison duty at Port Hudson. Both men agreed that the number required could not come from Tennessee; rather, they looked to Lieutenant General Theophilus H. Holmes, in Arkansas, to provide the needed manpower. They looked in vain.

46. Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 53; Warner, Generals in Gray, 317-18; O.R., XV, 843; Smith, Company K, 39; Memphis Daily Appeal, November 18, 25, 1862. The cause of death was variously reported as typhoid pneumonia, cholera morbus or simply fever.

Port Hudson’s isolated position demanded a larger garrison. Fifty-eight miles of irregular terrain broken by numerous rivers and streams separated the village from the railroad at Tangipahoa. The twenty-one-mile Clinton and Port Hudson Railroad hardly reduced the distance reinforcements would have to march. Moreover, the rolling stock amounted to one locomotive and seven cars— one passenger, the balance box and flat cars. The entire train could accommodate only half a regiment at a time. Flat rails on rotten cross-ties made up the road-bed, a combination that led to almost scheduled derailments. Some Tennesseans nicknamed it the “tri-weekly” road, saying that “the train would go to Clinton one week and ‘try weakly’ to get back the next.”

Davis realized that if the Confederate government could build a railroad linking Port Hudson with the line running to Jackson, Mississippi, it would compensate for 10,000 desperately needed men. Such a rail connection could quickly move a mobile reserve to Vicksburg or Port Hudson when either place became threatened. But the shortage of iron in the South relegated the line to a long list of


desirable, but unfulfilled projects.

* * *

Even though a fortified post, Port Hudson remained a commercial port. Louisiana sugar and salt moved east, while Virginia tobacco traveled west. Immense profits on sugar shipments that reached the Atlantic states fed speculation. With the speculators came peddlers and sojourners. Friends and relatives of the soldiers lingered about the camps, and Negroes selling foodstuffs made frequent visits. Thus strangers observing the progress of the fortifications came under no suspicion. Occasionally a beautiful young woman would appear. The soldiers stared, sighed, and remarked to each other, "Uh! Aren't [sic] she a screamer, though!" The officers gladly showed the women around and explained every detail of the defenses. At least once, the women proved to be spies. They made their way back to New Orleans and revealed all to Union authorities.

While the river remained open to the Confederates, one would have expected them to stockpile large stores of provisions at a post so important as Port Hudson. Mr. H. C. Miller, provost-marshal shortly after the occupation, attempted to build warehouses to hold a year's rations for a

50. [Wright], Port Hudson, 10-12; Jones, Diary, October 12-16, 1862, Jones Collection; Dawson, Confederate Girl's Diary, 233-35, 246-47, 261, 279-80.

51. [Wright], Port Hudson, 10-11.
considerable garrison. Fresh from civilian life, he could not overcome governmental red tape—covering jurisdiction, procedure, and approval—that blocked his every move. During one of Beall's absences, Colonel William R. Miles found himself in command at Port Hudson. Fearless of bureaucracy and willing to accept full responsibility for his audacity, he sent agents out to scour the countryside for provisions and began construction of storage buildings. Relieved sooner than expected, he too failed to get the supplies and complete the warehouses.

Improper handling or inferior storage procedures increased shortages. Salted pork spoiled after careless placement in the hold of a steamboat. Poorly-salted pork that arrived was issued immediately to the soldiers to prevent a total loss. Entire boatloads of corn lay for days at the landing until spoiled by exposure to the weather. A great deal of the corn was stored in open sheds, where it turned musty and sour. The soldiers became ill after eating it. While long-horned cattle driven from Texas frequently swam the Mississippi at Port Hudson, only those in the worst condition were left for the garrison. Poor pasture made most of these scrawny by the time they were butchered. The few subordinate officers who voiced complaint were

reprimanded by their superiors. The soldiers generally suffered in silence. An exception occurred one day in an Arkansas regiment during drill. The colonel ordered his men to shout "Butler the Beast!" when they executed a charge. Instead, the men yelled "Bull beef! Bull beef!" The colonel's horse bolted with him, and the drill came to an abrupt end.

Rations varied with each day and individual at Port Hudson. The most commonly issued were "blue beef" and "corn bread." The men found the meat repulsive. Chaplain J. H. McNeilly described it as "...nauseating. Poor, gristly blue, gummy, it could be boiled for hours and never an eye of grease on the water." Sweet potatoes, pumpkins and molasses supplemented the regular fare. For those soldiers who had never tasted it, sugar-cane proved a delightful treat. Surprisingly, salt was sometimes in short supply. The lack of good cooks made the food even less appealing. Each mess either detailed some of its members or hired Negroes to cook. Fortunately the ladies in the area often visited the camps and took an interest in the culinary duties. One motherly matron pointed out to a novice cook in

53. Memphis Daily Appeal, April 4, 1863; [Wright], Port Hudson, 13; Smith, Company K, 42; McMorries, First Alabama, 52.

the 1st Alabama that, "it would improve his kettles if he would burn them out." Complimented by the attention, the cook took the first opportunity to remove the excess soot and grease from his utensils.

The soldiers had to tolerate other discomforts. Homesickness undoubtedly headed the list, followed closely by lice. The Confederates nicknamed the latter "graybacks." By boiling their clothes, the troops managed to exterminate the pests. The officers constantly made the men change campgrounds for various reasons, often moving them to an area that lacked adequate drinking water or that flooded whenever it rained. Major inconveniences included repulsive-smelling water unfit to drink, poor shelter and a shortage of blankets, shoes, clothing and cooking utensils. The men used fence rails or door shutters to construct beds by placing them between two trestles or benches or simply upon the ground. Spanish moss, hay or cane served for a

mattress.

Bad diet and exposure caused most of the sickness. Chills, fever and mumps plagued the garrison; the death toll mounted daily. A fortunate few received the loving care only a woman can give. Beall converted Centenary College at Jackson, Louisiana, into a hospital to handle the overflow from Port Hudson and Clinton. It too, however, soon overflowed. The soldiers distrusted the attending physicians. Major Andrew Jackson Campbell suffered with a toothache for weeks because "the surgeon enjoys tooth-pulling more than any man I ever saw."

Some of the troops managed to construct suitable winter quarters. They cut magnolia and willow trees and built log

56. George M. Owens to Wife Ann, October 28, December 25, 1862, Owens Papers; Cannon, Inside Rebeldom, 72, 74; Morning reports of Weatherly's Company, October, November 1862, Confederate States of America Papers; Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 47, 59; Jones, Diary, December 6, 1862, Jones Collection; Diary of Campbell, December 15, 17, 1862; Wiley, "Letters of Magee," 207; Dawson, Confederate Girl's Diary, 234; Dixon, Diary, October 14, 1862, Dixon Papers; F. L. Allen to Brother, December 16, 1862, William M. Allen Correspondence, Merritt M. Shilg Memorial Collection, Louisiana State University Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

barracks; cypress boards covered the roofs. The soldiers built bunks along the walls and provided ventilation by not chinking the cracks between the upper logs; and an open door admitted light. Barracks and tents alike had chimneys made of clay and sticks. Partly constructed of wood, the chimneys often caught fire.

The men spent most days drilling, building fortifications, or walking guard duty. A few did courier duty, herded livestock, gathered forage or hauled supplies. The drill schedule for the 1st Alabama was fairly typical:

Reveille at daybreak with roll-call, inspection of arms and policing of camps; 6 A.M., guard mounting; 7 A.M., non-commissioned officers drill; 10 A.M., drill in the school of the company; 12 M. dinner; 1 P.M., skirmish drill; 3 P.M., battalion drill; 5 P.M., dress parade; sunset, retreat; 7 P.M., taps.

Infantry companies assigned to the artillery drilled at the guns during the hours assigned for company drill. Even though the men found drilling tiresome exercise, it was essential for the inexperienced soldiers at Port Hudson, most of whom were new recruits or fresh from prisoner-of-war

58. Smith, Company K, 45; Cannon, Inside Rebeldom, 72; Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 62.

The troops took part in other military activities, some more enjoyable than others. Many units reorganized at the end of one year's service and elected new officers, which pleased the men. Some soldiers refused to work if they did not get their pay when due, and funds seldom arrived on time. What punishment they received for this disobedience is not known. An occasional court martial took place to enforce discipline. While the officers appeared understanding toward their colleagues, they came down hard on the enlisted men, especially deserters. Punishments for the guilty included forfeiture of pay, wearing a ball and chain, and "bucking," or tying the offender's wrists together and slipping them over his knees. A stick or musket was then placed over the arms and beneath the knees; so restrained, he sat out his sentence.

The soldiers had little free time to pass. Many sought to supplement their rations by fishing, hunting alligator, or "foraging" in the country for butter, eggs and other items. The plentiful molasses encouraged candy-makers. Chaplain McNeilly recalled that, "...all through the camp one could see couples of men pulling the ropes of the

60. Smith, Company K, 44; McMorries, First Alabama, 50; Cannon, Inside Rebeoldom, 73.

candied stuff until it reached the proper color and brittleness, and in the enthusiasm of the pulling they would spit on their hands to get a better hold." They also made candles. Many visited relatives, friends and local residents. The officers attended balls and banquets at the palatial homes of lovely young ladies. Many officers also attended church with these women. Regimental chaplains held services for the men on Sundays. The largely Catholic 30th Louisiana and 10th Tennessee had ample priests, but Protestant units lacked chaplains. The Tennesseans loved hearing the laundresses of the 30th Louisiana speak French. One soldier exclaimed to a comrade, "...listen to these women. One of them can give one flutter of her tongue and say more than you can say in a week."

The troops also played games, tried to make money, and drank. Popular games included marbles, cribbage and "Smut," in which the soldiers took turns making a spectacle of themselves by blackening their faces. Some of the men participated in "kangaroo courts." They made up cases during the day and held trials in the evening. The unsuccessful party to the suit had to treat the crowd to


63. M'Neilly, "Under Fire at Port Hudson," 338; Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 60-61, 70; Frederick, "Porter," 305-307; McMorries, First Alabama, 51; Dawson, Confederate Girl's Diary, 232; Dixon, Diary, October 5, 12, 1862, Dixon Papers.
beer. The "beer" consisted of corn, molasses and water mixed in a barrel, and made a seemingly palatable beverage. Although Private Robert D. Patrick drank the brew, he found it resembled vinegar. Several industrious Tennesseans developed a thriving business selling the Port Hudson beer. Members of the 49th Tennessee baked and sold round cakes made with flour and mashed sweet potatoes. The soldiers nicknamed them "sweet potato pones." Pushy salesmen canvassed the entire garrison. Before long, when the regiment marched out to drill, it met cries of "Here come your sweet 'tater pones." While virtually everyone indulged in beer because of the foul drinking water, those desiring a stronger beverage drank Louisiana rum, made from the unsold sugar of local planters. Soldiers able to get a jug retailed the beverage for a dollar an ounce and found plenty of customers. Even though many officers enjoyed rum punch during the evenings, provost guards scoured the countryside to locate and destroy the distilleries. Every night gallons of the liquid were confiscated and poured out. Even then some soldiers dipped it up with their cups or drank out of depressions in the ground. Encountering drunken soldiers was common—and often resulted in injury to

64. M'Neilly, "Under Fire at Port Hudson," 337; Frederick, "Porter," 307; Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 59, 65, 70; McMorries, First Alabama, 51.
one of the parties.

Reading and writing also occupied much of the soldier's time. A few enjoyed good novels, and everyone welcomed the arrival of a newspaper, especially the Memphis Appeal. Most of the soldiers wrote letters home, and the men looked forward to receiving a letter from a loved one, especially if accompanied by a package that contained some delicious edible or piece of clothing. Occasionally the men managed to purchase sugar and molasses and send it to loved ones less fortunate back home. The men wrote a daily newspaper called The Mule, a satirical account of the officers and men at drill. The Woodchuck soon appeared to counter The Mule.

Some spent the evenings sitting around the fire. They ate roasted potatoes, listened to fiddle music and swapped lies. Rumors circulated about the ever-impending advance of the enemy's infantry or the expected appearance of a gunboat. Opinions varied regarding the outcome of a land attack against Port Hudson. A few thought the war would end

65. Cannon, Inside Rebeldom, 74; McMorries, First Alabama, 51; Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 46, 64, 65; George M. Owens to Wife Ann, December 25, 1862, Owens Papers.

soon; Private Patrick believed that the recent Democratic party victories showed "a diversity of opinion in the North which will be fatal to the successful prosecution of the war." Some of the men simply rested, preferring to do nothing at all.

But the enemy was about to end the relatively tranquil lifestyle of Port Hudson.

67. Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 47, 59-60; McMorries, First Alabama, 52; Jones, Diary, November 15, 21, 1862, Jones Collection.

Chapter III

"Spades are 'trumps'...."

During the fall of 1862 the Confederate grasp on the Mississippi River appeared unshakeable. Eager to wrest control from the enemy, the Union sought new avenues of approach. By October 29 the popular strategy was an expedition to the Texas coast, which Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton thought would "create a diversion of the enemy's force" and reduce Confederate strength along the Mississippi. Within ten days Stanton's strategy collapsed, as President Abraham Lincoln's Republican Party suffered staggering defeats at the polls. Even the voters in his home state of Illinois repudiated his administration. A letter to Lincoln from Indiana Governor Oliver P. Morton summed up the crisis facing the president:

The fate of the North-West is trembling in the


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balance...During the recent campaign it was the staple of every democratic speech, that we of the North-West had no interests or sympathies in common with the people of the Northern and Eastern States;...that socially and commercially their sympathies are with those of the people of the Southern States rather than with the people of the North and East;...that the Mississippi river is the great artery and outlet of all Western commerce;...that the people of the North-West can never consent to be separated politically from the people who control the mouth of that river....In some of these arguments there is much truth...The plan I have to suggest is the complete clearing out of all obstacles to the navigation of the Mississippi river....

Lincoln must have taken this recommendation to heart.

On November 8 the president issued orders assigning Major General Nathaniel P. Banks to command of the Department of the Gulf, including Texas, for an advance up the Mississippi. The next day General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck sent Banks specific instructions. With the troops already assembled for the Texas expedition, Banks was to proceed to New Orleans immediately and relieve Major General Benjamin F. Butler; additional reinforcements would follow.

Halleck made Banks' objective clear:

The first military operations which will engage your attention on your arrival at New Orleans will be the opening of the Mississippi...

The President regards the opening of the Mississippi River as the first and most important of all our military and naval operations, and it is hoped that you will not lose a moment in


accomplishing it.

...the opening of the Mississippi River is now the great and primary object of your expedition....

Halleck also provided an added incentive:

As the ranking general in the Southwest, you are authorized to assume control of any military forces from the Upper Mississippi which may come within your command. The line of division between your department and that of Major-General [Ulysses S.] Grant is therefore left undecided for the present, and you will exercise superior authority as far north as you may ascend the river.

Halleck wanted Grant superseded.

Prior to his new appointment, Banks' life had been filled with triumphs and defeats. Born in Waltham, Massachusetts, on January 30, 1816, he received little formal education, working instead for his father in a cotton mill. Admitted to the bar at twenty-three, he attempted to enter politics. Eight times he campaigned for a seat in the Massachusetts legislature before succeeding. He went on to become speaker of that body and preside over the state's Constitutional Convention of 1853. That same year Banks won a seat in the U.S. Congress. His success continued, and in 1856 he became Speaker of the House of Representatives. Although it took 133 ballots to secure the speakership, his moderate beliefs helped preserve fairness during bitter slavery debates. He held that seat until elected governor.

5. Ibid., XV, 590.
of his native state in 1858. When Banks offered his services to the president in 1861, Lincoln commissioned him a major general. The president's action baffled many West Point graduates, but Lincoln fully understood the recruits, money, morale and propaganda that Banks could deliver. Yet during 1862, Banks' lack of military experience proved costly to the Union. He lost thirty percent of his troops during Stonewall Jackson's Valley Campaign in the spring and barely held his position against Jackson at Cedar Mountain in August. His combat record could not warrant confidence.

While the Union army awaited reinforcements, the navy continued to patrol the Mississippi. On the morning of November 16 four vessels approached Port Hudson from down-river on a reconnaissance mission. The Confederates held their fire to conceal their strength; Lieutenant Commander George M. Ransom reported: "...the fortifications of Port Hudson are now made, by the peculiar advantages of situation, capable of resisting more effectually than Vicksburg the passage of any vessel or fleet." The fleet shelled sugar houses and private residences along the west


Believing the navy could break the Confederate blockade of the lower Mississippi at Port Hudson, Rear Admiral David Glasgow Farragut requested the army's assistance. Major General Butler agreed, hoping to halt the flow of Texas beef eastward. But he lacked manpower, and additional troops did not appear forthcoming. On November 29 he wrote Halleck: "For the want of a sufficient land force...I have been compelled to postpone a projected attack upon the position. It might have been taken by five regiments four weeks since had I had troops sufficient to hold it."

The Essex, Kineo, Katandin and Winona made a reconnaissance up-river, arriving below Port Hudson at 2 p.m. on December 12. The ships anchored off the upper end of Prophet's Island for the night. McClain's Confederate cavalry company crossed the river at Port Hudson and moved down the west bank to a point opposite the vessels. Early the next morning a Negro, whom Captain McClain had paid $20, signaled from the bank. A rowboat left the Kineo, but when it came within thirty yards of the shore the cavalymen


fired a volley of musketry that perforated the boat. The squadron opened on the levee. Both sides suffered minimal casualties. The *Kineo* and *Katahdin* steamed downstream at 10 a.m., the *Essex* and *Winona* remaining at anchor.

During the night three guns of Boone's battery crossed the river and took position behind the levee opposite the *Winona*. Two companies of the 1st Alabama lined the east bank levee below Prophet's Island. At first light Boone's Louisianians opened fire from 250 yards. Within seconds, the *Winona* replied. Her sailors slipped the anchor cable hoping to obtain a better firing position. The vessel drifted upon a sandbar, however, which rendered useless all but one gun. Federal Lieutenant Winfield S. Schley recalled that "for ten or fifteen minutes this disadvantage continued, while a storm of projectiles from artillery and 12 musketry swept the ship." The *Winona* finally slid free, maneuvered her broadside guns toward the enemy, and blasted


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the levee with 11-inch shells for over an hour. But the Confederates bested their stronger opponent. Boone's 6- and 12-pounders peppered the Winona, striking her twenty-seven times. The ironclad Essex finally had to interpose herself between the combatants to save the Winona from further destruction. Lashed together, the two vessels dropped down out of range stern first. They then turned about, and the Winona secured to the opposite (port) side of the ironclad. But the ordeal aboard the Winona had not yet ended. Just below the island the Alabamians opened fire. The sailors gave weak reply while the vessels passed. The Winona continued downstream to the docks in New Orleans for major repairs.

The transition between Butler and Banks went smoothly. Farragut "promised a hearty and cordial co-operation," and the new army commander returned it. Arriving in New Orleans on December 14, Banks promptly dispatched troops to reoccupy Baton Rouge. Farragut furnished vessels to provide covering fire for the army's landing because he wanted to secure Baton Rouge prior to any naval expedition against Port Hudson.

The Union convoy arrived off Baton Rouge early on the


morning of December 17. The Essex fired about a dozen shells over the town, enough to drive off about 500 infantry and two field pieces. Shortly after 9 a.m. sailors from the Richmond landed and hoisted the U.S. flag over the imposing state capitol. The Essex served as a wharf boat for the infantry, who disembarked by noon. The 22nd Maine had the honor of landing first. That same day Brigadier General William N. R. Beall notified Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton, that, "Fourteen gunboats and sloops are at Baton Rouge this morning. The Essex has started up." Beall informed his superior later that day "...that between 6,000 and 7,000 of the enemy at Baton Rouge." This faulty information appeared in the Vicksburg Whig on the 18th, and everyone expected a simultaneous land and naval attack on Port Hudson. But Brigadier General Cuvier Grover, Union commander at Baton Rouge, had no intention of launching an attack. Rather, he feared a Confederate assault on his 4,500 "effective"—but undrilled—troops and pleaded for reinforcements. Meanwhile, the Yankees occupied and strengthened the fortifications they had abandoned in


16. O.R., XV, 901.
17 August.

Grover did not intend to be caught napping. He kept his men constantly on the alert. The "long roll" sounded almost every morning long before dawn. The troops tramped heavily to the breastworks and waited until daylight for an attack that never came. Sergeant Major William F. Tiemann recalled standing in line,

waiting a possible onslaught by the enemy, unable to see more than a few yards in our front owing to the heavy, thick mist which usually prevailed from midnight to sunrise, chilled through by the damp, cold night air and heavy dew which fell like light rain, and when dismissed to our quarters we felt far from comfortable.

Bugler James K. Ewer remembered that the soldiers "began to think the enemy was not coming at all."

Eventually the men adjusted to the routine of garrison duty. The troops learned discipline and took pride in their proficiency at drill. The officers constantly inspected the guns and ammunition of individual units and guard

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detachments. Unfortunately, rapid weather changes and the general inactivity of the soldiers led to severe sickness and death; the majority of the troops had only recently joined the army and were unaccustomed to the rigors of army life. The garrison reorganized almost daily with the arrival of new officers and units. Major General Christopher C. Augur superseded Grover in command at Baton Rouge.

Having learned upon his arrival that the Fort Hudson garrison numbered about 12,000 men, Banks had intended an immediate attack. He began to hesitate on the morning of December 18, however, when a supposedly reliable rebel captain told him that new conscripts had brought to 23,000 the number of troops at Fort Hudson and that a division of Confederates from California was marching for the

Mississippi. More reasons for delay followed. Banks felt he needed time to discipline Butler's demoralized regiments; he lacked cavalrymen, horses and mules. And while the last few days of 1862 brought Banks up-to-date, detailed intelligence describing the Confederate defenses and stating that only 15,000 men garrisoned Port Hudson, Banks had already turned his attention to the non-military problems that plagued an army of occupation. Farragut's disgust with Banks' failure to advance grew and spread to others. Colonel Sidney A. Bean wrote in his diary that under Butler, "much was accomplished with small means. Now nothing is accomplished with great means. Butler's little finger is thicker than Banks' loins."

Had Banks acted, rather than over-estimating his opponent and doubting his own troops' capabilities, he might have taken Port Hudson in a matter of days. His caution proved costly. While some of the soldiers agreed that his troops needed more training, the majority expected—and wanted—an immediate advance. Private Morris Fyfe wrote his father from Baton Rouge, "...we are still here (probably to give the rebels time to complete their fortifications) for 1

can see no other reason."

Butler's small force had dictated a firm rule in occupied Louisiana, but no such restriction hampered Banks, who had brought thousands of soldiers with him. Banks inaugurated a new, more lax, policy—to conciliate the ardently disaffected citizens, nurture any seeds of loyalty and forge a workable structure of state and federal government. John C. Palfrey, Assistant Engineer on Banks' staff, thought little of his methods: "Social gayety was attempted, indulgencies [sic] granted, restrictions relaxed, salaried offices distributed, reconstruction encouraged, and the seed sown for a luxuriant crop of carpet-bag government." Banks believed that many of Butler's cronies were interested only in "stealing other peoples' property" and so clamped down on their flourishing trade.

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Banks to wife, January 16, 1863, N. P. Banks Papers, Essex Institute, Salem, Massachusetts.

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with the rebels. He also endeavored to gain territory in southern Louisiana to secure cotton for European and northern mills.

The last week of 1862 passed in relative quiet for the Federals at Baton Rouge. The Essex reconnoitred the Fort Hudson fortifications Christmas eve. The Confederates did not open fire. The sailors spotted one steamer anchored close under the bluff and a new battery mounting six or seven guns. Christmas came and went for the Union soldiers, the absence of milk, tea, coffee, eggs, flour and salt meat their only hardship, the accidental burning of the state capitol on the 28th, their only excitement. Cavalry skirmished on the 29th, and the Essex went up-river and shelled the woods below Fort Hudson. Refugees entered the city from the surrounding countryside, driven by hunger or "conscript hunters." Activity centered around the levee.


The Baton Rouge *Weekly Gazette and Comet* reported:

...vessels belching forth their contents until the whole front of the city presented one mass of barrels, boxes, bags, trusses of fodder, mules, negroes, stalwart knights of valor and death, the rolling of drums, the shrill bugle sounds, the heavy lumbering of cannon, and the fizzing of steam. The like has not been witnessed here. A deserted city crowded in one day.

By December 31 Banks had 31,253 officers and men present for duty. One-third of his force occupied Baton Rouge.

By early January officials in Washington daily expected news of Banks' capture of Port Hudson. Then Banks would need only to join Grant for an assault on Vicksburg. But to accomplish his mission, Banks saw few options. He lacked the land and water transportation to join Grant directly. Moreover, if he moved the bulk of his forces to join Grant, he would leave Confederate armies intact on both sides of the river between New Orleans and Vicksburg---and an inadequate Federal garrison at New Orleans. Banks also ruled out a direct assault on Port Hudson for, at least in his opinion, want of troops. He finally decided to detach the required garrisons, disperse the Confederates west of the Mississippi, and march for the Red River. From there, Banks could join Grant if water transportation became available.

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or he could move down the Mississippi against Port Hudson.

Banks notified Halleck on January 15 that his purpose west of the Mississippi was "control of the water communications and approaches to the Red River, which will become of great importance to us as soon as we are prepared to move against Port Hudson...." He requested additional troops, especially cavalry. Repeating his plea three days later, he added mounted artillery to his list of needs. By February 12 Banks planned to cut Port Hudson's supply line west of the river and advance from Baton Rouge to the rear of the Confederate garrison, cutting off supplies from the east. This would force the Confederates to surrender or to abandon their fortifications and fight in the open. Banks again requested horses and mules on February 19.

* * *

The Confederates had not been idle after the Union landing at Baton Rouge. On December 19 the men marched to the positions along the breastworks that they would defend


30. O.R., XV, 647.

31. Ibid., 240-41, 647, 1099-1100; Banks to Halleck, January 18, 1863, Letters Sent, December 1862-August 1863, Department of the Gulf, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
against an attack. Leaves of absence virtually ended and
the soldiers speeded up work on the fortifications. Beall
ordered a battalion from Port Hudson to Clinton to thwart
any Union raid in that direction.

The imminent threat brought a new commander—Major
General Franklin Gardner. Born in New York City on January
29, 1823, he received an appointment to West Point from
Iowa. Graduating seventeenth in the class of 1843 (Grant
finished twenty-first), Gardner won two brevets for
gallantry during the Mexican War. He entered the Regular
Confederate States Army on March 16, 1861, as a lieutenant
colonel of infantry. Not bothering with the formality of
resigning from the U.S. Army, he was dropped from its rolls
on May 7. He commanded a cavalry brigade at Shiloh, received
promotion to brigadier general to rank from April 11 and led
an infantry brigade in the 1862 invasion of Kentucky.
Appointed major general in December, Gardner received Port
Hudson as his first command at his new rank. Though New
Yorkers, both he and his sister had married into the Mouton
family of Louisiana. His brother, however, fought for the
North, and his father, retired Colonel Charles K. Gardner
(former adjutant general of the army during the War of

32. Diary of Campbell, December 19, 20, 28, 1862; J. W.
Harmon Memoir, 1861-1865, Civil War Collection, Tennessee
State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

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1812), worked in the Treasury Department in Washington.

While the garrison knew of Gardner's assignment, they did not know when he would arrive, and when he stepped off the train on December 27, no one greeted him. He inquired directions to Beall's headquarters and walked there to announce himself. The soldiers only learned his identity the next day when, accompanied by Beall, he made a detailed inspection of the garrison. Gardner was instantly popular. Lieutenant Howard C. Wright pointed out the value which this impression would have during the coming months:

"Human nature is capricious, and likes and dislikes are readily conceived by soldiers of an officer, who will often fail or succeed according to the esteem and confidence he enjoys with his command. First impressions are apt to be lasting, and the first impression a general creates upon assuming a command usually continues. It was well that Gen. Gardner was popular at first sight, for his hold upon the confidence and good will of his men steadily increased and was one of the great influences which resulted in holding Port Hudson so long.

The men believed that the appointment of an officer of Gardner's ability meant the Richmond authorities had recognized Port Hudson's importance. Beall retained direct


34. [Howard C. Wright], Port Hudson: Its History From An Interior Point of View As Sketched From the Diary Of An Officer (St. Francisville, La.: St. Francisville Democrat, 1937), p. 15.
command of the garrison.

Gardner immediately put his engineering knowledge to work to correct defects he found in the defenses during his tour. Redesigning the river defenses, he clustered the heaviest guns to enable the batteries to support each other with a more concentrated field of fire. He had the artillerymen construct their own works so that they took pride in their labor. Rejecting gabions and sandbags, they built the new parapets entirely of packed earth, reveted with green sod. Gardner also built roads from various points to the breastworks, taking advantage of the terrain to protect the movement of troops, artillery and ammunition. With qualified engineers in short supply, Gardner gleaned from his command men capable of supervising the construction of fortifications. Private Henry Ginder, for example, had worked on the U.S. coast survey for five years before enlisting in Fenner's Louisiana Battery. When Gardner learned of his experience, he transferred Ginder to the engineer corps and promoted him to first lieutenant. Acting Chief Engineer Frederick Y. Dabney had charge of fortifying the post after Gardner assumed command. Shortages of axes, spades and pick-axes slowed construction, but the troops worked steadily on the breastworks, Sunday

35. Ibid., 16; [Gardner] to Beall, January 6, 1863, Letters Sent, Port Hudson, La., 1862-63, 3rd Military District, Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana, Chap. II, Vol. 8, Record Group 109, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
not excepted. On January 4, 1863, Private M. D. Cannon wrote in his diary: "Spades are 'trumps' to-day, [sic] although it is the Sabbath." Overseers also worked gangs of Negroes, but Gardner replaced the overseers with soldiers and increased the number of Negro laborers.

The new commander instituted other changes. The machinery and tools in the arsenal and all medical supplies at Clinton were moved to Port Hudson. Residents vacated houses to provide storage space. A military officer took charge of Mr. Trot's mill and construction started on a government mill for the garrison. Another officer ran a government shoe shop Gardner established. Upset by the laziness of the fatigue detail charged with moving corn from the landing to the top of the bluff, Gardner detailed a field officer to superintend. He further notified the chief


quartermaster, "I do not wish to either superintend this work myself or be obliged [sic] to repeat this order." Gardner ordered five officers from each depleted regiment to return to their local communities in search of deserters and fresh recruits. He requested more heavy cannon and ammunition for the large-caliber guns already on hand.

Gardner quickly appraised his situation and gathered accurate intelligence about his opponent. Scouting parties reconnoitred on both sides of the river, and destroyed any cotton that might fall into enemy hands. Gardner sought the cooperation of Major General Richard Taylor, commander of western Louisiana, but without success. Brigadier General Henry Hopkins Sibley, who commanded Taylor's troops adjacent to the river, declined to defend Port Hudson from the west bank. Instead, he asked Gardner to bolster his command with infantry and cavalry. Pemberton supported Gardner's refusal to send reinforcements, but Gardner felt compelled to station two companies of cavalry across the river to protect his signal stations. One of Gardner's staff informed General Joseph E. Johnston that Port Hudson's new commander


expressed utmost confidence in his ability to defend the bastion without additional troops.

On December 29, 1862, with Union troops marching on Vicksburg and ready to advance on Port Hudson, Pemberton requested fresh troops from Johnston. He wanted to relieve some of his exhausted soldiers from the trenches around Vicksburg and send them to Port Hudson. Johnston denied the request; his information did not support the need for additional troops at Port Hudson. Pemberton repeated his request; finally Johnston asked for Gardner’s opinion.

The disagreement stemmed from their opposing views on defensive strategy. Pemberton believed in a static defense that emphasized holding Vicksburg and Port Hudson to the last. Johnston supported a mobile defense based on an active field army that could regain lost positions, rather than risk capture of thousands of troops at a fortified post. Each man stood fast, with Davis coming to Pemberton’s support, until Union operations ended the debate.


42. Archer Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), pp. 128-29, 149.
Pemberton, apparently ignoring Johnston's instructions, sent Brigadier General John Gregg's infantry brigade and a field battery by steamboat to Port Hudson on the 5th and 6th. Private Patrick M. Griffin recalled that when he reached Port Hudson the steamer "was minus all its mirrors, knives, forks, spoons, blankets, and rations." Their arrival led Gardner to reorganize the garrison into three brigades. The First Brigade, commanded by Gregg, occupied the right wing. It contained the 1st Battalion, 3rd, 10th, 30th, 41st, 50th, 51st Tennessee, 7th Texas, 9th Battalion Louisiana. Bledsoe's and Hoskins' batteries also formed part of the command. Brigadier General Samuel Bell Maxey occupied the center with the Second Brigade. The 10th Arkansas, 4th, 30th and Miles' Louisiana Legion, Colonel W. A. Quarles' consolidated regiment (42nd, 46th, 48th and 53rd Tennessee), Colonel J. E. Bailey's consolidated regiment (49th and 55th Tennessee) and Boone's, Roberts' and Fenner's field batteries comprised the brigade. Beall's Third Brigade held the left and consisted of Colonel R. H. Crockett's consolidated regiment (14th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 23rd and 1st Battalion Arkansas), Colonel John L. Logan's

consolidated regiment (11th and 15th Arkansas), Colonel J. M. Simonton's consolidated regiment (27th, 49th and 6th Battalion Alabama), Colonel W. B. Shelby's consolidated regiment (1st and 39th Mississippi) and Abbay's, Bradford's and Herod's field batteries. Two companies of infantry and three light batteries formed an informal reserve.

Gardner's new brigadiers ranked among the best in the Western Department. Thirty-four-year-old Gregg had moved from his native Alabama to Texas in 1852. A distinguished legal career led to his election to the Provisional Confederate Congress in 1861. He resigned his seat that same year to recruit the 7th Texas Infantry Regiment, of which he became colonel. The regiment surrendered at Fort Donelson in February 1862. After his exchange, Gregg gained promotion to brigadier, to rank from August 29, 1862. He commanded his brigade in northern Mississippi and at the Battle of Chickasaw Bayou on December 27, just a week before its reassignment to Port Hudson.

A Kentuckian by birth, thirty-seven-year-old Maxey graduated from West Point in 1846. After serving with distinction in the Mexican War, he resigned in 1849 to begin

a career in law. In 1857 he moved to Texas and entered politics. He resigned from the state senate to become colonel of the 9th Texas Infantry Regiment. Promoted to brigadier to rank from March 4, 1862, he commanded a brigade in eastern Tennessee prior to his transfer to Vicksburg.

The cavalry and heavy artillery remained separate from the three brigades. The 9th Louisiana Battalion Partisan Rangers furnished courier details. Gardner concentrated most of his mounted troops (six unattached companies, Hughes' battalion and Gantt's 9th Tennessee Battalion Cavalry) at Olive Branch. The camp, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George Gantt, lay sixteen miles east of Port Hudson and ten miles south of Clinton on the Plank Road, which ran from Baton Rouge to Clinton. Garland's battalion and Rhodes' company picketed the approaches from Baton Rouge to Tangipahoa. Two companies of the 1st Mississippi Cavalry occupied Ponchatoula. Gardner needed an efficient cavalry commander experienced in gathering intelligence and posting pickets in the enemy's presence. He requested the promotion and transfer of Colonel James Hagan but his plea fell on deaf ears. The heavy artillery consisted of the 12th Louisiana and 1st Tennessee Heavy Artillery battalions and the 1st Alabama Infantry. Gardner

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retained Lieutenant Colonel M. J. Smith for his chief of heavy artillery. Smith, appointed to that position by Beall, would prove a valuable addition to Gardner's staff. A former graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and a veteran naval officer, Smith knew heavy cannon. The entire district still contained just over 11,000 men present for duty.

In one respect Gardner disappointed his men. He failed to assault Baton Rouge or even to annoy the garrison there. Weeks passed, and expectations of an advance proved vain. Major Andrew Jackson Campbell thought "...this place will be like Fort Donelson. May the troops have skill enough to evacuate, but I don't think the general has or cares."

Rumors circulated that Pemberton held him in check out of jealousy, apparently because Pemberton insisted that all paper work, even individual leaves of absence, pass through

46. O.R., XV, 934-35, 943, 948-49, 965, 1181, XXIV, pt. 3, p. 613; L. B. Butler to E. S. Jefferies, January 17, 1863, William Terry and Family Papers, W. J. Martin to Lemanda, January 24, 1863, Lemanda E. Lea Papers, Merritt M. Shilg Memorial Collection, both in Louisiana State University Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Lee H. Farrar to Cousin Maggie, March 7, 1863, Farrar Letters; [Gardner] to Cooper, January 15, 1863, Chap. 11, Vol. B, Gardner, S.O. No. 15, January 12, 1863, Chap. 11, Vol. 198, both in Record Group 109; Dimitry, Louisiana, 587; Beal [sic] to Cooper, February 28, 1863, Louisiana Historical Association Collection, Manuscript Department, Special Collections Division, Tulane University Library, New Orleans, Louisiana. Lieutenant Colonel Wilbourn temporarily commanded Hughes' battalion.

47. Diary of Campbell, February 12, 1863; [Wright], Port Hudson, 16; Jas. B. Corkern to Brother [Dr. J. McKinney], January 23, 1863, McKinney Papers.
his headquarters. Both men actually spent their time strengthening Port Hudson to withstand the impending Federal onslaught.

During the second week of January, Pemberton and Johnston's inspector-general, Colonel Charles M. Fauntleroy, inspected Port Hudson. Although Pemberton wanted to build an interior line of redoubts, he told Johnston, "I think everything will be in good condition in one week." Fauntleroy, however, took a more critical view: he saw poor placement of powder magazines; corn accumulated at the landing lost to the rising river; insufficient storage for food already on hand; the troops' pay in arrears; the presence of "a number of women and children...remaining in spite of his [Gardner's] recommendations to remove--persons who have come to occupy the houses made vacant by owners removed away:" and "...lack of discipline and instruction among the troops, with the very general inefficiency of the officers of the command...." These problems had existed before Gardner's arrival, and he took steps to correct them. He especially had trouble conducting business with area residents because they had not yet been paid for their

48. [Wright], Port Hudson, 16-17; Diary of Campbell, February 8, 1863.


50. O.R., XV, 943-45.
services to Breckinridge and Ruggles.

Gardner imposed a rigid schedule which left little free time for the troops. Soldiers on fatigue duty labored from 7:30 a.m. to noon and from 1 to 5:30 p.m. They unloaded steamboats, herded cattle or cared for hospital patients. Some troops performed guard, picket or scouting duty. Various staff departments, including commissary, quartermaster, ordnance and engineer, received detachments. These men hauled supplies or worked at the grist mill, arsenal, or earthworks. Details rotated daily among the brigades to allow for brigade drill.

Soldiers who managed to escape some detail drilled. Each morning they took position along the breastwork and remained there for thirty minutes to familiarize themselves with the area. This routine would minimize confusion in case the enemy advanced. Drill consumed the next


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two-and-a-half to three hours, after which the troops returned to camp for lunch. Drill resumed at 2 p.m. and continued until four.

Other aspects of life at Port Hudson changed little under Gardner. Steamers delivered spoiled meat and damaged flour. The river continued to rise and constantly washed away corn, meal, sugar, molasses and other supplies that officers carelessly left at the landing. Livestock quickly broke down because of their diet of inferior corn and insufficient fodder and the strain of hauling supplies up the bluff. Criticism of the neglect of subsistence stores continued. Rations of "very tough," "slimy old blue" beef and "damaged" corn-meal predominated. Texas cattle still arrived enfeebled. One private reported, "...they have a log in the slaughter-pen, and kill only those [beees] that are unable to step over it," adding, "If any of them can step over a common-sized fence-rail they deceive their looks." Private Robert D. Patrick declared, "I have been living almost like a dog for the last six weeks,...never since I have been in the army have I fared so badly and in

53. Cannon, Inside Rebeldom, 78-79; Diary of Campbell, January 24, 1863.

truth I have been almost starved." At times the commissary substituted ears of corn for meal. Patrick thought this "pretty low down...." The soldiers sifted the coarse meal in crudely perforated tin pans to make distasteful bread. Some of the soldiers also got, albeit with mixed feelings, wet, brown sugar and rice. Private Cannon said, "...of all the sickening messes human beings ever had to eat, sugar and rice are the most detestable...." The mere sight of sugar brought on "heaving and retching, but with a vain effort, for there is nothing in my stomach to vomit." Cannon dreamed of the repulsive food and never again ate rice, even though he, like others, preferred rice over the beef, bread and sugar. The men needed vegetables, but supplemental rations brought exorbitant prices: flour, $100 a barrel, bacon, 60 cents a pound; sweet potatoes, $4 per bushel; butter, $2.50 a pound, eggs, $1.50 a dozen; turkey, $5; goose, $1.50; and lard, $1 a pound. The overwhelming desire for more and different rations, coupled with poverty, forced some soldiers to steal from neighboring plantations. John W. Robison wrote his wife, "...I wisht [sic] this state would sink so as the

55. Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 88-89.
56. Ibid., 91.
58. Ibid., 81.
soldiers was out of it [sic] the people of this state has [sic] no respect for soldiers attall [sic] they make us pay...." outrageous prices.

The shortage extended to other items. Substitutes for coffee came into general use, among them parched rye, wheat, sweet potatoes, corn and especially sugar. One doctor used cherry-tree bark for bitters. Spoons were the table cutlery. The soldiers depended upon loved ones at home for clothing. When available, soap brought $5 a bar and candles $1 each. Boots went for $40 and shoes averaged $12.50. A watch sold at $212.50. While all these prices reflected the discounted value of Confederate currency, inflation seldom affected the soldiers at Port Hudson, because currency was scarce and their pay remained in constant arrears.

Poor food and shelter increased sickness during early

59. John W. Robison to [wife], February 20, 1863, John Wesley Robison Papers, W. J. Brigham to Mary Brigham [Mother], January 24, 1863, Brigham Family Papers, both in Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; Cannon, Inside Rebeldom, 77, 81; Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 92-93; Memphis Daily Appeal, January 16, 1863; Diary of Campbell, February 11, 1863; [Gardner] to Gant [sic], January 20, 1863, Chap. II, Vol. 8, Record Group 109.

1863. Although some had built comfortable quarters, Lieutenant R. B. Crockett wrote his cousin, "...we are living in a swamp and drinking water out of a Mud [sic] hole." The region experienced its coldest weather in twenty-five years; this environment bitterly affected the soldiers, especially those from the Gulf states. Common diseases included fevers, chills, diarrhoea and jaundice. Fortunately the illnesses did not hospitalize many of the men. Smallpox struck Miles' Legion and the 41st Tennessee, but most of the garrison's soldiers had been vaccinated. Smallpox victims were hospitalized outside the fortifications. Sick cavalrymen packed Olive Branch Church. Gardner had moved the hospital from Magnolia to Woodville, Mississippi, which allowed patients to travel by boat to Bayou Sara, and from there by rail to Woodville, rather than overland in a wagon to Magnolia. Patients often suffered the effects of the bad drugs after the original illness had ended. Private Patrick believed that "...I am suffering now
from the treatment of ignorant, sap-headed physicians."

Many in fact did not survive treatment. Death rolls appeared in the newspapers; burials became a common sight.

A local reporter described a private’s funeral parade:

...a rough pine coffin drawn in a mule team, and followed by eight men and a corporal, with reversed arms, and perhaps some half dozen men who knew and loved the man whose remains are to be committed to the earth....

Quietly and silently the firing party fall into line by the side of the grave—the coffin is laid before them—arms are presented as a token of respect, the necessary command to load at will, is given; three volleys [sic] are fired and the comrades of the deceased shoulder arms and with rapid steps march back to their encampment.

Opportunity seldom allowed such military honors, or even a monument to mark the grave.

Homesickness increased with time, and mail became more sporadic. Dreams of the past filled the soldiers’ sleep.

Private Patrick frequently thought “of the happy hours of my boyhood and then I wish myself a hermit, away from the cares


64. Smith, Company K, 47-48; Memphis Daily Appeal, February 6, 1863.
and ambitions, the strife, and the jarrings of the active world, with no seductions of dissipation, neither prolonged stimulants, nor the late hours of passion." A few tried to hire a temporary substitute to secure a furlough. A photographer opened a studio in nearby Jackson, where a soldier could have his image taken to send to his sweetheart. Friends often had to hand-carry letters to and from home, especially if money or gifts were included. These letters helped ease the absence from home. Private Cannon wrote, "...while they [at home] are suffering the privations and hardships incident to war, [they] are still cheerful and live in hopes that we will finally be victorious and be reunited again."

Though they enjoyed less leisure time under Gardner, the men took advantage of any respite. While a few washed clothes or simply lounged around camp, others sought more-stimulating relaxation. Tennessee Captain S. R. Simpson visited Miles' Legion to witness his first cock fight and was disappointed by its brevity. Drinking rose dramatically, and Gardner extended his prohibition to Clinton and Olive Branch. No matter, the soldiers got drunk.

65. Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 84-85, 100; Frederick, "Porter," 309; Lee H. Farrar to Cousin Maggie, March 7, 1863, Farrar Letters; Diary of Campbell, January 9, 1863.

66. Cannon, Inside Rebelldom, 79; W. J. Brigham to John Brigham [Father], January 24, 1863, W. J. Brigham to Mary Brigham [mother], February 15, 1863, Brigham Family Papers; Jones, Dairy, January 24, 1863, Jones Collection.
and brawled. Major William F. Pennington, a bar keeper before the war, attempted to break up one such fight; his sound thrashing thoroughly entertained the enlisted men. Intoxicated soldiers usually found their way into the guard-house, but one soldier literally drank himself to death.

The officers lived somewhat better. A few boarded their wives nearby. Sick officers often stayed in private homes. The healthy continued visiting nearby plantations, where they danced and flirted with young ladies, everyone sublimely oblivious to the darker days ahead. Whatever tension remained after dancing, they relieved by petty squabbles among themselves, by taking it out upon their men,


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or by forgetting with a bottle of liquor.

Civilians suffered great hardships, particularly the women. With so many men off fighting, the mistress generally ran the plantation. Both armies had stripped the countryside for miles, forcing civilians to trade with the enemy for ordinary supplies. Mrs. Francis Collins East hid her preserves under a hedge when some Yankee foragers approached her plantation. As the soldiers tried to behead her chickens and turkeys with their swords, the fowl tried to escape under the hedge, her hiding place. The soldiers carried off their booty, including every jar of preserves, and laughed as they passed Mrs. East. Relatives fleeing Federal occupation required shelter; sick soldiers needed care; and travelers wishing to avoid the Federals sought civilian hospitality. The demands became so great on one lady in the area that she finally set aside two rooms for her unexpected guests. Women also smuggled much-needed

drugs through enemy lines, and they often brought important information about the enemy with them.

Civilians in Baton Rouge and especially the Confederate signal corps stationed across the river observed enemy movements. They did an exceptional job of gathering and transmitting this information. Gardner received accurate, detailed reports almost daily. B. F. Burnett and another person known only as "+______" managed to get letters out of the city to Gardner.

The Federal navy posed a threat which Gardner and his colleagues could seldom thwart. The Essex steamed in sight about every ten days, lobbing shells into either bank and at the batteries. Southern cavalry occasionally replied with a few minie balls, but Confederate cannon remained silent. Gardner had no desire to divulge the specific location of


his heavy guns.

A few Confederate officers and men formed a special detail that constructed rafts and torpedoes. While the rafts might obstruct the passage of enemy vessels, the torpedoes had a more deadly purpose—the destruction of a vessel, especially the Essex. Mr. Stewart, who successfully destroyed a Union ironclad in the Yazoo River, took charge of torpedo construction at Port Hudson. He planted several of them—each containing a barrel of powder—in the Mississippi River below Port Hudson. A most unusual floating model was simply attached to a log. Adding a cotton bale to attract the enemy's attention, the Confederates released the disguised bomb and allowed it to drift downstream.

But the crew of the Essex managed to stave off disaster. Thanks to information provided by a Negro, the sailors succeeded in removing four of the infernal machines during a single voyage. And because of the vigilant patrols of the Essex, none of these torpedoes ever damaged a Union vessel.


73. Memphis Daily Appeal, February 28, March 9, 1863.
When the torpedoes failed to destroy the Essex, the Confederates tried bribery. The first lieutenant aboard the Essex offered to turn her over to the Confederates at the first opportune moment for 300 bales of cotton. Pemberton ordered Gardner, "Buy her at any price. I will guarantee payment." Before the transfer could take place, the Federals arrested the lieutenant for treason.

The Federal navy up-river proved more dangerous than the Essex. The Queen of the West had successfully run the Vicksburg batteries in broad daylight on February 2. She quickly cleared the Mississippi and Red rivers of Confederate transports, disrupting the flow of foodstuffs to Port Hudson. On the night of the 13th the Indianola ran past Vicksburg. Before she could join the Queen of the West, however, her commander learned that the Confederates had sunk that vessel on the 14th. The Indianola lingered about the mouth of the Red River for three days, before beginning

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75. O.R., XV, 269.
a slow ascent of the Mississippi.

While Confederates fitted out a naval expedition up the Red River to confront first the Queen of the West and afterward the Indiana, Gardner began assembling his own one-vessel navy. Gardner had detained the Dr. Beatty at Port Hudson when word arrived that the Queen of the West had passed Vicksburg. He "clothed" both decks from stem to stern with cotton bales and placed in command Lieutenant Colonel Frederick B. Brand, a former officer of the U.S. Navy. Gardner empowered Brand to select four captains, eight lieutenants, sixteen non-commissioned officers and 200 privates. Brand also had his choice of cannon, but had to include the 20-pound Parrott gun. Gardner granted Beall the privilege of providing half the crew from his brigade. Soldiers with naval experience received preference. Because this expedition promised the first chance for excitement since the men had arrived at Port Hudson, volunteers were plentiful, and Brand got a choice pick. Boone's Battery provided two more cannon and the accompanying artillerymen. Miles' Legion and the 4th Louisiana provided most of the

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infantry contingent. At least 3,000 soldiers assembled on the bank to witness the departure of the Dr. Beatty on February 19. Private Edward Young McMorries recalled that "the deafening acclamations of these and those on board marked this as one of the most memorable incidents of Fort 77 Hudson."

The Dr. Beatty joined the C.S.S. Webb and the refloated, Confederate-manned Queen of the West on February 22. The flotilla then steamed after the Indianola, which it overtook thirty miles south of Vicksburg on the evening of the 24th. Believing that only surprise would achieve victory over the formidable Indianola, renowned as the strongest ironclad on the Mississippi, the Confederates attacked under cover of darkness. The Webb and Queen of the West rammed the Indianola until they disabled her. Brand then ran the Dr. Beatty alongside the sinking vessel and shouted "Board

At that moment the Indianola's commander cried, "For god's [sic] sake don't shoot any more! I've surrendered!" Brand jumped aboard, claimed his opponent's sword and towed the Indianola downstream until she finally sank in ten feet of water. The crew of the Dr. Beatty escaped without a single injury and returned to Port Hudson on the 26th.

A Yankee trick, however, was to deprive the South of the Indianola. While Confederates labored to raise the vessel, Union Acting Rear Admiral David D. Porter built a dummy "ironclad" of barrels atop a coal-barge. Passing the Vicksburg batteries, the sham approached the Queen of the West, upstream of the Indianola. Deceived, the captain of the Queen fled south with his vessel, stopping only to warn the men working on the Indianola. The false ironclad ran aground two miles above the Indianola, but the officer in charge of repairing that vessel, Lieutenant Charles H. Frith, chose to blow up the ironclad, rather than chance her recapture by the Federals. The addition of the Indianola

78. Memphis Daily Appeal, March 11, 1863.
80. O.R., XXIV, pt. 1, pp. 363-64; Bergeron and Hewitt, Miles' Legion, 7.
to the Confederate flotilla would have provided the South with a chance to maintain a hold on the Mississippi River between Port Hudson and Vicksburg. Without her, it was merely a question of time before control of that waterway slipped away forever.

The capture of the two Union vessels once more opened the rivers to safe travel. Provisions began arriving at Port Hudson almost every day and the garrison no longer had to rely on supplies hauled overland. Apparently the limited number of wagons and often washed-out railroads could barely transport the minimum requirements of the garrison. When a steamer arrived on February 24 with a cargo that included hogs and bacon, the men of every regiment rejoiced. Private Cannon wrote on the 25th, "Got a bite of something good to eat at last. Everybody is happy."

Beyond the naval activities, the soldiers had little to excite them. Young ladies continued to visit the post. The men on picket duty skirmished every day or two. Captain T. R. Stockdale secured three much-needed wagons by posing as a Yankee officer, an easy task because of his birth and

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82. Had the Confederates succeeded in raising the Indianola, it is probable that Farragut’s attempt to run the batteries at Port Hudson and the ferrying of Grant’s army across the Mississippi would have awaited the destruction of that vessel by Porter’s fleet.

education in Pennsylvania. A saboteur tried to spike the heavy cannon. When caught, the man confessed that the Federals had promised him $50,000 if he succeeded. Gardner even decommissioned the Dr. Beatty.

A flag of truce arrived from the Federals on February 7. The Yankees asked if Gardner would follow the cartel of exchange. Hesitant, Gardner finally agreed after masking his batteries with tree branches. The Union vessel carried the prisoners to Vicksburg, the point of exchange, but on February 22 Gardner insisted that they move the place of exchange from Vicksburg to a point between Port Hudson and Baton Rouge, selected by the Confederates. The first such exchange came three days later. The General Quitman arrived unexpectedly at Fort Hudson with Yankee prisoners captured in Texas. Gardner retained the officers and sent the balance to Baton Rouge.

Three newspapers opened offices in the village. The


Point Coupee Echo moved its office to Port Hudson and began publishing the last week of December. Originally entitled the Echo, within two months it became the Tri-Weekly News. The Chronicle commenced operations that same week. The Port Hudson Courier started publication during the first week of January, apparently with a morning and evening edition. The shortage of paper in the Confederacy may have occurred first at Port Hudson. The Chronicle consisted of one short column on each side of a small piece of brown wrapping paper. An issue of the Evening Courier appeared on one side of a mere slip of paper only two inches by six.

The rumors spread by these and other newspapers proved more interesting than the truth. The most common speculations were whether the Yankees would advance against Port Hudson. Other rumors told of the Confederate capture of Nashville; a Union regiment issued uniforms identical to those worn by Louisiana Confederates; Kentucky and Indiana joining the Confederacy; Confederate reinforcements transferred from Virginia to Tennessee; and peace in the near future. Corporal John Wesley Powers wrote: "There has been a good deal of talk about Peace [sic] of late, and some

86. Memphis Daily Appeal, December 22, 1862, January 31, February 18, 1863; Baton Rouge Weekly Gazette and Comet, January 14, March 4, 1863; Opelousas Courier, February 21, 1863. I have not found any issues of these papers.

87. Port Hudson Evening Courier, January 3, 1863; Diary of Campbell, January 8, 1863; Memphis Daily Appeal, January 31, 1863.
pretty large Bets [sic] being made that there would be Peace [sic] in the course of four or six months." Powers disagreed, thinking peace impossible "unless the conduct of the war was drastically changed" and the Black Flag hoisted. Another rumor focused on mutiny among the Federals at Baton Rouge, which the Confederates heard about first-hand.

Numerous Yankee deserters from Baton Rouge had entered Confederate lines. All of them told of the division of opinion in Banks' army regarding Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. They objected to having to salute Negro officers, opposed Negro equality or supremacy, and disdained Negro fighting abilities. The Memphis Appeal attributed this statement to Banks: "My army had gone to hell, and it is useless to deny it."

The dissension in the Federal ranks brought abounding confidence to Port Hudson. Private John A. Morgan thought


89. Diary of Campbell, January 23, 1863.

that if the Yankees advanced, "...they will be one of the worst whipped set of men that ever was." Sarah Morgan, a young lady staying at a plantation just beyond the Confederate fortifications, wrote in her diary:

they are confident that our fifteen thousand can repulse twice the number. Great God!—I say it with all reverence—if we could defeat them! If we could scatter, capture, annihilate them! My heart beats but one prayer—Victory!"

The Confederates longed for a fight. Finally, reliable intelligence arrived on February 24 that the Yankees would soon attack. Rain delayed their advance but the weather broke on March 2, and all were sure that with the sunshine would come the assault. One Arkansas soldier wrote the editor of the Little Rock True Democrat: "Before the ides of March shall have passed, the weapons of the soldiers of liberty will be crossed with the followers of Abraham the first...."

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91. Jno. A. Morgan to Sister, March 8, 1863, John A. Morgan Papers, Louisiana State University Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Booth, Louisiana Records, III, bk. 1, p. 1050; Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 93.

92. Dawson, Confederate Girl's Diary, 328.

93. Little Rock True Democrat, March 25, 1863; Frederick, "Porter," 310; Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 97-100; O.R., XV, 990.
"The time has come, there can be no more delay."

The Federal fleet above Vicksburg had failed miserably. Between that city and Port Hudson the river lay open, and this situation the authorities in Washington would no longer tolerate. The loss of the Queen of the West and Indianola led Rear Admiral David Glasgow Farragut to place himself directly in charge of closing the river to Confederate traffic. The Admiral told a subordinate, "The time has come, there can be no more delay. I must go--army or no army." Farragut had considered action in January without the army's cooperation; by late February when he asked Major General Banks to support him, the general reluctantly agreed. He had no choice. President Lincoln thought Banks should have advanced immediately after he assumed his new command, and through General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck, he repeatedly urged Banks on. Lincoln wanted to

send Banks to Texas and replace him with Major General Benjamin F. Butler in January 1863. The President even ordered Butler to the Gulf theater in February to check on the situation. Banks must have realized that he had to move or lose his command.

The campaign opened in late February, when Federal forces advanced from Indian Village toward Morganza. Major General Gardner dispatched Colonel William R. Miles with his Legion, the 4th Louisiana and Fenner's battery by steamboat to drive back the enemy and cut the levees. The expedition left on the 26th, with the band playing "La Marseillaise." It landed at the Hermitage, about three miles above Port Hudson, and marched ten miles, the last three in a heavy rain storm. The larger Yankee force fled before it, and

finding no enemy, the Confederates returned the next day.

Rain and last-minute Federal preparations granted the Confederates time to make some final adjustments of their own. On February 22 Lieutenant General Pemberton ordered Rust's brigade to move immediately by train for Port Hudson. Less than 3,000 strong, it entered the garrison on March 3. While marching through Clinton, the column was observed by several women. One of them cried out, "These are the ones to whip the Yankees. Kill a half dozen for me boys." J. W. Harmon broke into a smile, "but thought her patriotic zeal had got a little higher than was necessary." The 1st Texas Battalion Sharpshooters took an easier path by steamboat down the Red River. They joined the garrison on March 6.

Port Hudson's new brigadier boasted military

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5. Harmon Memoir, Civil War Collection.

experience. Born in Virginia in 1818, Albert Rust moved to Arkansas as a young man, became an attorney and entered politics. He served in the state and national legislatures for twelve years between 1842 and 1861. A huge, muscular man, his best-known political act was a street brawl with Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune. Leading the 3rd Arkansas, Colonel Rust fought under Robert E. Lee in western Virginia before his promotion to brigadier in early 1862. He led a brigade at the Battle of Corinth in October, before the transfer of his command to Port Hudson.

Gardner continually strove to strengthen his position. On March 8 he cut the east levee to prevent the Federals from landing immediately below Port Hudson. All quarantined troops except small pox victims moved inside the fortifications. Work continued on the breastworks, with one-inch planks replacing fence rails. Shipments of corn, cattle and hogs gave Gardner a three-day supply of corn and


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thirty days' rations c' meat on hand.

On March 9 Yankee cavalry attacked the pickets at Monte Sano bridge; everything indicated an advance. Gardner reported that fresh troops landing at Baton Rouge on the 7th and 8th brought his opponent's strength to 30,000 men; Pemberton replied: "The odds are large against, but I...believe you will whip their demoralized army."

Confidence abounded. Private Isaac N. Hicks felt the Yankees "will have a lively time taken [sic] this place for we well preapred [sic] for them...." Corporal John Wesley Powers believed, "When Old Banks makes an attack on this place he will get a worse whipping [sic] than he ever had in Virginia." One Arkansas soldier wrote his father, "we

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10. I. N. Hicks to C. C. Dunn, March 12, 1863, Melrose Collection, Department of Archives, Northwestern Louisiana University, Natchitoches, Louisiana; Andrew B. Booth, Records of Louisiana Confederate Soldiers and Louisiana Confederate Commands, 4 books in 3 vols. (New Orleans: n.p., 1920), III, bk. 1, p. 297.

[sic] will have a jolly Time [sic] with them [Yankees] the [sic] Boys [sic] are all confident that we will whip them if [sic] They come...."

The constant threat to river traffic forced west-bound travelers to seek passage at Port Hudson; and an occasional famous visitor provided a diversion for the soldiers. On his way to assume command of the Trans-Mississippi Department, Lieutenant General Edmund Kirby Smith, his family and staff stopped at Port Hudson on March 4th. Major General Sterling Price, accompanied by his staff, reached Port Hudson on the 10th. Many in the garrison had fought under "Old Pap," as they familiarly called him. Price spoke that night to a cheering crowd of 10,000 and announced his impending return to Missouri. Some Arkansas troops serenaded Price and Gardner the following night, when Gardner assured his men that the Yankees would advance within the week.

On March 13 Gardner deployed. Gregg's brigade held the right of the breastworks, Maxey's the center and Beall's the left. Rust's brigade formed an advance guard about a mile

12. R. A. Medearis to Father, March 12, 1863, xerox copy of original in possession of Mr. David R. Perdue, Pine Bluff, Arkansas.


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in front of the fortifications. Company E, 12th Louisiana, took a position two miles in front of Rust and a detachment of the 35th Alabama, under Sergeant William G. Whitefield, moved down-river adjacent to the Essex, with orders to fire on any boat attempting to land. Though they could have peppered thirty "blue coats" on the upper deck of the ironclad, the men held their fire. Rust kept one regiment and a battery at Troth's house to cover the approach from Troth's landing; and Gardner had a small detachment observing Springfield Landing.

Gardner's plan called for Rust's men to engage the enemy and draw him onward, until the Federals were committed to a frontal assault. When that assault ended in a repulse, Rust's brigade would form a reserve while the other three brigades counterattacked. This was a sound plan if Banks could be enticed into attacking.

Banks' preparations got underway in early March. Reinforcements constantly arrived at Baton Rouge. Everyone struck tents, packed baggage and prepared rations. The


15. [Wright], Port Hudson, 17.
troops believed that the long-awaited move against Fort Hudson had finally begun. Sergeant Henry W. Howe wrote: "All are in good spirits and anxious to move," but more than a few soldiers dreaded the impending battle.

On the night of March 8 Banks arrived to issue marching orders to the troops. On the 10th he sent Colonel George P. Bissell's 25th Connecticut to occupy a line north of Monte Sano Bayou to protect the men working on the bridge on the Bayou Sara road. After a West Point engineer despaired of the task, Connecticut Sergeant William Webster repaired the bridge, assisted by Negroes of the 3rd Louisiana Native Guard. Cavalry detachments occupied positions four miles from Baton Rouge on the Clinton and Greensburg roads. The Federal troopers ordered out the Clinton road skirmished with the 25th Connecticut in the darkness. The mistake cost the life of at least one infantryman. On March 12 and 13, Company K, 42nd Massachusetts, laid a pontoon bridge across


17. Henry T. Johns, Life with the Forty-ninth Massachusetts Volunteers (Pittsfield, Mass.: Published for the Author, 1864), pp. 159-60.
Monte Sano Bayou. But the wait for the navy left some units in constant readiness from the 9th until the 13th. Adjutant Luther T. Townsend concluded, "Nothing ever seemed to be done at the time designated. And...we reached the unmilitary conclusion that an order to move to-day [sic] meant to-morrow [sic] or the day after."

The delay left Banks free to deal with a new—and imaginary—enemy. He heard on March 4 that a multitude of Confederates, including several Virginia and Georgia regiments, had just arrived at Camp Moore. "It is probable from this," Banks wrote Farragut, "and the reports from the Northern papers, that the Army of [Northern] Virginia is moving toward the Mississippi." He asked the admiral to post a gunboat near Pass Manchac to block an enemy advance.


19. Q.R.N., XIX, 650; D.R., XV, 1110.
on New Orleans, and ordered the bridges over the Comité River destroyed to prevent the Confederate horde at Camp Moore from striking his exposed flank and rear when he advanced on Fort Hudson. The expedition, commanded by Colonel T. E. Chickering, burned Bogle’s and Roberts’ bridges, but Confederate pickets blocked the destruction of Strickland’s. Chickering then returned to Baton Rouge, his men fatigued by the lengthy march through the knee-deep mud and mire. Banks greeted the footsore men when they entered the city, many with custom-made boots slung over their shoulders. One barefooted young fellow saluted the general when he passed, and Banks accosted him: “Well, my boy, don’t you find those boots rather harder to march in than government shoes?” The youth replied in the affirmative and moved on.

Farragut arrived at Baton Rouge on March 11. He had intended to run the batteries on the night of the 7th, but had to wait for the Essex to complete repairs. Banks insisted that a naval force remain at Baton Rouge to protect his transports after the admiral passed Port Hudson, and

20. James K. Ewer, The Third Massachusetts Cavalry in the War for the Union (Maplewood, Mass.: Historical Committee of the Regimental Association, 1903), pp. 60-62; O.R.N., XIX, 650; Banks to Chickering, March 9, 1863, Letters Sent, Department of the Gulf, Record Group 393; O.R., XV, 263-64. Ewer’s statement that the second attempt to destroy Strickland’s bridge succeeded is incorrect.

21. Ewer, Third Massachusetts Cavalry, 62.
Farragut needed the Essex for this task. On the 12th Banks staged a grand review, the first for his new command. His honored guests included Farragut and several naval officers. On horseback, they slowly accompanied Banks along the lines. The Admiral's son, Loyall, recalled jumping several ditches, "which the navy men declared had been dug for their especial benefit; but it was a subject of deep congratulation to the sailors that only one man went off, and he was an aide to Banks." Corporal James K. Hosmer commented, "Winnowing the air may be graceful work for the wings of a swallow, but not for the elbows of a commodore." The soldiers thought it a rare treat to see Farragut. When the admiral, riding a bob-tailed horse, passed the 24th Connecticut, the regimental band struck up, "I bet my money on the bob-tailed nag." The troops' ached from standing through the entire ceremony in heavy marching order, but Banks, mounted on a coal-black stallion, 22. Loyall Farragut, "Passing the Port Hudson Batteries," in James Grant Wilson and Titus Munson Coan, eds., Personal Recollections of the War of the Rebellion: Addresses Delivered Before the New York Commandery of the Loyal Legion of the United States, 1863-1891 (New York: New York Commandery, 1891), p. 316; O.R. N., XIX, 652, 709; Robert Means Thompson and Richard Wainwright, eds., Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, 1861-1865, 2 vols. (New York: Printed for the Naval History Society by the De Vinne Press, 1920), I, 327; Richard B. Irwin, History of the Nineteenth Army Corps (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893), p. 77. 23. James K. Hosmer, The Color-Guard: being a Corporal's Notes of Military Service in the Nineteenth Army Corps (Boston: Walker, Wise, and Company, 1864), pp. 1, 81.
nevertheless impressed his command.

Banks sent out two probing detachments on March 13. Colonel E. L. Molineux led the 159th New York, three companies of the 26th Maine, and two guns of the 2nd Massachusetts Battery up the Plank Road. After driving off Confederate pickets in a sharp skirmish, they took up a position at Cypress Bayou bridge. The 48th and 53rd Massachusetts boarded transports and, accompanied by the gunboat Albatross and the Essex, steamed upstream to Springfield Landing. Disembarking, the Federals waded through waist-deep water to the bluff and forced Confederate signalmen to flee. The infantrymen, escorted by eighteen troopers of Company C, 1st Louisiana (U.S.) Cavalry, moved cross country to the Baton Rouge and Bayou Sara road, where they scattered the Confederate pickets. They drove in several head of cattle when they returned, via the road, to Baton Rouge. Along the march, the Federals took time to visit some of the local residents. Surprisingly, they left most unharmed, but did pillage Mrs. Newport's deserted

Banks made his final dispositions on March 13. He tried to make it appear that his was more than just a diversionary force, merely intended to aid Farragut's passage, which the admiral scheduled for the morning of the 14th or the following day. But Banks' deployment illustrated his fear of an enemy strike on his exposed flank. The main column—Grover's, Emory's and Augur's divisions—would advance up the Bayou Sara road. Detachments would leave at intersecting roads and proceed to the Plank Road, searching out any Confederate force threatening the Union right. Upon striking the Plank Road, these units would link up and, while a detachment destroyed Strickland's bridge, the balance would march toward Clinton. A portion of Grover's division would move west and join forces disembarking at Springfield Landing. A reserve of at least 3,000 men, under


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Colonel Chickering, would remain at Baton Rouge.

Grover's division led off on the afternoon of the 13th. His troops marched with streaming colors to strains of inspiring, martial music. They crossed Monte Sano Bayou, and proceeded some three miles beyond. Sergeant Major Edward A. Whitney thought it an easy march, the road "in splendid condition, soft to the feet, yet without a particle of dust."

Emory's division followed Grover's at 7 p.m. By contrast, the men found the march tiresome, the weather unpleasantly warm and the road extremely dusty. Two hours later the soldiers received orders to secure all tinware and talk in whispers, for fear the enemy would hear them coming. Private Frank M. Flinn was struck that "in Louisiana, one must hunt very hard in order to discover a pebble, so that a wagon train can move with but little noise, an advantage of great importance to an army on the

26. O.R., xv, 692, LIII, 550-5; Ewer, Third Massachusetts Cavalry, 64, 64n; O.R.N., xix, 768.

27. Moors, Fifty-second Massachusetts, 78-79, iii; Banks to Grover, March 13, 1863, Letters Sent, Department of the Gulf, Record Group 393; Sprague, 13th Connecticut, 102.
move." When Emory's men halted at midnight near Whites Bayou, many collapsed upon the ground. Fear did not stop the hungry from building campfires. The soldiers had learned that because the plantation where they camped belonged to a "Union man," they could take only the top fence rails for firewood. This soon became a standing order in Banks' army, and the troops remembered that each regiment took only the top rails, "as they found them." The Yankees felt the Southerners had shown "commendable foresight, [having] put up rail fences about ten feet high, and often ten or twelve rails in one panel [sic]."

The Federals continued their advance on the morning of March 14. At 3 a.m. the long roll sounded for Augur's troops. Two hours later the soldiers moved out in fine spirits, with hearty cheers and singing. But when Banks


rode through portions of the column, the men fell silent. When he moved by Colonel William Francis Bartlett, the colonel remembered marching down a Virginia road the year before when Major General George B. McClellan "passed along through the army, and for miles and miles the cheers were deafening." By the time the division bivouacked in the afternoon, the heat was oppressive. For many it was their first march; they fell along the roadside, exhausted by the burdens they bore. Private Henry T. Johns believed marching is our work; every thing else is play in comparison. Carry a...knapsack,...an overcoat and two blankets, and a ten-pound gun with sixty rounds of cartridges, and haversack filled with food, and canteen holding a quart of water, and you have a load that will bow you over....

After halting for the day, most troops foraged about for supplemental rations. Private James Very Waters "shot lots of cows calves pigs hens &c [sic] for the fun of it."

Colonel Bartlett observed soldiers "...not only steal

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31. Francis Winthrop Palfrey, Memoir of William Francis Bartlett (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1878), pp. 73-74; Stevens, Fiftieth Massachusetts, 66; Adjutant General, Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, IV, 472.


33. Diary of Waters, March 14, 1863, Garb Collection.
poultry and other live meat, but in some cases even go into the houses and take the food off the table, and steal 34 jewelry and other valuables." The colonel thought such pillaging would demoralize the army and imposed restraints; the men resented them, but believed that he would shoot violators and take the consequences.

Emory's men roused at three that morning. They then stood, sat or lay in line, allowed to change position for comfort, for four hours before the division marched. Unlike Augur's troops, Emory's men cheered as Banks rode past. Halting for a ten-minute rest each hour, the soldiers marched until 3 p.m. They had walked only seven wearisome, sun-baked miles—the heat of the day reached a purported 100 degrees in the shade. They soon discarded their "bullet-proof" iron vest linings. Blankets, overcoats and knapsacks covered the roadside as the soldiers changed to light marching order. A career officer, Lieutenant William L. Haskin described the "volunteers," complaining that "more clothing was thrown away during that short march than would suffice to clothe the whole Confederate garrison of Port

34. Palfrey, Memoir of Bartlett, 59-60.
35. Ibid., 59-60.
Hudson for a year." Thirst forced men to drink from puddles covered with green scum. The troops bivouacked in a cane field on Mrs. Alexander’s plantation, over six miles from the Confederate fortifications. Shortly after nightfall the men heard conflicting orders and everyone wondered, "What did all this hubbub mean?" Nobody knew, but some speculated that it comprised part of their "discipline;" others resented Banks for failing to take them into his confidence. Colonel H. E. Paine’s brigade finally moved out. Advancing through Grover’s division and turning eastward, the brigade marched about a mile down the Springfield Landing road. The men slept with their weapons


37. Townsend, Sixteenth New Hampshire, 82; Dargan, Experiences in Service, bk. 2; Powers, Thirty Eighth Massachusetts, 53-54; Willis, Fifty-third Massachusetts, 70; Map 2218; Champion Map.

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that night, re...v to assault.

Grover’s division began a slow advance at 7 a.m., preceded by cavalry and skirmishers. The heat bore on Grover’s men as it did Augur’s and Emory’s. The division halted at noon about six miles from the Confederate fortifications.

Colonel John S. Clark, a member of Banks staff, refused to sit idle and rode off for the outpost toward Springfield Landing. About 3:30 that afternoon, three cavalrymen of Company B, 2nd Rhode Island Cavalry, rode up to headquarters and reported Clark and their captain dead after reconnoitring beyond the Federal pickets with a handful of men. The colonel’s party had halted at a damaged bridge, about three miles from Port Hudson, noting, “The —— ‘reb’s have been here.” And they were still there, for Company E, 12th Louisiana, lay in the woods along the road. The Federals heard the command “Fire!” and Clark yelled “right about.” The Confederate’s first volley swept the road. A few Yankees escaped uninjured, but one poor

38. Townsend, Sixteenth New Hampshire, 82; Stanyan, Eighth New Hampshire, 190; Map Z218.


fellow's foot got caught in the stirrup when he fell from his horse. The frightened animal dragged him off down the road and out of sight. The Confederates captured most of the party, including the captain. But the report of the colonel's death proved premature. His horse shot from under him, Clark broke his left leg below the knee in the fall.

Banks responded with a reconnaissance in force—the 91st New York, 52nd Massachusetts and a squadron of cavalry, under the command of his chief of artillery, Brigadier General Richard Arnold. The infantry double-quicked most of the first two miles. They passed the Federal surgeons working on Colonel Clark, which offered the first sight of bloodshed for most. Their pace slowed when they approached the Confederate picket post, where they found camp-fires burning and placards nailed to trees bearing various greetings, including: "Yanks, beware! this is a hard road to travel." The 91st New York halted there, but the remainder of the troops continued until reaching a point less than a mile from the line of lunettes southeast of Port Hudson. The Federals then withdrew a mile or so and encamped.


42. Moors, Fifty-second Massachusetts, 79; Eby, Virginia Yankee, 156; George Cullum, Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U. S. Military Academy, from 1802 to 1867. Revised Edition, with a Supplement continuing the Register of Graduates to January 1, 1879,—3 vols. (New York: James Miller, 1879), II, 261-62.
for the night. Darkness and fear enveloped the men as they huddled together. Lieutenant Colonel David Hunter Strother, an aide-de-camp of Banks, thought, "A dozen horse attacking them would have thrown the whole body into confusion."

Late that night, two guns of Nims' battery passed through the camp of the 52nd Massachusetts and unlimbered. The lieutenant in charge repeatedly asked the guide the direction and distance to Port Hudson. The guide finally said the fortifications lay far beyond the range of the cannon, but the gunners elevated the pieces anyway and fired a few shells in the direction indicated. The artillerymen then hitched up and returned to their camp.

Banks had intended to land siege guns at Ross' Landing and move them within range of Port Hudson, but imperfect maps, a damaged bridge, Confederate skirmishers and approaching darkness stopped him. Other portions of Banks' plan proved more successful. Major General Cuvier Grover opened communication with Springfield Landing at 2 p.m., and the Federals finally destroyed Strickland's bridge, though ironically, troops could ford the Comite River 200 yards above it. At 7 a.m. Colonel Molineux's forces advanced up


the Plank Road. Within just two miles the Federals encountered resistance, but one artillery piece dispersed the Confederate pickets. Advancing cautiously, Union skirmishers spotted a queer-looking obstruction in the road, resembling a cannon. Closer examination proved it a "Quaker gun," made of an old boiler. Clearing it from the road, the Federals marched to the bridge spanning Redwood Creek where the Confederates, supported by artillery, opened fire. The Yankees destroyed the bridge and withdrew several miles. Molineux's forces had reached a point that would have allowed him time to warn Banks had there been any Rebels on hand to attack the general's exposed flank.

Confederate cavalry skirmished with the Federal advance. Armed with everything from shotguns to Maynard rifles, and numbering less than 2,000 in all, the Southerners hardly faced a fair contest. They did manage to keep the Federal cavalry near its infantry support and stop Yankee marauders from plundering civilians. The 9th Louisiana Battalion Partisan Rangers engaged in particularly

45. Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 78-79; Captain R. L. Dunham, AAG, to [Banks], March 14, 1863, 11 a.m., Letters Sent, Department of the Gulf, Record Group 393; Tiemann, 159th New-York, 24; Map Z218.

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sharp skirmishing about a half mile south of Plains Store.

Rust fared no better than the Confederate cavalry. During the afternoon and evening he tried in vain to entice an attack from Banks. Failing, Rust asked permission to turn Banks' right flank and rear while Gardner sallied forth with his other three brigades in a frontal assault. Gardner's refusal disheartened the troops, but they did not hold him responsible.

Banks felt confident on the afternoon of the 14th. He sent word to Farragut shortly after one o'clock that his command had reached Barnes' Crossroads and occupied the road to Ross Landing "on the flank and rear of the rebel batteries." He asked when the admiral intended to open fire and concluded, "We shall be ready this evening." But Farragut had postponed the passage that morning because of fog. Elated that the army could divert the Confederates and anxious to get underway, Farragut changed his timetable. Rather than pass during the pre-dawn hours on the 15th, he decided to proceed at first dark that evening.

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47. [Wright], Port Hudson, 17.


49. Ibid., 262.

50. O.R.N., XIX, 768; Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 79.
But the bulk of the land forces had stopped their advance that afternoon. And instead of resuming the march when he learned of Farragut’s change of plans at 5 p.m., Banks sent word to the admiral that he could expect no diversion that evening. Banks’ assistant adjutant-general, Lieutenant Colonel Richard B. Irwin, summed up the army’s performance: "...the change of hour left us little more than spectators and auditors of the battle between the ships and the forts."

"...there is no use in trying to dodge God Almighty."

On Friday the 13th of March, Rear Admiral Farragut prepared to run the Fort Hudson batteries. His crews spent the day readying their ships; by early afternoon Farragut had inspected each vessel. Knowing the fire from the batteries crowning the bluff could cripple or even destroy his fleet, he decided to chance an uncertain navigation around the bend just before dawn, rather than improve Confederate aim by running the gauntlet in broad daylight. "The best protection against the enemy's fire," Farragut believed, "is a well-directed fire from our own guns...."

At 4 p.m. Farragut signaled to get underway from Baton Rouge. Thirty minutes later the Hartford started upstream, followed by the Monongahela, Richmond, Kineo and Mississippi. After steaming fifteen miles the Hartford dropped anchor at 7:30 near Prophet's Island, alongside the Albatross and the Essex. The remainder of the fleet anchored

astern. After towing two mortar boats to the head of the island, the Genesee anchored near the Hartford. Because of the supposed invulnerability of the ironclad Essex, Farragut assigned her to protect the wooden vessels in case of a surprise attack by any Confederate ship.

During the voyage and throughout the night and following day, the crews filled shells with powder and attached cartridges to them. Upon the suggestion of Captain James Alden, the sailors whitewashed the decks and gun carriages so they could better see the ropes and gun-gear during the night passage. This contrivance silhouetted the stands of grape and canister like black hats against snow, drawing astonishment from all. The sailors took down all surplus spars, unscrewed and stowed below all brass railings and other ornaments, secured splinter nettings, and sprinkled sand about the gun carriages to provide a foothold and also to soak up any blood. Shallow, square wooden boxes containing reserve sawdust lined the deck behind the cannon. Reverend Thomas S. Bacon of Christ Church in New Orleans, a guest aboard the Richmond, thought the boxes resembled "the spitoons one used to see in country

barrooms. Where possible, the crew protected the engines with cotton bales, the boilers with bunkers of coal. The crew of the Hartford rested the lower yards athwartships on the hammock nettings and suspended chain cables from the extreme ends of the yards on each side to thwart attack from the Confederate cotton-clad steamers. The sloops-of-war (Hartford, Richmond and Monongahela) had chain coiled vertically in front of the boilers, as they had during the passage of Forts Jackson and St. Philip. The crew of the Richmond moved one of the 9-inch Dahlgren guns from the port side to the poop deck so that it could fire to the starboard side. Farragut attached a trumpet to a tube running from the mizzentop to the wheel of his flagship (the Hartford) so that the pilot, stationed in the top to see over the fog and smoke, could communicate more efficiently with the helmsman astern. On the Mississippi the crew strapped howitzers securely in the fore- and main-tops so that flashes from their muzzles would delude the aim of the enemy; besides, firing from such heights, they might inflict more damage.

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Upon the Confederates.

At five in the morning the fleet moved up to the head of Prophet's Island, where the Essex, Sachem, and six mortar boats lay at anchor. Fog forced Farragut to postpone the passage; he called his commanders to the Hartford for a conference at 10 a.m. Commander Charles H. B. Caldwell of the Essex told the others what faced them. The five Confederate vessels--clearly visible in the distance--particularly intrigued the Union officers. Farragut ordered the mortar boats to check the range of their 13-inch mortars. When their shells fell short of the enemy's batteries, the mortar boats moved a half mile upstream. The Confederates paid little attention, although one soldier counted eighty-six projectiles flying through the air, and a few would have preferred "crawling in a hole." Nobody was injured, and Corporal John Wesley Powers


concluded the shells "did not even scare our Boys [sic]."
The gunboat Sachem steamed up near the Confederate batteries
to draw their fire, but the Confederates did not wish to
divulge the positions of their guns. His preparations
complete, Farragut ordered his commanders back to their
vessels. He returned their salute with a wide smile.

To pass Port Hudson, the admiral adopted a somewhat
novel tactic—one that has particular advantages when the
enemy lies on only one side. Because the port guns were
useless, a large ship had a smaller gunboat lashed well aft
on her port side. The gunboat, protected by her larger
consort, could also pull the ship should it run aground or
become disabled. To equalize the speed of the pairs,
Farragut assigned the fastest gunboat (Genesee, capable of
ten knots at best) to the slowest ship (Richmond). He
paired the Albatross and the Hartford, each averaging eight

6. Partin, "Report of a Corporal," 589; Smith to Gardner,
March 15, 1863, Louisiana Historical Association Collection,
Manuscript Department, Special Collections Division, Tulane
University Library, New Orleans, Louisiana. Hereinafter
cited as LHA Collection.

7. O.R.N., XIX, 666, 769; John C. Parker, "With Farragut at
Port Hudson: A First Person Account by Lt. John C. Parker,
45.
About mid-afternoon Farragut received the early dispatch from Major General Banks stating that the army could move immediately upon Port Hudson by land. The admiral replied that he hoped to have passed the batteries by midnight. At dusk Farragut signaled for the gunboats to take their assigned stations. By 8 p.m. every crew was ready. The air felt moist and heavy on that calm, dark evening. A stubborn fight threatened, and each man felt the importance of the occasion. William T. Meredith, aboard the Hartford, wrote: "It is as quiet as death."

Farragut signaled to get underway at 9 p.m., but the Mississippi and Monongahela failed to take their positions. Nervous and impatient, the admiral paced the quarter-deck. One button of his double-breasted frock coat held it about his shoulders, and his uniform cap was pressed far down upon his forehead. Occasionally he fondled the strap holding the night-glass slung over his right shoulder. Nearly an hour


9. Meredith, "Farragut's Passage," 120; Q.R.N., XIX, 666; Webster, Battle of Port Hudson, 12. The evidence proves that Farragut must have received Banks' communication about 2:30, rather than 5 p.m., which he claimed.
later the tug Reliance, with loud-puffing, high-pressure engines and flaring lights, pulled alongside the Hartford with a message from Banks: no diversion would come from the army. Irritated by the tug, which only attracted the enemy's attention, Farragut muttered, "He had as well be in New Orleans or at Baton Rouge for all the good he is doing us." The tug went down with orders for the vessels to close up, and shortly after ten o'clock the fleet headed north.

Slowly, and for a short time quietly, they slid upstream, the Hartford, with the Albatross lashed alongside, in the lead. Next came the Richmond with the Genesee, then the Monongahela with the Kineo, and finally the Mississippi. A side-wheeler with big paddle boxes extending some twenty feet on each side and no consort, the Mississippi had the least chance of passing the batteries. Farragut placed her where her disabling would not hinder the advance of the fleet. Under orders not to fire until the Confederates did, the Essex and Sachem stayed with the mortar boats to cover


the advance. The sailors on the latter vessels must have waited impatiently for the battle. Anchored behind the head of Prophet's Island almost three miles below the closest Confederate battery, any glory they won that night would be paid in sweat, not blood. But their comrades steaming northward toward the foe must have felt more dread.

Indeed, Farragut's son Loyall noted the anxiety among the crew of the Hartford. They stood by their guns with arms bared, while officers cautioned subordinates in low, earnest tones. The marines lay ready to assist either in working the tackle or in repelling boarders. Farragut seemed worried about Loyall; so he busied himself giving his son useful suggestions about how to stanch a wound or use a tourniquet.

Alerted by the mortar firing and the unusual number of ships visible throughout the day, Confederate gunners awaited the passage. On the evening of the 13th, Companies A and C, Point Coupee (Louisiana) Artillery, replaced Fenner's battery, which had covered Troth's landing. The next battery to the north consisted of Lieutenant J. Watts


Kearny's 20-pound Parrott. Then came the nine heavy batteries containing seventeen cannon, all of which fired en barbette. Lieutenant Colonel Marshall J. Smith commanded the big guns. Colonel I. G. W. Steedman commanded the right (northern) wing (Batteries 1-3, 5) under Smith, while Lieutenant Colonel P. F. de Gournay commanded the left (southern) (Batteries 4, 6-9). The hot-shot battery (No. 7) had an oven to bring a large number of solid shot to a white heat. Wads of wet hay or hemp prevented premature ignition. Smith personally checked to see that the ammunition was properly arranged beforehand in every battery and gave detailed instructions to each gunner.

About 11:20 p.m. the Hartford passed a light on the west bank, and a lookout there fired a warning rocket—immediately, Lieutenant Colonel de Gournay fired the first round. The 8-inch shell from Battery No. 9 exploded over the Albatross, and the battle began. De Gournay moved

from battery to battery shouting commands, but the deafening roar of cannon drowned out his voice, so the batterymen loaded and fired as rapidly as possible, without further guidance. Only the 45-pound Sawyer gun could reply from the Hartford, but the Essex, Sachem, and the mortar boats joined in the return bombardment. The sailors thought their mortar fire paralyzed the enemy at the lower batteries, because the reply there was less intense than from the upper batteries. In truth, the Confederates simply had fewer guns in the lower batteries.

As the ships passed through, the Confederates lit piles of pitch pine along the west bank, throwing the Union fleet into vivid relief and—the sailors unanimously concluded—giving the enemy an immense advantage. As Assistant Engineer Harrie Webster of the Genesee described,

15. O.R.N., XIX, 666, 692, 694, 709; O.R., XV, 1027; [Howard C. Wright], Port Hudson: Its History From An Interior Point of View As Sketched From the Diary Of An Officer (St. Francisville, La.: St. Francisville Democrat, 1937), 18; Meredith, "Farragut's Passage," 121; Edward Young McMorries, History of the First Regiment Alabama Volunteer Infantry C. S. A. (1904; reprint ed., Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), p. 54. The specific times mentioned in the text are based on a comparison of the individual source with the starting time of the initial firing (11:20 p.m.).

16. Webster, Battle of Port Hudson, 10, 13; John Smith Kendall, "Recollections of a Confederate Officer," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXIX (October 1946), pp. 1108-9; Dewey, Autobiography, 88; Meredith, "Farragut's Passage," 122.
...the illumination of the river showed with all needful accuracy the position of each ship, her lead-colored sides and outlined rigging affording excellent targets for the gunners on the bluffs, beneath which we seemed to be crawling at a snail’s pace.

But Lieutenant Colonel Smith disagreed. He claimed—probably correctly—that only one fire was ignited and that the limited illumination from the single blaze proved of little benefit to his gunners. The Federals saw an unobstructed view of the bonfires, however, while the Southerners had to peer through the curtain of cannon smoke between the bluff and the vessels; this difference undoubtedly accounts for the discrepancy in opinion.

When the Hartford came abreast of the lower Confederate batteries, she opened with a full broadside. The cannon could not fire simultaneously, however, without straining the ship. Instead, the gunners discharged the forward cannon first, then along the line "as fast almost as the ticking of a watch." Loyall ducked when a shot whistled by. The admiral took hold of him by the shoulder: "Don’t duck, my son," he said, "there is no use in trying to dodge

17. Smith to Gardner, March 15, 1863, LHA Collection; de Gournay, "The Siege of Port Hudson." Smith and de Gournay blamed the passage of the two vessels on the absence of the officer in charge of igniting the fires. Smith credits Mr. McGruder of the Signal Corps with lighting the lone bonfire.

Now both sides fired rapidly, and smoke from the cannon and bonfires grew so dense that it nearly blinded all. An officer stationed himself at the prow of each vessel and transmitted directions through a line of men to the helmsman at the stern. The fleet hugged the eastern shore just under the enemy guns to avoid running aground on the shoal that jutted out from the west bank at the bend. And in doing so, the ships hovered just below the range of many of the Confederate guns, which had to fire over the edge of the bluff. They passed so close in fact, that the yards brushed against overhanging tree limbs and the voices of Confederates reached those aboard ship. The sailors taunted the men on the bluff to "shoot their damned old batteries." And the Confederates did just that when the vessels moved upstream enough to allow their fire to clear the bluff and strike the ships.

The first shell had brought a halt to the card games within the garrison. The long roll sounded and officers rushed about ordering their men to fall in. The two-thirds of the infantrymen who had remained in camp hurriedly formed


21. Mobile Advertiser and Register, April 2, 1863.
ranks and moved to the breastworks, taken aback by the night attack. Officers had the horses moved out of range. Private Robert D. Patrick received orders to take a trunk containing at least $50,000 and valuable papers to Major and Chief Quartermaster W. K. Bennett's quarters, half a mile north of town, to protect it from enemy shells. After a hazardous journey, Patrick found at his destination that "the shells fell just as thick or thicker there than they did at my quarters." The heavy artillerymen ignored the mortar shells and did not have to worry about the high-flying projectiles from the fleet, which passed over their heads.

When the bombardment began, alert Union soldiers in the rear of Port Hudson woke the sleeping to witness the rare


We were only to see the flashes, hear the reports, and watch the flight of the mortar shells as they took their flight upward, at an angle of forty-five degrees, with the rapidity of lightning. Small globes of golden flames were seen sailing through the pure ether; not a steady, unfading flame, but coruscating like the fitful gleam of a fire-fly, now variable, and anon, invisible like a flying star of the sixth magnitude. The terrible missile, a thirteen-inch shell, nears the zenith. Up, and still up, higher and higher. Its flight now becomes much slower, till, on reaching its utmost altitude, its centrifugal force becoming counteracted by the earth’s attraction, it describes, it may be, ere it reaches terra firma, a grand parabola....

The bombardment, louder than any peal of thunder, carried to the outskirts of New Orleans. Captain Daniel E. Howard recalled that the “cannon and shells made the earth tremble and our heads quake.” Recalling Milton’s description of battles in Paradise Lost, members of the 52nd Massachusetts trembled for Farragut and his fleet, but took comfort in the


apparent destruction raining down upon the enemy.

The incoming shells from the fleet no less impressed their targets, many of whom came under fire for the first time. The Confederate infantrymen hugged their trenches and watched what was possibly the finest pyrotechnic display ever to take place in North America. Private Albert Theodore Goodloe knew first-hand that it transcended "by far the naval engagement between the Arkansas and the Yankee fleet above Vicksburg." Lieutenant Charles W. Tyler believed "no grander or more awful spectacle could well be imagined." To Private Thomas R. Myers, "The whole atmosphere appeared to be full of the screaming, exploding heavy bombs. The man who would say he could look with complacency and ease on such a scene has no regard for the truth. It was


Concussions from blazing cannon and exploding shells shook the earth. Projectiles uprooted huge trees or splintered them to pieces. Often the large shells buried themselves in the soft, sandy earth before exploding—then from the ground came a flash of light and a boom, as if the shot originated underground. A shell-burst looked dangerous at first, and the men would drop to the ground. Standing on a parapet, Private John T. Goodrich spotted a 13-inch mortar shell coming straight at him: "I jumped about twenty feet to get out of the way, to learn later that the old screeching shell fell something like a fourth of a mile from me."

For T. H. Rattan, the "shells came so thick and fast that my teeth were set on edge, but some of the boys were affected differently—their hair stood on end." The men soon learned that fragments from shells exploding directly overhead carried beyond them. While standing in line, the troops could hear frogs chattering in puddles. "These frogs


have camped by the side of the 30th Louisiana till they have learned to talk French," said one youth. By withstanding the shelling without a man killed, "the Forty-first [Tennessee] Regiment never afterward seemed to have any fear of cannon on land or water," according to Lieutenant Colonel James D. Tillman.

Panic seized many within the garrison. Several women who had come to Port Hudson to visit their husbands fled north through the woods. Ignorant of the terrain, one woman and a child fell into Little Sandy Creek and drowned. The Negroes who remained in camp, mostly cooks and teamsters, were likewise terrified. Running through the woods terror-stricken, one Negro tripped over a stump and broke his neck. Chaplain J. H. McNeilly witnessed a Negro run past:

Some one called to him: 'Tom, it's time for you to be praying.'
He accepted the suggestion and flopped down on his knees and began the only prayer he knew: 'Now I lay me down to sleep.'
Just then his eye caught sight of one of the big shells from the mortar boats soaring up into the heavens with its burning fuse until it seemed just over his head. He didn't wait to finish. With 'O, Lord, I done forgot de res', he started again on the run, and in his blind terror he struck his forehead against a projecting pole of a cabin, his neck was broken, and he fell dead.

33. Lindsley, Military Annals, 510.
34. M'Neilly, "Under Fire at Port Hudson," 338; Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 105.
A few civilians did remain calm. Fully exposed to flying shot and shell, several Irish women, married to men in Company E, 12th Louisiana Battalion Heavy Artillery, sat on the powder magazine behind the battery. Cheering their husbands on, they called: "Jemmie, why don't you hurry with the cartridge," and "Mike, hurry with the shell." Four miles northeast of town, six women huddled at a second-floor window in the Carter house to witness the shelling. Sarah Morgan thought she had heard a bombardment before; but Baton Rouge was child's play compared to this...Such an incessant roar! And at every report the house shaking so....That dreadful roar!...from the window...we can see the incessant flash of the guns,...and silently wondered which of our friends were lying stiff and dead, and then, shuddering at the thought, betook ourselves to silent prayer. I think we know what it is to 'wrestle with God in prayer'; we had but one thought. Yet for women, we took it almost too coolly. No tears, no cries, no fear, though for the first five minutes everybody's teeth chattered violently.

The bombardment woke Clinton and was distinctly audible along the railroad leading to Jackson, Mississippi.

Lieutenant Colonel Smith had stationed himself at Battery No. 4 to await his foe. He had served under Farragut before the war and intended to give him a warm


37. Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 104.
reception. The Hartford passed Smith so closely that he could have struck the officers on her poop-deck with a pistol shot. Instead he double-loaded an 8-inch and 10-inch Columbiad to pay his respects to his former commander; he personally trained the 10-inch gun on the Hartford, but when he gave the order to fire, both friction primers failed. Replacing them, again Smith gave the order to fire. Once more, both primers misfired, and the Hartford passed unscathed. Defective primers plagued the garrison, and the gunners had to resort to port fires or slow matches. But when the gunners raised them to the powder vent to ignite the piece, they also revealed their positions in the darkness.

As the Hartford proceeded upstream, the gunners scanned the bluff for a muzzle flash or a port fire. When Farragut sighted one he would shout, "That's your sort, boys. now's your time!," and the gunners would quickly discharge their cannon. When the smoke became so thick that the pilot could not see, Captain James S. Parker repeatedly ordered his men to cease fire to allow the smoke to clear. When it did, the pilot suddenly discovered that the treacherous, five-knot current had turned the ship toward shore directly.

38. Smith to Gardner, March 15, 1863, LHA Collection; O.R., XV, 1027; Notebook of Lieutenant William Trask (xerox copy in author's possession); Waterman, "Afield-Afloat," 390; de Gournay, "The Siege of Port Hudson."

under the batteries. Before the helmsman could change
course the Hartford touched shore. Fearing the enemy would
disembark, sharpshooters lining the bluff quickly brought
their muskets to bear. Despite the ten-minute ordeal, the
vessel escaped with little damage as the Confederates failed
to lower their cannon far enough to hit it. Possibly the
howitzers firing from the Hartford's top deceived them,
because the opposing guns rested on nearly the same
40 elevation.

Struggling to free the vessels, the Albatross reversed
engines while the Hartford's continued forward. Every man
on the deck of the two vessels watched breathlessly.
Farragut, impatient, shouted, "Back! back on the Albatross!"
(Loyall repeated his father's order and received a lecture
afterward for officiousness.) The maneuver succeeded, and
the two vessels continued upstream. A voice rang out, "Ram
on the port bow, sir!", and another ordered, "Man the port
battery, and call away the boarders!" Farragut seized his
cutlass and started forward, with, "I am going to have a

40. Ibid.; O.R.N., XIX, 666, 671; E. B. Potter, ed., et al.,
and Inland Waters (New York, N.Y.: Jack Brussel, n.d.), 135;
Waterman, "Afield--Afloat," 391; McMorries, First Alabama,
54, 56; Charles S. Foltz, Surgeon of the Seas, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1931), p. 262
hand in this myself." The ram proved an illusion. Ruins of an old building, coupled with the reflection from burning logs, had misled the nervous lookouts.

The Hartford continued up-river after firing a final broadside. By 12:15 a.m. the two vessels had passed the last of the shore batteries. For the next two miles the Hartford fired the 9-inch Dahlgren and 30-pound Parrott mounted on the poop deck. Within thirty minutes both vessels were beyond the range of the Confederate guns. Unable to close with the faster Confederate steamers, which chose to flee rather than do battle, Farragut dropped anchor.

Unknown to the admiral, the Confederate fleet—except for the Queen of the West—consisted of four steamboats making last-minute deliveries of corn, a commodity in short supply at Port Hudson. Two vessels had remained at the wharf, still being unloaded, when the bombardment began. Private Daniel P. Smith viewed the sight aboard the transports, where

42. Ibid.
43. Smith, "With Farragut," 34.
44. Meredith, "Farragut's Passage," 123; O.R.N., XIX, 666, 671, 707, 709, 711; O.R., XV, 277.
45. Daniel P. Smith, Company K, First Alabama Regiment, or Three Years in the Confederate Service (Prattville, Ala.: Published by the Survivors, 1885), 49, 83; O.R., XV, 271.
all was confusion, the shrieks of the women, the
shouts of the officers to their crews, and the
glare of light from the cabins and furnaces,
contrasted strangely with the death-like stillness
and darkness of the batteries on the bluff.

Right after the steamers left the wharf for safer waters
upstream, Gardner galloped up to Battery No. 1. Lights on
the vessels caught his eye, and he shouted to Captain J. F.
Whitfield, "Why don't you fire on those boats?" Private
John C. Hearn failed to recognize the commanding general,
and replied, "They are our transports, you infernal
thief." Gardner acted as though he had not heard the
remark and rode on.

The admiral now faced a new worry. Signal rockets had
failed to elicit a response from the five missing vessels,
and as the admiral stood with his arm on his son's shoulder,
Midshipman William T. Meredith could see "the expression of
anxiety and woe in the old hero's face" in the flare's
light. Where was the rest of his fleet?

Downstream, between 11:20 and 11:30 p.m., the men
aboard the Richmond watched the fire of the mortar boats
overhead while the helmsman struggled to avoid ramming the
Hartford. It appeared to a reporter on the Richmond that,

46. Smith, Company K, 49-50, [143].
47. Ibid., 50, [139].
48. Ibid., 50.
49. Meredith, "Farragut's Passage," 123-24; Farragut,
"Passing Port Hudson," 319.
"Farragut seemed to be so enamored with the sport in which he was engaged as to be in no hurry to pass by."

Repeatedly, Lieutenant Edward Terry called for the engines to stop to avoid a collision. The crew of the 80-pound Dahlgren rifle stationed on the bow had to fire cautiously to avoid striking the Hartford.

The smoke from the Hartford, coupled with that from the bonfires and Confederate batteries, made visibility even worse on the Richmond. The gun captains passed the order: "Boys, don't fire till you see the flash from the enemy's guns." Above the roar of battle the men aboard the Richmond could hear the cries for help from a marine who had fallen off the Hartford. Terry shouted, "Man overboard, throw him a rope." But no one could help, and the victim's screams grew faint as he floated downstream.

While the Richmond pushed ahead through the smoke, an officer on the forward top-gallant shouted, "Ready with the port-gun." But before the gunners could fire, Terry

50. Moore, Rebellion Record, VII, 452.
52. Moore, Rebellion Record, VII, 452-53.
53. Ibid., 452; L. F. Brockett, Battle-Field and Hospital; or, Lights and Shadows of the Great Rebellion (n.p.: Edgewood Publishing Company, n.d.), 228; Mahan, Gulf and Inland Waters, 136.
54. Moore, Rebellion Record, VII, 452.
55. Ibid., 453.
yelled, "Hold on, you are firing into the Hartford!" A second later the muzzle flash of the Hartford's guns revealed its spars and rigging. When the Richmond reached a point about halfway through the gauntlet, the smoke cleared momentarily to reveal the Confederates running a cannon to the edge of the bluff. They pointed it sharply downward and fired it almost point-blank at the Richmond. The Richmond stood helpless, her cannon unable to elevate enough to hit those upon the bluff. The Confederates raked her deck with grape and canister. The sailors replied weakly with double-shotted guns.

Enraged over the Hartford's successful passage, the Confederates mercilessly pounded the Richmond. A shell entered the port of the forward starboard gun and exploded directly beneath it, the concussion reeling the ship. Fragments splintered the gun-carriage, dented the barrel, and struck the boatswain's mate, cutting off one arm and both legs. With his dying breath he shouted, "Don't give up the ship, lads!" Seconds later a rifled solid shot passed under No. 8 gun port and tore through the bulkhead. A


57. Moore, Rebellion Record, VII, 453; Webster, Battle of Port Hudson, 13.

58. Brockett, Battle-Field and Hospital, 229; O.R.N., XIX, 674.
12-pounder shell ripped through the side between gun ports 11 and 12, took off the head and arm of one marine, half the head of another, and wounded some twelve or thirteen more by splinters. When it passed through the bulwark, it exploded. The largest fragment ploughed up the deck and twisted the brass rods that protected the lower cabin's skylight. Continuing its flight, it shivered a stanchion that supported the poop-deck and punched a hole into the captain's office, where it dropped to the floor, spent. Blood now covered the entire front of the office, some twenty feet from where the marines fell. Much of the rigging and all of the waist boats sustained damage. Another shot went through the mainmasthead and another struck the starboard bow only two feet above the water-line.

Captain Alden and Lieutenant Commander A. B. Cummings stood on the bridge. Cheering his men through his trumpet, Cummings directed them to fire "in rapid succession from bow to stern..." But the trumpet fell, smashed, when a large-caliber conical shot passed over the starboard gangway, taking off the lieutenant's leg just above the ankle and knocking Captain Alden down with the windage.

59. O.R.N., XIX, 674-75, 769; Moore, Rebellion Record, VII, 454-55.

60. Moore, Rebellion Record, VII, 455; Bacon, "Fight at Port Hudson," 593.
before passing through the smoke-stack. The captain escaped injury, but Cummings, gushing blood, screamed: "Put a tourniquet on my leg, boys. Send my letters to my wife. Tell her that I fell in doing my duty!" On his way below, blood streamed from his shattered leg. While the surgeons amputated below the knee, he told them, "If there are others worse hurt, attend to them first." Moments later a shell exploded under the stern and threw water thirty feet high. The ship quivered, equipment fell overboard, and the cabin windows shattered.

Disaster struck when the Richmond turned the point about 12:35 a.m. A solid shot fired from a 6-inch rifle came through the starboard side and destroyed the starboard safety-valve chamber and damaged the port safety-valve. Instantly, dense volumes of vapor enveloped the ship. The scream of escaping steam penetrated the air; steam pressure plummeted to nine pounds, and vapor extinguished the port fire. A few sailors tried to haul fire from the furnace of the starboard boiler; First Assistant Engineer Eben Hoyt penetrated the hot steam several times while overseeing and trying to gauge the damage. Comrades finally led him away,

61. Brockett, Battle-Field and Hospital, 230; Moore, Rebellion Record, VII, 455.

62. O.R., XIX, 676-77; Moore, Rebellion Record, VII, 454.

63. Webster, Battle of Port Hudson, 13-14; Brockett, Battle-Field and Hospital, 232; O.R.N., XIX, 673, 676.
exhausted and fainting. First Class Firemen Matthew McClelland, Joseph E. Vantine, and John Rush and Second Class Fireman John Hickman fell in to help. Relieving each other every few minutes, these four men, "acting courageously in this crisis,...persisted in penetrating the steam-filled room in order to haul the hot fires of the furnaces and continued this action until the gravity of the situation had been lessened." All four received the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Even with the aid of the Genesee, the Richmond could make no headway against the current. Both vessels had to turn back. The mortally wounded Cummings heard the escaping steam, and told that a shot had disabled the vessel, he cried, "I would rather lose the other leg than go back...." The dense smoke confused the crew; many on board did not realize that the ship had reversed course. At least four gunners on the Richmond mistook the flashes of the Mississippi's cannon for those of the Confederates and


66. O.R.N., XIX, 672, 677, 769.
fired at her.

Lashed to the Richmond, the Genesee could fire only three of her guns, and Confederate riflemen peppered her from the west bank. Commander William H. McComb replied with his port battery. The Genesee passed up nearly unharmed, but the destruction inflicted upon her consort was obvious. The head of the decapitated marine, splinters and other debris from the Richmond fell on the Genesee's quarter-deck. When the two ships rounded the turn, the Richmond lost power; the Genesee could not tow her against the current. Only by skillful maneuvering could the Genesee turn her consort downstream, but in her caution to avoid collision with the Monongahela or Mississippi below, she ran the Richmond aground on the west bank. The Richmond's top hamper smashed through the branches of the trees lining the river.

Just as the Genesee swung the Richmond back into the current, a 10-inch solid shot struck the former at the water line. After disabling the port steerage, the shot passed through the ship and exploded a shell that had just been hoisted from below. The explosion set the ship on


68. O.R.N., XIX, 678; Webster, Battle of Port Hudson, 4, 13, 14-15.
fire—directly over an open hatch that led to the shell-locker and magazine. Miraculously, the crew managed to extinguish the fire before a flaming splinter could ignite the magazine. Meanwhile the carpenter plugged the hole through the ship’s hull. Without further incident, both vessels then dropped downstream, defeated. Had the Genesee not been lashed to the Richmond, the Confederates probably would have destroyed the latter. The two vessels sustained little damage while returning to a point west of Prophet’s Island, where they dropped anchor about 1 a.m.

The Monongahela engaged the lowest Confederate battery about 11:30. In reply to musketry, her consort, the Kineo, fired shrapnel and grape into the west bank, immediately silencing the Confederates there. An hour later, as the Monongahela passed the heaviest of the shore batteries, she grounded on the point opposite. The impact tore loose the Kineo, and she too grounded. For almost a half hour, the Confederate fire played havoc with the grounded Monongahela. It disabled two 32-pounder broadside and an 11-inch pivot gun. A shot destroyed the bridge, killed three men, and severely wounded Captain J. P. McKinstry. A shell-burst knocked Acting Master’s Mate Henry B. Rome overboard. After swimming ashore he managed to board the Kineo. That vessel freed herself and, assisted by the reversed engines of the

69. Webster, Battle of Port Hudson, 15-16; O.R.N., XIX, 679; Moore, Rebellion Record, VII, 454.
Monongahela, succeeded in swinging the latter off. Farragut's plan of lashing two vessels together no doubt saved the Monongahela.

The Monongahela then cast off from her consort and proceeded upstream. But the crank pin of the forward engine had over-heated while backing off the sandbar. Chief Engineer George F. Kutz had to stop the engines, finding it impossible to cool the pin by applying water. Unable to maneuver against the current, the vessel appeared doomed. She drifted into the eddy opposite Battery No. 7, within thirty yards of the bluff. Lieutenant Frederick V. Dabney noticed the vessel "could not extricate herself. She was being carried around and around in an apparently helpless condition..." The crew's only solace was the Confederates' inability to lower the muzzles of their cannon enough to blast the vessel. One sailor taunted, "Now let me see you strike me from those hills, G- -d- d- -m you!" In reply, batteries north and south of the ship zeroed in. A shell smashed through the forecastle, and grape swept the decks from the mizzenmast forward; sharpshooters peppered away. The withering fire brought from the defiant soul who

70. O.R.N., XIX, 686-88; Meredith, "Farragut's Passage," 122.


had shouted the oath, "For God's sake don't shoot any more! We are sinking!" But the vessel's commander made no sign of surrender, and the Confederates answered the plea for pity with twelve double charges of grape and canister. The Monongahela had ceased firing, and finally, someone aboard screamed, "Cease your firing; I surrender." The Confederates complied, but before they could secure their prize, the Monongahela escaped the eddy and drifted downstream. Confederates speculated about the fate of the ship, but all agreed that if she survived, it was because they ceased fire. She continued to drift southward until she dropped anchor abreast of Prophet's Island.

Just before the Kineo ran aground, a 32-pounder shot split her rudderpost. The commander sent a man over the stern but he could not repair it. The absence of the pilot, who had been stationed on the Monongahela, coupled with a useless rudder, made it extremely difficult for the Kineo to aid her consort. Only by alternating the motions of her


74. [Dabney], "Sinking of Mississippi," 181; J. Wes Broom to [Miss G. A. Brigham], March 27, 1863, Brigham Family Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; Smith to Gardner, March 15, 1863, LHA Collection; O.R.N., XIX, 688.

engines could she get in position to assist the \textit{Monongahela}. Once that ship got free, the \textit{Kineo} ceased fire and dropped down-river. Her engines failed as she neared the head of Prophet's Island, where now, she too, anchored.

Last in line, the \textit{Mississippi} passed the lower batteries unscathed. When the \textit{Richmond} drifted between her and the Confederate guns, her crew mistook the vessel for the enemy and nearly fired into their comrades before her officers intervened. Unable by this time to see the \textit{Monongahela}, Captain Melancton Smith ordered "go ahead fast," hoping to close with the column. When the pilot thought his ship had passed the shoal point, he shouted, "Starboard the helm! Full speed ahead!" As the crew congratulated themselves on reaching the turn, their vessel grounded and heeled over to port, just above the \textit{Monongahela}. Smith ran in the port guns to return the \textit{Mississippi} to an even keel, and reversed the engine. He increased steam pressure from thirteen to twenty-five pounds, the greatest the boilers would bear, and for thirty-five minutes the engine strained to back the vessel into deep water.

The sailors could not free the \textit{Mississippi}, now the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{76.} O.R.N., XIX, 693-94.
\item \textbf{78.} O.R.N., XIX, 680-81; Mahan, \textit{Gulf and Inland Waters}, 137.
\end{itemize}
principal target of the Confederates. Shot and shell riddled the doomed ship. Some of the men jumped overboard to escape but drowned. Amid this holocaust Smith remained cool. He lit a cigar with steel and flint and remarked to Lieutenant George Dewey (future admiral and hero of the Spanish-American War): "Well, it doesn't look as if we could get her off." "No, it does not!" said Dewey. "Can we save the crew?" Smith asked. "Yes, sir!" replied Dewey. 79

Smith ordered

...the port battery to be spiked and, with the pivot gun, to be thrown overboard, but the latter was not accomplished before I deemed it most judicious and humane to abandon the vessel, as the enemy had obtained our range and we were exposed to the falling and cross fire of three batteries, their shot hulling us frequently.

Confederate hot shot ignited a fire in the forward storeroom. The sailors continued firing, however, as if confident of victory, until other crewmen helped the disabled above deck.

One boat took the seriously wounded down-river while two others began ferrying the remaining men ashore. The latter returned slowly, their oarsmen afraid to go back after reaching safety. Dewey, fearing the crews would not

80. O.R.N., XIX, 681.
81. Dewey, Autobiography, 94-95. Smith's report is incorrect regarding the cause of the fire.
return at all the next time, jumped into one boat. Later in

life he thought this

...the most anxious moment of my career. What if a shot should sink the boat? What if a rifle bullet should get me? All the world would say that I had been guilty of about as craven an act as can be placed at the door of any officer....If the ship should blow up while I was away and I should appear on the reports as saved, probably people would smile over my explanation.

When they landed, he shouted, "Now, all of you except four get to cover behind the levee. Those four will stay with me to go off to the ship." The men

obeyed one part of my command with great alacrity...all but one scrambled over the levee in a free-for-all rush. The one who remained standing was a big negro, the ship's cook...

...when I called out, shaming them, in the name of their race, for allowing a negro to be the only one who was willing to return to save his shipmates, I did not lack volunteers.

At gun point, rowers were secured for the other boat. Dewey often said afterward that he "lived five years in an hour," during the passage of Port Hudson, "about four and a half of the years I was absent with the boats."

On board ship, Smith ordered the engineers to destroy the machinery. Although facing possible capture ashore, Smith ordered all small arms thrown overboard. Before

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82. Ibid., 96-97.
83. Ibid., 97.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid., 85, 98.
abandoning the vessel, he had the yeoman check on the fire below deck. As he did so, three shots passed through the hull and entered the storeroom. Water poured in and extinguished the flames. After other seamen started four new fires aft, two shells tore through her, exploded, and ignited some turpentine and oil. The flames spread quickly, and a master's mate reported that the fire had reached the entrance to the magazine. With little time left, Smith told Dewey, "We must make sure that none is left aboard alive." Dewey described it as

a search whose harrowing memory will never fade from my mind. We went up and down the decks, examining prostrate figures to make sure that no spark of life remained in them, haste impelling us in the grim task on the one hand, and, on the other, the fear that some poor fellow who was still unconscious might know the horror of seeing the flames creep up on him as he lay powerless to move. Meanwhile, we kept calling aloud in the darkness that this was the last chance to escape. As a result of the thorough search, we found one youngster, little more than a boy, who was so faint that he could scarcely speak. We pulled him out from under the body of a dead man, in the midst of a group of dead who had been killed by the bursting of a shell.

Smith, preceded by Dewey, sadly took leave of his ship—the last man ever to stand upon her deck.

They rowed away from the Mississippi, and Smith, having

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86. Ibid., 98; O.R.N., XIX, 681; Moore, Rebellion Record, VII, 455; Brockett, Battle-Field and Hospital, 234.


88. Ibid., 100.
no desire to surrender his sword and pair of fine revolvers, threw them overboard. Dewey, at the tiller, determined to reach one of the vessels downstream, rather than land and risk capture. About 1:15 a.m. they came alongside the *Essex*. After informing Caldwell that a large number of the *Mississippi*'s crew had landed on the west bank, Smith continued south in the rowboat and pulled up to the *Sachem*. When he learned that the *Richmond* lay below, he boarded the *Sachem* and proceeded to the *Richmond*. After delivering Smith, the *Sachem* headed upstream but fouled her propeller when she struck a raft. She had to drop anchor to avoid drifting down and colliding with the *Richmond*. The *Essex* promptly crossed to the west bank and under a murderous fire conveyed the stranded sailors on board the ram.

When flames enveloped the *Mississippi*, the bluff erupted in cheers. To one observer, "a wild, enthusiastic delirium seemed to pervade the mind of every one." Lieutenant R. H. Hughes thought, "it was a beautiful sight to see the enemys [sic] fleet on fire before our eye

89. Ibid., 101-102; *O.R.N.*, XIX, 692, 694-95; Truesdale, *Blue Coats*, 475.

90. Mobile *Advertiser and Register*, April 2, 1863.
Shortly after 3 a.m. the abandoned Mississippi slid off the shoal, swung around with the current, and floated downstream. The heat reached the friction primers in her loaded port guns, which now faced the Confederates. A dying ship, manned by a dead crew, the Mississippi fired a final broadside at the enemy. When Engineer Webster, aboard the Genesee, first sighted the burning Mississippi, the fire was already crawling up the rigging. From every hatch the flames were surging heavenward, and it seemed but a question of minutes when the good old ship must blow up. Every mast, spar, and rope was outlined against the dark background of forest and sky, and it was a sad, and at the same time, a beautiful spectacle. Majestically, as though inspired with victory, the ship, which by this time was a mass of fire from stern to stern, from truck to water-line, floated past the fleet, down past Profit's Island, down into the darkness of the night. Suddenly, as if by magic, her masts shot into the air all ablaze, a tremendous tongue of flame pierced the sky for an instant, and amid the muffled thunder of her exploded magazine the Mississippi disappeared in the stream whose name she had borne so bravely and so long.

Union soldiers thought the drifting Mississippi was Confederate ironclads chasing Farragut's wooden vessels.

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91. Diary of R. H. Hughes, March 17, 1863, R. H. Hughes Collection, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania; List of Confederate Officers sent to New Orleans aboard the Zephyr on July 13, 1863, Letters Sent, December 1862-August 1863, Department of the Gulf, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

92. Webster, Battle of Port Hudson, 16-17; Waterman, "Afield--Afloat," 393-94.
downstream. At five minutes past five that morning, Captain Homer B. Sprague saw the heavens lit from horizon to horizon with a fiery splendor. The stars sank in an ocean of flame. For ten seconds the lurid glare filled the sky; then came a moment of dense blackness; and then, a crash so loud and deep that the earth shook for a hundred miles, and it seemed as if all the thunder of the past five hours had been concentrated in one terrific peal.

It was as noonday. Standing in a dense woods, Chaplain Moors could recognize his friends' faces and "catch a sight of moss and different kinds of bark on trees." Adjutant Luther T. Townsend thought "the atmosphere seemed to strike us as with a blow that quite stopped the breath." Lieutenant George G. Smith witnessed the scene from Baton Rouge, five miles to the south. When the light died out, he "tried to look into the faces of my [his] comrades, but all was silence and darkness, no one moved or spoke. The scene had stupified them. They were smitten with awe." Farmers ten miles away told one soldier "...the light was so bright at their places on that night that they could pick up


94. Moors, Fifty-second Massachusetts, 70; Clark, One Hundred and Sixteenth New York, 57; Goodloe, Rebel Relics, 204.

95. Townsend, Sixteenth New Hampshire, 86.

96. George G. Smith, Leaves from A Soldier's Diary ... (Putnam, Conn.: George G. Smith, 1906), p. 41.
The Federals on guard duty at Camp Parapet, on the outskirts of New Orleans, saw the flash of light from the explosion. The concussion rocked houses over twenty miles away, and nearly hurled a woman from her bed at that distance.

When the burning hulk approached the fleet below, panic ensued. The Essex, fearing the explosion of the Mississippi's magazine, quit rescuing those sailors on shore and hastened across the river. The mortar fleet hoisted anchor and headed downstream. Although the Sachem and Richmond moved out of the Mississippi's path, Alden worried about her port broadside guns discharging into the Richmond. Smith assured Alden that the "port guns had all been discharged." Apparently shells exploding on deck gave the contrary appearance. After the Mississippi drifted past, the Essex, now assisted by the Genesee, Sachem, and unarmed Reliance, resumed picking up the Mississippi's survivors.


99. Moore, Rebellion Record, VII, 456; O.R.N., XIX, 692, 695; Smith, Leaves from a Soldier's Diary, 42.
By half past five on the morning of March 15 the Mississippi, former flagship of Commodore Matthew C. Perry during the Mexican War and the Japan expedition, was gone. Only her figure-head and a few blackened timbers floating on the water remained.

At dawn the fleet below Port Hudson "presented a melancholy spectacle," wrote one observer. Blood, brains and other particles of human bodies covered the Richmond. Men found it difficult to move about the vessel, with the sailors trying to repair the ship, the carpenters making coffins, and most of the survivors of the Mississippi resting on board. The Monongahela, viewed from the outside, showed that at least eight shots had passed completely through her. A 10-inch solid shot had demolished three staterooms, and another projectile, apparently from an 80-pounder rifle, had entered the port steerage and engine room. The slight casualties suffered by the Richmond (three men killed and twelve wounded), Genesee (three wounded), Monongahela (six killed and twenty-one wounded) and Kineo (none) belie the severity of the fighting. Smith reported only sixty-four men killed or missing from the Mississippi's crew, and Confederate cavalry captured thirty-seven of

100. O.R.N., XIX, 681, 692, ser. 2, I, 146; Moore (ed.), Rebellion Record, VII, 455; Smith, Leaves from A Soldier's Diary, 41-42.

these.

Up-river, the night passed slowly aboard the flagship. An officer recalled that the fire from the burning Mississippi caused extreme "anxiety for the fate of those on board of the absent vessels." When the firing had ended, all expected the other vessels to appear, because the Hartford and Albatross had passed virtually undamaged. Casualties on both vessels amounted to only two killed and two slightly wounded.

All efforts to communicate with the vessels below from the Hartford's masthead failed; the woods on the intervening point blocked the line of sight between the two fleets. Farragut then discharged three guns, the signal agreed upon with Banks to indicate a safe passage. The next morning the crew nailed a placard stating their safe arrival on the launch and cast it adrift. At 10:30 a.m. Farragut, undoubtedly anxious and distressed, moved leisurely upstream toward his self-imposed objective—to blockade the Red

102. O.R.N., XIX, 676, 679, 682, 685, 688-89, 694, 770; Memphis Daily Appeal, March 16, 1863. Among the prisoners was the Negro who had assisted Dewey in disembarking the sailors.


104. Ibid., 315; O.R.N., XIX, 670, 711.
Confederate casualties totalled three enlisted men killed, and three officers and nineteen men wounded. Only one man, Private O. P. Saltzgiver, was admitted to the hospital. While he was carrying a hot shot from the furnace to the battery, a shell fragment tore off his heel and forced the amputation of the leg. Most of the injuries fell among the 10th and 30th Tennessee regiments when portions of those units moved from their camp to the breastworks. One shell-burst apparently killed three men and wounded six. Although shells had ploughed the ground surrounding the batteries, not one gun sustained damage. The limited casualties led Lieutenant Colonel W. N. Parish to write his
wife, "God. [sic] is on our Side [sic]."

Naturally, the Confederates felt congratulations were in order. Everyone from Gardner on down praised their performance. Lieutenant John Wes Broom wrote his beloved, "This Splendid [sic] achievement has fully demonstrated that open mud forts can fight gun boats with an advantage, when defended by stout hearts and cool heads." An editorial in the Franklin (Louisiana) Junior Register heralded

the heroic daring and gallant defense...the same determination, the same valor and the same cause which urged on the defenders of Vicksburg, now actuate the troops of Port Hudson. They are all


108. Franklin Junior Register, March 26, 1863.
aware of the great responsibility resting upon them, and they know that all eyes are turned towards this point...Time and opportunity only wanting to make the name of Port Hudson worthy a place side by side in the annals of history with the ever glorious Hill City. Mississippi will have her Vicksburg and Louisiana her Port Hudson.

Contemporaries and historians have labeled the passage a tactical failure, and not because of Confederate gun-fire. Yet they also generally described it as an important strategic victory. The failure of five out of seven vessels to successfully pass the batteries confirms the first conclusion, but the Confederate gunners deserve the credit. Even when handicapped by darkness, their 600 rounds disabled the Richmond, Genesee, and Kineo. One can only speculate about the outcome of a daylight attempt. Nonetheless, Farragut's decision to pass at night undoubtedly enabled the Hartford and Albatross to run the gauntlet almost untouched. Dewey, even though his vessel was destroyed, followed Farragut's example, relying on the cover of darkness thirty-five years later at Manila Bay. Dewey fully appreciated the accuracy of the Confederate fire that night, and so admitted after the war to his friend Chief Justice Edward Douglas White. White, though a mere teenager, served as Gardner's aide during Farragut's
There is no evidence to support the conclusion that Farragut's passage was an important strategic victory. The admiral could have achieved such a triumph only by forcing the Confederates to evacuate Port Hudson. His two ships above Port Hudson hardly changed the situation. Alone, they could not blockade the Mississippi from Port Hudson to Vicksburg. Only when anchored at the mouth of the Red River did they severely constrict east-west supply lines. Farragut thought his squeeze on foodstuffs reaching troops at Port Hudson from western Louisiana would starve them out. He was wrong.


110. O.R.N., XX, 59, 62, 77-78.
Chapter VI

"...the object of the expedition is accomplished."

The light moving south along the horizon disturbed Major General Banks. His aide, Lieutenant Colonel David Hunter Strother, watched the general pace "to and fro in great perturbation." Fearing the worst, Banks reckoned the naval passage a total failure and blamed the "rash and headstrong" Admiral Farragut. Everyone at headquarters thought the burning ship was only an enemy fire raft, but Banks ordered a retreat anyway. The explosion of the Mississippi ended all speculation. Colonel William F. Bartlett led the withdrawal, entering in his journal, "I felt safe from the first, for Banks had made so many good

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retreats that he must understand it pretty well."

Federals still lounging when the explosion took place quickly deployed for the anticipated Confederate assault. Quiet and determined, the troops stood in line while the morning wore away, the men anxiously awaiting an attack, both front and rear. When the Union soldiers marched toward Baton Rouge, they moved at a fast walk, the rear guard burning bridges and felling trees to slow any pursuers. Why the retrograde movement, the soldiers all wondered? Private Henry T. Johns thought, "...awe and half-panic seized many hearts," and the men were "dispirited, angry, fully believing we had suffered a severe defeat...." Rumors of defeat, concluded Adjutant Luther T. Townsend, led


officers who were not accustomed to swear [to do so] and the anxiety and confusion of the men in the ranks, cannot easily be described.

We then could see with how little difficulty a panic might be started that would render troops utterly uncontrollable. Had the enemy really made an attack upon us that morning, likely enough there would have been another famous Bull Run disaster.

Some men even threw away their guns, though few dropped out to rest for fear of capture. Kind-hearted officers gave up their horses to exhausted soldiers and packed the men's muskets. The farther the soldiers marched away from the enemy, the less regard they held for Banks. Cursing him and his tactics, they had no idea that Banks never intended to assault the bastion. Chaplain John F. Moors tried to persuade his comrades they "had not been defeated, that it was a part of the strategy of war. Some were satisfied, others discouraged, and growled." At 8:30 a.m. Banks ordered the division commanders to announce to their troops


"that the object of the expedition is accomplished." The message lifted the spirits of some. The 36th Massachusetts cheered Banks when he rode by. Captain Homer B. Sprague observed "much wondering at this Delphic announcement...."

Most of the troops, however, took a different view. The 49th Massachusetts thought the announcement "an official lie to cover up a defeat that the unemployed troops might have converted into a victory...How we aided [Farragut], we can't see." Adjutant Henry A. Willis summed up the soldiers' feelings: "...our movements resulted like that of the famous king with 40,000 men, who marched up hill and then marched down again."

A shortage of provisions provided an excuse to pillage during the retreat. Corporal James F. Dargan described the

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9. Willis, Fifty-third Massachusetts, 71; Adjutant General, Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines in the Civil War, 9 vols. (Norwood, Mass.: Adjutant General, 1931-37), IV, 621; Palfrey, Memoir of Bartlett, 79.
vandalism in his journal that evening:

...what reckless plunder is carried on, which we would not deem in civilized life capable of being performed by men once living in our enlightened community. Poor defenseless women and children, their houses ransacked by the merciless and demoralized soldiery. It is enough to make a Southerner fight for his home,...but I being one of the participants, am not obliged to condemn them much, for we must live on something; and there is in this world no such merciless dictator, as an empty stomach, craving for food.

Several Yankees entered Mrs. Ramey Delatt's house and proceeded to eat all her food. When she came into the kitchen, threw up her hands, and cried, "Oh, my you have just eaten the poultice from my husband's sore leg," the soldiers quickly exited the building and "unswallowed!"

Lieutenant Colonel Strother said, "The soldiers plundered without restraint, keeping up a skirmishing fire all around on pigs, poultry, and cattle. The whole land was covered with blood, guts, horns, hair, and feathers...and some houses wantonly robbed."

That afternoon a severe thunder storm broke over the troops, bringing an end to the unseasonable heat, but


turning the road into a quagmire that pulled shoes off the feet. Sergeant Major Henry M. Whitney cut a hole in the toe of his boots to allow the water to drain out. "...we had encountered the worst storm and waded through the deepest mud to be found on the continent and had bivouacked in a field almost as dry as the bottom of Lake Ontario," concluded a man in the 25th Connecticut.

Before the sun rose on the 16th, most of the men endured what one called "a night to be remembered a lifetime." The soldiers cursed at least one general that night, and Colonel H. S. Greenleaf commented, "I do not believe our great ancestor, Noah, ever saw a greater..." flood. The 116th New York had pitched camp south of Monte Sano Bayou before the torrential rain started. Buffeted by gale-force winds, the men found little protection in their tents. Lieutenant Orton S. Clark said the rain covered their camp with "a sheet of water, and for two hours we


15. Moors, Fifty-second Massachusetts, 81, 85.
literally swam in the element." Some soldiers built an elevated bed of fence rails, but the men of the 116th New York, lying under wet blankets in the mud and water, found no sleep. The exhausted members of the 16th New Hampshire rested in two to four inches of water, while other units had to contend with at least a foot. Alligators and snakes competed with the soldiers for space on fallen trees, earning the encampment the name "Rattlesnake Swamp." The 26th Maine stood all night in line of battle. With mud and water nearly to their knees, one member called it "the bluest night... he ever experienced." The men of the 25th Connecticut nicknamed their bivouac "Camp Misery," though they had to share the title. Captain Sprague observed the officers of the 13th Connecticut about a burning stump consuming liquor, where the usually abstemious Doctor George Clary distinguished himself by shouting, "If you can't [sic]


take Port Hudson take Baton Rouge; and if you cant [sic] take Baton Rouge, take whiskey!" Sergeant Michael T. Sullivan agreed, stealing enough whiskey for every enlisted man in the 8th New Hampshire and 4th Wisconsin.

The men spent the 16th moving to higher ground, drying out, vanquishing varmints and securing food. During the night, one unwelcomed guest crawled into the knapsack of a soldier in the 8th New Hampshire. When aroused, the denizen set his fourteen rattles in motion, and a large crowd formed a circle, at a respectful distance, around the rattlesnake's new home. Captain John M. Stanyan recalled that when the snake emerged "he was gunned out of existence." Strict orders prohibited foraging, but some soldiers thought survival required otherwise. Sweet potatoes, sugar, hogs, sheep and fowl came from neighboring plantations; even the officers welcomed without question tasty fowls for breakfast. The officers issued whiskey rations where


available to the men.

The Federals deployed along Bayou Monte Sano from west of the Bayou Sara to east of the Greensburg road. Banks apparently feared an assault, but aside from sporadic skirmishing and the confiscation of cotton, the days passed quietly. A few regiments maneuvered, but most of the men enjoyed the rest, nursed their blistered feet, and continued to loot and pillage. The officers paid extreme courtesy to the ladies—at least at first—but many residents still chose to leave the vicinity. Rattlesnakes remained a problem, however, an officer in the 49th Massachusetts killing eight by himself. Drinking water posed another. Private Johns had to drink water that "farmers would hardly
"Wash their hogs in." Although Banks arrested one lieutenant and sixteen enlisted men for "quiting their colors to plunder or pillage" on the 15th, the general sanctioned such behavior three days later—so long as proper officers gave receipts for the confiscated property. Officers of the 21st Maine gave receipts only to persons professing loyalty to the Union. The army returned to Baton Rouge March 20-22.

About evenly divided between glorious success and bloody repulse, the Federals debated the likely outcome had

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23. [Banks] to Grover, March 18, 1863, Letters Sent, Department of the Gulf, Record Group 393.

they assaulted Port Hudson. A large majority of the soldiers, however, felt the expedition ridiculous and took little solace in the $300,000 worth of cotton and sugar taken during a retreat they found "incomprehensible."

Adjutant Townsend believed the hardship had made the men "an easy prey to disease and accounts in part for the terrible fatality that came to them a month or more later. There is no doubt that scores of our regiment never after that mud march knew a well day." Lieutenant William L. Haskin, a regular army officer, was one of the few to grasp the only true advantage Banks' campaign secured for his army: "The experience thus gained in field service was undoubtedly of use in the coming campaign, for the improvement in the troops in all respects was wonderful in the short space of time intervening."

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Banks also drew criticism from Farragut and General-in-Chief Halleck, who believed that he should have cut the flow of supplies to Port Hudson and forced Gardner to abandon his defenses and attack. But to provoke a battle, Banks would have had to encircle the fortifications to prevent foodstuffs reaching the garrison from the east. Such a deployment would have jeopardized his army by stretching the 17,000 Federals along a seven-mile front. Gardner could have concentrated nearly 14,000 troops for an assault against a portion of Banks' line, or Confederate reinforcements from Mississippi could have attacked his rear or cut him off from Baton Rouge. And the military situation in Mississippi at that time almost ensured that sufficient force would be detached to relieve Port Hudson. Such speculation, however, neglects the fact that Banks had no intention of risking his army until he had received both reinforcements and the cooperation of the forces about Vicksburg.

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At Port Hudson the day after battle, soldiers and civilians alike rejoiced over the panic-stricken enemy retreat, although Sarah Morgan felt, "positively disappointed! I did want to see them soundly thrashed!"

The Port Hudson Echo advised General Banks "to get up a balloon expedition, and even then he would not be sure to drop in upon us unawares." The troops' confidence in themselves and their commander knew no bounds. No longer fearing an attack, Gardner allowed two-thirds of the troops to return to camp. The soldiers gathered up spent artillery projectiles, and Colonel I. G. W. Steedman obtained the captain's gig from the Mississippi, which furnished recreation for the officers of the 1st Alabama. But a sadness hung over the garrison that day as well, for the bodies of a woman and child were recovered from the creek where they had drowned while attempting to flee the


Although the passage of the *Hartford* and *Albatross* worried some in the garrison, Gardner expressed little concern. He believed the vessels would go the way of the *Queen of the West* and *Indianola*, a view shared by others. The threat of siege ended, Gardner changed the daily rations, issuing twice the rice, three times the peas, an additional quarter pound of meat, but reducing the corn-meal to one pound. This especially pleased the men because the quality of the beef also improved. The only item in short supply was corn. Gardner realized that Farragut would pass above the mouth of the Red River and requested Major General Richard Taylor to send steamboats loaded with corn when the danger had passed. Three transports arrived by the 19th and five more on the 20th, and the soldiers worked day and night.

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to unload the vessels.

Another brigadier drew assignment to Port Hudson in early March, but he came without troops. A Kentuckian, graduate of West Point, and veteran of the Mexican War, Abraham Buford owned a stock farm in his native state when the war broke out. He maintained the classic neutrality of his state until General Braxton Bragg led a Confederate army into Kentucky during the fall of 1862. Buford, even though he had two cousins who were generals in the Union army, cast his lot with the Confederacy. Appointed a brigadier general to rank from September 2, 1862, he apparently received Port Hudson as his first assignment. Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton had to find a position for him and finally conceived the idea of a mixed brigade of infantry and cavalry in Gardner's district. Gardner found such an arrangement ridiculous. "I respectfully represent that the cavalry are encamped at Olive Branch, 15 miles from here," he replied. "I do not understand how I can make a brigade

of infantry and cavalry," On the 15th Buford reported for duty, and Gardner formed a fifth infantry brigade for him to command, drawing units from the other brigades. The men easily identified him moving about camp because he weighed at least 300 pounds.

The 9th Louisiana Battalion Partisan Rangers skirmished with the enemy on the 15th and 16th. The troopers spent more time gathering items discarded by the enemy than fighting, which hardly reassured local residents. When Gardner learned on the 17th that the enemy had sent out strong detachments to gather cotton, he advanced Beall's and Maxey's brigades to disrupt the Federals and force Banks to develop his army. The Confederates expected a major engagement, but none took place. The infantry gathered so much livestock and equipment—reportedly fifteen wagon-loads abandoned by the Yankees in their flight—that Corporal John Wesley Powers concluded, "I think old Banks is about at his

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34. O.R., XV, 273; Taylor, Reluctant Rebel, 105. Buford's command was composed of the 10th Arkansas, 3rd and 7th Kentucky, and Edward's and Snodgrass' consolidated Alabama regiments. Watson's four-gun Louisiana battery provided the artillery.
wits end, and don't know what to do. You recollect Old Stonewall used to make a commissary [sic] of Banks, and now General Gardner has commenced making one of him, at least it looks very [sic] much so...."

Banks tried several times to communicate with Farragut across the intervening lowland west of the river. On the 17th, Colonel Theodore W. Parmele, with the 116th and 174th New York, a squadron of the 2nd Rhode Island Cavalry and a section of artillery, disembarked at Winter's plantation, three miles below Port Hudson on the west bank. After leading his command down the wrong road for two and a half miles and making his men march through waist-deep water, Parmele became frightened by reports from slaves of Confederate cavalry ahead and retreated to the landing. That night, Lieutenant David Jones, desiring action, took ten men of the 116th New York out and, without firing a shot, captured Captain J. W. Youngblood, commander of the Confederate signal corps, along with five of his signalmen.

and all their equipment.

Parmele apparently felt his force insufficient to reach Farragut, but Captains Charles F. Wadsworth and David W. Tuttle, believing Parmele "stampeded," volunteered to make an attempt. Their two companies of the 116th New York, accompanied by a company of cavalry and section of artillery, reached a point above Port Hudson. After a march of about eighteen miles, the expedition returned with about thirty horses, twenty cattle, plenty of poultry and a dozen prisoners. "We thus proved that the fears of our stampeded Colonel were groundless," Wadsworth concluded, "and that he could have accomplished his object if he had had the pluck." Of course Wadsworth had no way of knowing that Farragut had steamed northward on the 15th, thus making it impossible for Parmele to communicate with the admiral on the 17th. To foil another such attempt by the Federals, Gardner cut the levee up-river, and the resulting flood prevented any further crossing by infantry. The Yankees burned several buildings that night to vent their


frustration.

Disgusted by the failure of Parmele to communicate with Farragut, Banks, with an entire brigade, started up-river the on evening of the 18th. Steaming through the fog and darkness about ten miles above Baton Rouge, the Morning Light and Empire Parish passed through a crevasse in the levee and ran aground in a cane field, much to the amusement of the infantrymen and to the consternation of Banks. The vessels were freed during the day and proceeded to Winter's Plantation.

At 2 p.m. on the 19th Colonel Charles J. Faine struck out with the 2nd Louisiana (U.S.), the 174th New York and about twenty troopers of the 2nd Rhode Island Cavalry. The slaves welcomed the Federals with "God bless you all!" and


provided intelligence, but were poor judges of numbers and distance. High water forced Paine to leave his infantry at the crevasse, while he proceeded another four miles with the cavalrymen. Leaving detachments along the route, Paine, almost alone, reached the levee about two miles above Fort Hudson, but the Federal vessels were nowhere in sight. Paine's commander praised "his personal courage, military skill, and inomitable perseverance, [which] has almost individually accomplished the object for which hundreds of troops were deemed necessary." The Federals made two more attempts on the 20th and 24th. Both failed to contact Farragut, but the second expedition destroyed considerable property.

Banks finally abandoned the effort and ordered the troops to return to Baton Rouge on the 25th. The men burned more buildings before leaving the following day. Although the Federals had not contacted the admiral, their efforts did not go unrewarded. In addition to the property destroyed, the Federals reportedly shipped the following to Baton Rouge: $10,000 worth of copper, 183 hogsheads of sugar, 200 barrels of molasses, 100 horses plus numerous ponies, 109 beef cattle, 60 wagons and carts and 375

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40. O.R., XV, 266-67; Hepworth, Whip, Hoe and Sword, 259-60.
contrabands, including 200 men. This list does not include individual expropriations. Members of the 116th New York, for example, expropriated enough tobacco to last several months.

The Federal fleet below Fort Hudson repeatedly shelled the garrison during this entire time. On the 19th the Monongahela (with Banks aboard), Genesee and Essex engaged the enemy batteries for at least an hour at a range of 1200-1300 yards, and drove the Confederate transports from the landing. Shells from the Federal fleet interrupted the unloading of supplies for the next several days, but the Confederates did not return the fire. The naval fire did little damage, but the 100- and 200-pound Parrotts aboard the Genesee and Monongahela impressed the Confederates.

Private Robert D. Patrick noted,

They shoot with marvelous accuracy, and they have one gun of most extraordinary range...fully 6 miles from where they fire to where the shells fall about 100 yards from my quarters and occasionally one comes into the yard.

Steamboats docked at the wharves attracted deadly attention. Tiring of this consistent inconvenience from the

42. O.R., X V , 257; O.R.N., XX, 787; Memphis Daily Appeal, April 6, 1863; Howe, Passages of Howe, 42; Clark, One Hundred and Sixteenth New York, 66.

Federal fleet, Gardner established a landing on Thompson's Creek. He ordered each brigadier to detach his smallest regiment to the new site, where the men worked round-the-clock to unload the transports.

To add to Gardner's worries, Federal troops advanced up the railroad from New Orleans on the 23rd. The next day they drove the Southerners out of Ponchatoula. Confederate Lieutenant Colonel H. H. Miller fell back four miles and telegraphed for assistance. Pemberton rushed forward reinforcements from Mississippi, and Gardner sent troops from Port Hudson under Colonel J. M. Simonton. On the 28th the Federals fell back to a point eight miles south of Ponchatoula. Simonton arrived the night of the 30th, and the following day the Southerners advanced to attack the Federals. After observing the enemy's position, Simonton deemed an assault unwise. Garland's cavalry battalion deployed along the Amite River and Simonton remained in command at Ponchatoula.

To support the Federal move on Ponchatoula, Colonel Frank S. Nickerson made a diversion with the 14th Maine and

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44. O.R., XV, 279; [Gardner], S.O. No. 82, March 21, 1863, Chap. II, Vol. 198, Record Group 109; John A. Morgan to Sister, March 24 [1863], John A. Morgan Papers, Louisiana State University Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

three companies of cavalry. His expedition moved from the Mississippi River at Bonnet Carre, toward Springfield and Ponchatoula. Some of the Maine soldiers seized two flatboats on Bayou Manchac to ferry their regiment across the Amite River. Captain B. F. Bryan learned of the movement and led twenty-one Louisiana cavalrymen to a bluff adjacent to the Amite and about 100 yards below the mouth of the bayou. When the boats floated past about 10 p.m. on the 26th, the Louisianians opened fire and the Yankees jumped overboard, abruptly ending the diversion.

Following Banks' withdrawal from Port Hudson, the Confederates returned to their routine, improving the fortifications and drilling. The 22nd passed quietly, both sides apparently respecting the sabbath. The tranquility continued except for a violent storm during the night of the 23rd, and by the 24th the opposing pickets had resumed trading various commodities, both sides oblivious to the deadly conflict of the preceding week. President Jefferson Davis declared March 27 a day for fasting and prayer, and Gardner, wherever practical, suspended all details. By the end of the month rumors circulated that the Federals had given up all hope of taking Port Hudson and were even

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46. O.R., XV, 259, 281, 1062; Memphis Daily Appeal, March 30, April 15, 1863.
vacating Baton Rouge, but the Confederates were in for a surprise.

With Farragut above Port Hudson, Banks turned his attention to western Louisiana. He moved his headquarters to New Orleans on the 24th. Three days later he began shifting his troops to Donaldsonville for a march on Thibodaux. No shortage of cavalry or water transportation would delay his efforts to destroy or disperse Taylor's forces.

In a letter on March 13 explaining his situation, Banks requested Grant's cooperation. Grant offered an army corps if Banks could provide water transportation, and concluded, "The best aid you can give me, if you cannot pass Port Hudson, will be to hold as many of the enemy there as possible." Grant appeared eager to furnish the necessary manpower to capture Port Hudson, so that Banks could move to assist him. Grant expanded on the subject of reinforcements for Banks in a letter to Farragut, stating that he might be able to provide Banks with 20,000 men on the Red River, if the Lake Providence Canal could be completed.


49. Ibid., 301, 692-93.

50. Ibid., 300-301.
Separated by Confederate forces the two generals could send messages only by warship, making effective cooperation impossible. Farragut’s secretary, Edward C. Babaudan, committed Grant’s letters to memory and slipped past the batteries at Port Hudson in a skiff disguised as a tree. He made it to Banks’ headquarters at Brashear City on April 10, the exchange of views taking twenty-eight days. Banks immediately replied that he could cooperate with 15,000 men in a movement against Port Hudson by May 10. Babaudan returned to Baton Rouge, crossed the swamp opposite Port Hudson, and reached the Hartford on April 15. Grant received the message on May 2.

The strategic situation had changed drastically since Grant had first written Banks forty days before. By now he had a foothold east of the Mississippi below Vicksburg and saw no reason to delay his advance against that city. Consequently, he decided to retain all his troops for that movement and so notified Banks on May 10. He also requested Banks to bring all available troops to operate against Vicksburg. Banks received the message two days later at Alexandria, and for the first time could properly evaluate

the situation. Having dispersed Taylor's forces, he could
gain nothing by advancing beyond Alexandria. Limited
transportation would require weeks to move his army to
Vicksburg, and such a move might leave New Orleans open to
attack. Consequently, he chose to move against Port Hudson
and immediately set his troops in motion.

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Farragut's passage brought several changes to the
garrison. It provided an excuse for both Pemberton and
Gardner to retain cannon intended for the Trans-Mississippi
because navigation upon the Mississippi "was uncertain and
dangerous...." With water transportation to Bayou Sara
threatened, surplus patients at Port Hudson had to move
overland to hospitals in Clinton or Jackson, rather than to
Woodville.

The bombardment of the 14th had also kindled fear at
Port Hudson. The thought of impending death altered, for
example, attitudes toward religion by both black and white.

52. Greene, Mississippi, 223-25; O.R.N., XX, 788; Farragut,
"Passing Port Hudson," 320-21. Both generals sent other
messages that hindered, rather than helped, any possible
cooperation.


54. Lawrence L. Hewitt and Arthur W. Bergeron, Jr., eds.,
Post Hospital Ledger, Port Hudson, Louisiana, 1862-1863
(Baton Rouge: Le Comite des Archives de la Louisiane, 1981),
v.
To Chaplain J. H. McNeilly,

It was remarkable, the change that the bombardment made in many of the negroes. Before they were a careless, happy-go-lucky set, many of them quite profane. Afterwards they indulged largely in camp meeting songs, and one couldn't twist out an oath with a corkscrew.

Negro teamsters, cooks and others held prayer meetings at night. Private Albert Theodore Goodloe wrote in his diary on March 29, "I believe a revival has already commenced in our midst, and I praise God for it." Some soldiers formed social organizations to promote religion through prayer meetings and other services.

One procedure that did not change was the continued needless loss of foodstuffs. This waste took on added importance, because most supplies now moved overland from Osyka. Gardner was repeatedly severely criticized over the handling of stores at Port Hudson during late March and April. By the end of April rations on hand had diminished, and the garrison wondered how much longer provisions would hold.

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57. Ibid., 257-60.

Banks' movement west of the Mississippi prompted a Confederate redeployment. Gardner ordered Rust's brigade and most of Buford's to join Pemberton in early April. "Satisfied that the enemy will not make an immediate advance on this point," Gardner unsuccessfully requested an eighteen-day leave on the 7th. By the end of the month Gardner's force, including the garrison at Ponchatoula, numbered less than 12,000 effective troops—and he faced an unusual threat.

Gardner received word on April 24 of a new danger—Union cavalry moving south from Tennessee, possibly headed for Baton Rouge. He immediately ordered the 10th Arkansas and one company of the 9th Tennessee Battalion Cavalry to Tangipahoa. He also sent the 7th Texas, eighty troopers of the 9th Louisiana Battalion Partisan Rangers and two guns of Bledsoe's (Missouri) Battery to Woodville. Later that day he learned the enemy was "reportedly" moving on Woodville from Hazlehurst, and ordered the cavalry north of Clinton to advance on Woodville. Gardner continued to move units about during the next forty-eight hours in a vain endeavor to capture the Federals. Not until after 10 p.m. on April 30 did he learn that the enemy had doubled back.

60. O.R., XV, 1059.

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toward Osyka. Gardner correctly surmised the Federals were attempting to reach Baton Rouge, and he planned to cut them off at Williams' bridge on the Amite River.

While Garland's battalion of weary men and jaded horses and the exhausted Louisianians of Miles' Legion pursued the Federals, Gardner ordered troops from Port Hudson to seize the bridge. Colonel A. J. Brown moved with two regiments and a battery at 3 p.m. on May 1. The men bivouacked for the night at Olive Branch and arrived at the bridge at ten the next morning. But Brown had to notify Gardner, "We were unfortunately about 10 hours too late." Gardner promptly arrested Lieutenant Colonels George Gantt and C. C. Wilbourne, whose disobedience of orders largely enabled the enemy to escape. Instead of advancing to meet the Federals, they deployed their men to ambush the approaching enemy west of Hazlehurst; while they waited, the Federals doubled back.


Gardner also renewed his request for "a good cavalry commander." Gardner’s embarrassment increased when he learned that the Federals surprised Captain B. F. Bryan’s cavalry in camp and captured thirty-eight men before entering Baton Rouge. Bryan managed to escape by climbing a tree and lying flat upon a large limb while the Federals passed below.

The monotony at Baton Rouge was broken on the afternoon of May 2, when a lookout atop the Capitol sighted a heavy cloud of dust in the distance. Much to everyone’s surprise, it proved to be the 6th and 7th Illinois Cavalry, commanded by Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson. The troopers had successfully passed through 600 miles of enemy-held territory in less than sixteen days. The Federals went wild with enthusiasm and cheered the cavalrymen when they rode into town, the garrison amazed at the daring raid.

With Grant’s army having landed east of the Mississippi River below Vicksburg, Pemberton faced a threat much worse than Grierson’s cavalry. He ordered Gardner to gather all supplies possible from the west bank and send him


64. O.R., XXIV, pt. 1, pp. 537-38; Jennings, Plains, 63.

reinforcements. While a portion of the 1st Alabama collected and transported cattle, sheep and corn across the river with Federal vessels above and below Fort Hudson, Gardner began transferring units to Pemberton. Gregg's 3,300 troops marched on May 2. Two days later Pemberton telegraphed Gardner to move with Maxey's brigade. On May 6 Gardner forwarded Maxey's brigade, Colonel Brown's detachment, Miles' Legion and two cavalry companies, and ordered Colonel Simonton to move his command to Port Hudson. Gardner also relinquished command of the 3rd Military District to Brigadier General Beall. Small compensation for the thousands of departing infantrymen arrived on the 6th in the form of a cannon. Confederates salvaged the 4.62-inch rifled bronze gun from the U.S.S. Barataria, which the Federals had abandoned at the mouth of the Amite River on April 7. Clumsily mounted on a 24-pounder siege carriage, it was christened by the Confederates "The Baby."

While Grant held Confederate attention, the Federals

below Fort Hudson also became aggressive. Farragut returned to New Orleans via the Atchafalaya River and ordered the mortar boats to take up a position to shell Fort Hudson on May 5. The vessels opened on the 8th, commencing what amounted to a ritual during the nights ahead. The first fatality from the mortar fire took place the night of May 9 when a 13-inch shell struck a soldier standing in Battery No. 9 about the neck and pushed him head first through the wooden platform, leaving only his feet visible. During the afternoon of the 17th, a mortar shell buried itself in the earth below four lounging soldiers. The ensuing explosion killed three and wounded the fourth man. Adjusting to the bombardment was impossible, but it did not "cause a good soldier to flinch," concluded Lieutenant Howard C. Wright. "It has the tendency to make a man either a good Christian or a fatalist, according to his early training or latent religious belief."

On the night of May 9, Lieutenant Colonel de Gournay took four rifled cannon three miles down-river. At first light his men opened fire on the Essex and Richmond. The Confederates peppered the ships for almost two hours, until

67. [Wright], *Port Hudson*, 22-23; O.R.N., XX, 178-79, 791-92; Dabney to [Gardner], August 24, 1863, Louisiana Historical Association Collection, Manuscript Department, Special Collections Division, Tulane University Library, New Orleans, Louisiana; "Fortification and Siege of Port Hudson—Compiled by the Association of Defenders of Port Hudson; M. J. Smith, President; James Freret, Secretary," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, XIV (1886), p. 313.
their guns became disabled or their ammunition was expended. Commander C. H. B. Caldwell on board the *Essex* thought eight cannon had bombarded the vessels. The Southerners sustained some half-dozen casualties; the vessels suffered hardly at all. An attempt a few days later to destroy one of the vessels with a torpedo proved equally unsuccessful.

On May 2, Pemberton had recommended the evacuation of Port Hudson to Davis unless he received substantial reinforcements. But Davis replied on May 7: "To hold both Vicksburg and Port Hudson is necessary to a connection with Trans-Mississippi. You may expect whatever is in my power to do." Pemberton immediately ordered Gardner to "return with 2,000 troops to Port Hudson and hold it to the last. President says both places must be held."

Gardner resumed command on May 11 and gathered what forces remained. He ordered Colonel William R. Miles to return with his Legion and brought in all the infantry from Olive Branch except the 11th and 17th Arkansas. Captain Charles R. Purdy's Lake Providence Cadets (Company C) stayed to guard nearby Jackson when the remainder of the 4th

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Louisiana left for Mississippi. Receiving no orders, Purdy decided that his men would prove more valuable at Port Hudson, and he marched his company into the garrison.

On May 11 the 3rd Louisiana Native Guards marched from Baton Rouge to Monte Sano Bayou and commenced building bridges. Colonel N. A. M. Dudley led a brigade twelve miles out the Clinton Road the next day. After continual skirmishing for the last four miles, he withdrew to the Bayou Sara Road, leaving the 50th Massachusetts, two cannon and a cavalry squadron at the bridge across White’s Bayou. Supported by Grierson’s Illinois Cavalry, Dudley pushed up the Bayou Sara Road on the 13th. Severe skirmishing started before the column reached Plains Store, but Company A, 6th Illinois Cavalry, managed to reach the railroad, where the troopers destroyed 300 yards of track and cut the telegraph line to Clinton. The entire column then withdrew to Alexander’s and Merritt’s plantations on the Bayou Sara Road. Grierson’s troopers skirmished with the 9th Tennessee Battalion Cavalry at Redwood Creek Bridge on the Plank Road on the 14th, but the Federal infantry failed to advance. The Confederates reopened communications with Clinton May 71.

15, and the garrison rejoiced upon receiving several weeks back mail.

Twenty-four hours after he despaired over Grant's failure to provide reinforcements and his own inability to join Grant, Banks reversed himself. On May 13 he notified Farragut and Grant that he would move his army via Simmesport to Grand Gulf and link up with Grant. Consequently, he asked the admiral to leave the Hartford above Port Hudson while Augur moved to block the supposed Confederate evacuation. But later that day Banks again seemed indecisive. He sent Brigadier General William Dwight with a plea to Grant for reinforcements to enable him to quickly capture Port Hudson. Before contacting Grant however, Dwight sent word on the evening of the 16th that

...Port Hudson is evacuated except one Brigade...

...Move with all disposable force at once, immediately precipitately against Port Hudson... I will have a Corps on the way to aid you soon—Very soon—But you will need only half your force [sic] much less aid, to capture Port Hudson.

Dwight failed to keep his promise, but Banks, acting upon


73. Dwight to [Banks], May 16, 1863, 8:30 p.m., original in author's collection; O.R., XV, 731-32; O.R.N., XX, 178; Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 157.
Dwight's suggestion and the advice of his chief of staff and his adjutant, changed his plans once again--he would move upon Port Hudson immediately.

"The enemy are coming, but mark you, many a one will get to hell before he does to Port Hudson."

Once Banks committed himself, he rapidly deployed his forces to achieve his goal—a swift capture of Port Hudson and a junction with Grant. On May 14 three divisions started from Alexandria to Simmesport. The men began crossing the Atchafalaya on the 19th and landed at Bayou Sara at 2 a.m. on the 22nd. If these troops could link up east of Port Hudson with two divisions moving northward from Baton Rouge and New Orleans, the Confederate garrison at Port Hudson would find itself isolated.

To thwart Banks' planned encirclement, Gardner on May 18 sent three companies of the 1st Alabama across the river to prevent enemy communication across the point. When the first company landed at the junction of the Mississippi and False River levees, the twenty-five Alabamians found

themselves face-to-face with the enemy—five companies of Union cavalry who had ridden down the west bank on a reconnaissance to clear out the Confederates who shipped supplies across the river. The troopers attacked immediately and drove the Southerners back. When the rest of their companies arrived, the Confederates advanced, but the enemy had vanished. The initial encounter had convinced the Federals that they faced an overwhelming force. With their commander drunk and five miles in the rear, the troopers fled with all the cattle and twenty-eight prisoners. The Alabamians returned to the east bank on the 21st.

An attack on his cavalry pickets that night on the Bayou Sara road convinced Union Colonel N. A. M. Dudley to make a reconnaissance in full force the following day. The Northerners drove Stockdale's Mississippian over seven miles to a point north of Plains Store, and then countermarched to Merritt's Plantation, where Dudley requested reinforcements from Major General Christopher C.

Augur. Colonel Frank P. Powers brought additional cavalry to assist Captain T. R. Stockdale. Some 300 Southerners deployed south of the store and placed two 6-pound howitzers in the road.

Both sides sent reinforcements to the Bayou Sara road on the 20th. Augur joined Dudley with Chapin's brigade and prepared to advance the next morning. Gardner sent Major Erastus L. Black with 300 infantry from various regiments and Abbay's five-gun battery to assist Powers.

A message from General Joseph E. Johnston reached Gardner on May 21. Written on the 19th, it ordered Gardner to "evacuate Port Hudson forthwith...." Gardner, recalling the words of President Davis, was determined to fight instead. He shot back: "...a large force...is moving down to cross at Bayou Sara against this place. His whole force from Baton Rouge is in my front. I am very weak and should


4. [Augur], G.O. No. 1, May 20, 1863, Roll 348, Microcopy 619, Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General (Main Series), 1861-1870, National Archives Microfilm Publications, Washington, D.C.; Dabney to [Gardner], August 24, 1863, Louisiana Historical Association Collection, Manuscript Department, Special Collections Division, Tulane University Library, New Orleans, Louisiana. Hereinafter cited as LHA Collection; Claud Estes, comp., List of Field Officers, Regiments and Battalions in the Confederate States Army, 1861-1865 (Macon, Georgia: The J. W. Burke Company, 1912), p. 13; Little Rock Arkansas Gazette, October 25, 1936, mag. sect., 3.


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be rapidly re-enforced." Johnston telegraphed on the 23rd to avoid an investment and save the troops, but by then it was too late.

After a meager, beefless breakfast, Augur's division moved out at six o'clock on the morning of the 21st, with Dudley's brigade in the lead. Three companies of the 30th Massachusetts met stiff resistance when they clashed with Powers's forces three-quarters of a mile south of Plains Store about 10 a.m. The Federals deployed two guns, but after thirty minutes failed to silence the enemy's cannon. Eventually eight guns joined the bombardment, but the Northerners still could not muffle the opposing battery, which continued to hold them at bay. To end the deadlock, Augur moved two regiments through the woods to the east. Before these units could outflank the Southerners, however, the latter had to retreat about noon, their ammunition expended. Augur's men resumed their advance to the store, where they deployed to await the arrival of Banks. One section of Battery G advanced on the road leading to Port

7. Ibid., 482.
Hudson, the other on the road leading to Bayou Sara.

Powers reformed his command near the railroad. Their ammunition replenished, the Confederates swept southward along the Bayou Sara road that afternoon, most of the troopers fighting on foot. The 174th New York rushed to support the 2nd Vermont Battery, which had deployed 200 yards north of the store, and the struggle continued. The Southerners pushed the Federals back, but the Vermonter's, firing canister, finally managed to halt the onslaught and repulse Powers' assault.

At noon, Gardner dispatched Colonel William R. Miles with 400 infantry and Boone's Battery to assist Powers. Two companies of the 15th Arkansas picketed the road to Port Hudson. During the afternoon they skirmished with enemy cavalry moving westward from Plains Store until Colonel Miles arrived and quickly dispersed the troopers.

Lieutenant Colonel F. B. Brand took three companies of the


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Legion south of the road, while Major James T. Coleman took two companies on a wide detour through the woods on the north. Coleman's Louisianians emerged from an apple orchard on the flank of the enemy's cannon, and the major ordered his men to charge--right into an overwhelming force. Their sheer audacity startled the 48th Massachusetts, which supported the artillery. Lieutenant Colonel James O'Brien mistakenly attempted to wheel his inexperienced regiment to face the rear. Although the 48th had withstood enemy artillery fire earlier, the new threat threw them into confusion and they fled in disgrace to the rear. Their support routed, the U.S. regulars attempted to save their cannon. They managed to remove one gun, but the Confederates shot the horses and drivers of the second piece and seized it.

About 3 p.m., while the 116th New York and 49th Massachusetts stacked arms in the field southeast of the intersection, the men heard firing in the direction of Port Hudson. One of Dudley's staff officers appeared with an order for Colonel Edward P. Chapin to send the 116th New York to the front. Chapin refused, saying, with some sarcasm, that he had learned neither of Augur's death nor of

Augur's relinquishing command of the division to Dudley. Suddenly a member of Augur's staff rode up and ordered Chapin to lead two regiments via a wagon path northwest to support the guns on the Port Hudson road.

The 49th Massachusetts and 116th New York had moved but a short distance when they received a volley of musketry at point-blank range from Brand's Louisiana. Simultaneously, the panic-stricken members of the 48th Massachusetts burst into the ranks of the 49th, throwing the men of both upon the 116th New York. Major George M. Love shouted "stand fast," and the New Yorkers held firm while the rabble fled to the rear. The 116th then advanced a short distance, where Augur deployed the men in line of battle.

No sooner had the soldiers executed the order than a volley of musketry swept their rear. The New Yorkers simply faced about and exchanged some twenty or thirty rounds with the enemy. Augur faced a desperate situation. With few exceptions, none of his troops had combat experience, and only his calm, determined manner helped ease their fear. Finally, Augur asked Love if his regiment could manage a charge. Love replied, "The One Hundred and Sixteenth will

do anything you order them to." Augur instructed him to advance. Love relayed the message to each captain, and he took position at the center of the regiment. Leading the charge twenty paces in advance of the line, Love waved his men on with his hat. The New Yorkers surged forward, shouting demonic yells. The Confederates retreated 300 yards across an open field and into another patch of woods, just west of a graveyard. There the Southerners wheeled about and returned fire. The 116th exchanged a few rounds before Augur ordered a second charge, forcing the Confederates back a second time. Facing encirclement, Miles managed to outflank the enemy's left with two guns of Boone's Battery. Lieutenant E. P. Harmanson handled the cannon so effectively that he halted the Federal onslaught and enabled Miles to withdraw in good order. Lacking horses, Coleman had to abandon the captured cannon. The fighting at an end on this portion of the field, the New Yorkers scoured the woods and brought in about seventy prisoners, mostly of French origin, who expressed their

13. Ibid., 76-79, 82.

14. [Chapin] to [Augur], May 23, 1863, Augur Papers; [Howard C. Wright], Port Hudson: Its History From An Interior Point of View As Sketched From the Diary of An Officer (St. Francisville, La.: St. Francisville Democrat, 1937), p. 25; Andrew B. Booth, Records of Louisiana Confederate Soldiers and Louisiana Confederate Commands, 4 books in 3 vols. (New Orleans: n.p., 1920), III, bk. 1, p. 191; [Wright], Port Hudson, 24-25.
loyalty for the Union by crying "Vive la Republic." The 116th also picked up the abandoned colors of the 49th Massachusetts.

As Powers and Miles were attempting to disengage, Logan’s Arkansans advanced from the southeast and struck a train of some fifty wagons strung out along the Bayou Sara road in the Federal rear. Eight companies of the 21st Maine advanced to meet them and soon forced the Southerners to withdraw to Olive Branch. Black’s infantry, dragging some of Abbay’s cannon by hand, joined Miles, and together they returned to Port Hudson. Powers’ cavalry withdrew to Freeman’s Plantation, on the road to Clinton.

Both sides congratulated themselves and licked their wounds. Despite the duration and ferocity of the battle, casualties only amounted to about 100 on either side. A flag-of-truce the following afternoon allowed the Confederates to remove their dead and gave the Northerners a

15. Clark, One Hundred and Sixteenth New York, 79-80; Johns, Forty-ninth Massachusetts, 212.


chance to look over the battlefield. The two-story structure that stood at the crossroads attracted the most attention. The first floor contained a drug store and post office; a masonic lodge occupied the upper level. Several artillery rounds struck the building, one bursting open the door of the masons' hall.

While the Battle of Plains Store raged, Gardner inspected the garrison. Customarily, he rode unattended. As he listened to the distant firing, his face reddened and his eyes glowed. The cannoneers at the river batteries knew at a glance that he desired combat. After confirming their readiness, he pointed toward the fighting and said, "The enemy are coming, but mark you, many a one will get to hell before he does to Port Hudson."

Banks also heard the firing at Plains Store. Worried that the Confederates might escape, the general hastened to complete the encirclement. On May 22 the curses of Southern women and a driving rain storm accompanied Grover's division southward from Bayou Sara until it linked up with Grierson's

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cavalry, whereupon Grover's men bivouacked south of Thompson's Creek. Paine's division camped about one mile in Grover's rear at the Perkins' plantation. Grierson's troopers occupied the intersection of the Port Hudson and Jackson and Baton Rouge and Bayou Sara roads. Augur's men blocked the road leading from Port Hudson to Clinton via Plains Store. Sherman's division disembarked at Springfield Landing and marched to the Bayou Sara road, where it deployed on Augur's left, blocking any Confederate escape toward Baton Rouge. Thus, by the evening of the 22nd, the Federals effectively besieged the garrison of Port Hudson. The following day, the 110th and 162nd New York, two guns of the 6th Massachusetts Battery and two companies of cavalry occupied the west bank. Together with the naval vessels above and below, Banks felt this force sufficient to block any escape to the west.

Banks continued to tighten his encirclement until the night of the 26th. Weitzel's division moved south on the Telegraph Road with Paine's on its left. Grover's marched southwest on the Jackson road, Augur's east on the Clinton road and Sherman's northwest on the Baton Rouge road. Banks

had to slow his approach the closer he came to his foe, particularly because of the stubborn resistance on his right flank. Gardner had reinforced Confederate pickets in that area until Colonel I. G. W. Steedman had nearly 1,000 men deployed from Big Sandy Creek on the west to near the Jackson road on the east, the line generally running one-half mile north of the mill. These troops, drawn from almost every unit in the Port Hudson garrison, bought Gardner the precious time he needed to complete his northern defenses. He placed Steedman in command of the left wing, consisting of the 1st Alabama (six companies), 10th, 15th and 18th Arkansas, 39th Mississippi, Herod's, Bradford's (one section) and Watson's (one section) batteries, the 9th Louisiana Battalion Partisan Rangers and the provost guard battalion. Some 2,400 men covered one-third, or one and 21 one-half miles, of the defenses.

 Brigadier General Beall commanded the center, occupied by the 49th Alabama, 1st Battalion, 12th, 14th, 16th, 23rd

21. O.R., XXVI, pt. 1, p. 501; Homer B. Sprague, History of the 13th Infantry Regiment of Connecticut Volunteers, during the Great Rebellion (Hartford, Conn.: Case, Lockhead & Co., 1867), pp. 136-37; Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 166; Steedman to [Gardner], [n.d.], Steedman to [Gardner], [n.d.], Provision Returns for May 1863, Entry 138, Record Group 109; Mobile Advertiser and Register, August 9, 1863; Miles to [Gardner], May 26, 1863, Shelby to [Gardner], August 5, 1863, LHA Collection; O.R., XXVI, pt. 1, p. 156, pt. 2, p. 10; [Wright], Fort Hudson, 25-26. Confederate troop figures are based on incomplete returns and provision records and include those too sick to perform their duties, roughly twenty percent at the time of investment.
and detachments of the 11th and 17th Arkansas, 1st Mississippi, and Abay’s, Watson’s (two sections) and Bradford’s (one section) batteries. His command also defended one-third of the line, but made up forty-three percent (3,200 men) of the garrison. Undoubtedly, Gardner felt that both flanks could readily draw on the center for reinforcements.

Gardner placed the right wing under Colonel Miles. In addition to his Legion, Miles had the 9th Louisiana Battalion, Boone’s battery (six guns), Roberts’ battery (two sections) and three makeshift battalions; one composed of fragments of Maxey’s and Gregg’s brigade, one of surplus artillerymen of de Gournay’s battalion and one of parts of the 4th and 30th Louisiana. With some 1200 infantry and 250 cannoneers, Miles had to defend one-third of the breastworks with one-fifth the manpower. It was no small task. Four hundred cannoneers manned the heavy artillery, leaving only a single relief crew for each gun.

Gardner also had some 1200 troops operating in Banks’ rear. This force consisted of all the cavalry, with the exception of most of the 9th Louisiana Battalion Partisan

22. [Wright], Port Hudson, 26.


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Rangers, under command of Colonel Powers, and Colonel John Griffith's 11th and 17th Consolidated Arkansas mounted infantry. Colonel John Logan had overall command of these forces. Gardner had welcomed Logan's suggestion to mount his men, but vehemently opposed taking horses "from carriages whilst persons were at church or from minors without their consent...." Logan also had two guns of Roberts' Battery.

Gardner originally had expected a besieging army to advance only from the south, and so had no fortifications on the northern sector west of Little Sandy Creek. Thinking the area safe, particularly during periods of high water, the Confederates had built their grist mill and ordnance shops there. While the 9th Louisiana Battalion Partisan Rangers attempted to delay the enemy's advance from Bayou Sara, Gardner hurried to secure his vulnerable left flank. Steedman's troops hastily fortified the high ground immediately south of Little Sandy Creek and choked the ravines with felled timber. Trenches dug behind logs and


fence rails, with the excavated dirt thrown in front, provided rifle pits. To safeguard the vital mill, Gardner built a lunette north of the stream, where the creek made a wide detour to the south. On the night of the 25th Gardner sent all available tools and slaves to his chief engineer, Lieutenant Frederick Y. Dabney. By daylight of the 26th Dabney had the works laid out. The men worked rapidly. By the next morning rifle-pits and redoubts protected the most exposed points of Steedman's line. The Southerners also strengthened the existing fortifications, with the men working five hours in the morning and five in the afternoon.

Gardner removed several of the heavy cannon from the river bluff to provide more firepower along the land defenses. The Southerners positioned one rifled 24-pounder in the center of Steedman's line to sweep a ravine where a road provided a good means of approach for the enemy, and a second near Bennett's house; a third went to Slaughter's

26. "Diary of Ford," May 23, 1863; Map of Port Hudson and its defences, drawn by Major J. de Baun (9th Louisiana Battalion Partisan Rangers), Camp Moore State Commemorative Area, State of Louisiana Office of State Parks, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, Tangipahoa, Louisiana; [Wright], Port Hudson, 25-26; Mobile Advertiser and Register, August 9, 1863; Lawrence L. Hewitt, ed., A Place Named...Desperate! (Baton Rouge: VAAPR, Inc., 1982), p. 1; "Fortification and Siege of Port Hudson—Compiled by the Association of Defenders of Port Hudson; M. J. Smith, President; James Freret, Secretary," Southern Historical Society Papers, XIV (1886), p. 318; [Gardner], Circular, May 23, 1863, LHA Collection.
field. They moved two 24-pounder smoothbores to the intersection of the railroad and breastworks, the 30-pound Parrott to the extreme right of the land defenses, and the "Baby" went to the redan on the Jackson road. The men mounted quaker guns—wood shaped and painted to resemble cannon—in the vacant positions along the river. Faced with the impossibility of forwarding cannon and ammunition to the Trans-Mississippi, Gardner acquired a sizeable amount of both. This formidable increase in armament consisted of a 4.62-inch Brooke, two 12-pound Blakely and two small breechloading guns.

Soon, the Federals began showing signs of aggression on Gardner's center and right. On May 24 the navy stepped up its bombardment of Miles's sector for two and one-half hours. The shelling killed three men and wounded three others but did little damage to the fortifications. Along Beall's sector on the 25th, the artillery dueled at long-range. Miles' artillery fire sufficed to disperse two advances against the Confederate right. Shortly thereafter a white flag appeared, and the Northerners immediately began removing their dead and wounded. When Miles sent two

27. [Wright], Port Hudson, 26; "Fortification and Siege," 318; McMorries, First Alabama, 62; Smith to Gardner, October 23, 1863, Shelby to [Gardner], August 5, 1863, LHA Collection; Photograph #77-F-133-98-1, showing a 4.62-inch Brooke rifled cannon, National Archives, Washington D.C.; John W. Robison to wife, April 16, 1863, John Wesley Robison Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; "Fortification and Siege," 326.
officers to receive the flag, the Federals withdrew, violating the rules of war. Colonel Edward Prince moved down the west bank of Thompson's Creek with the 7th Illinois Cavalry and a section of the 1st Illinois Battery. Under orders to block any escape in that direction, Prince seized two steamboats that had anchored in the creek to escape the Union fleet.

The enemy dashed Confederate expectations of an assault on the 26th. Scarcely a cannon fired during the day, and the Southerners found everything ominously quiet. They worked on the fortifications well into the night and collapsed behind the trenches, sleeping on their weapons. Only the song of the whippoorwill broke the stillness while some of the men, too nervous to sleep, pondered what would come on the morrow.

Meanwhile, Banks completed his assault preparations. The troops posted on the Plank Road received orders to join the investing force. Signal stations located high in trees enabled a semblance of rapid communication along the investing line. Company K, 42nd Massachusetts, constructed a 280-foot pontoon bridge where the Telegraph Road (running


29. McMorries, First Alabama, 62; Dabney to [Gardner], August 24, 1863, LHA Collection; "Fortification and Siege," 319.
to Bayou Sara) crossed Big Sandy Creek. Cannoneers replenished their ammunition and deployed their guns while officers spent the day reconnoitring. A detachment of the 128th New York drove Confederate pickets from Slaughter's house and burned the plantation buildings, which impeded Union artillery fire. For filling the trenches before the breastworks, the men made fascines of bundles of branches bound with grape vines. Each bundle measured eight feet long and one foot wide, and weighed from fifteen to thirty pounds. A call for volunteers for a storming party met overwhelming response from the men eager for the coming fray.

The Federals remained on edge throughout the night of the 26th. After completing their work that day, many soldiers cried as they penned what might be their last letters to loved ones. Unlike their opponents, the Northerners found the evening extremely noisy, especially on the right where the artillery bombardment kept the pickets awake. Twice that night one regiment mistook stampeding...

mules for an enemy cavalry attack and fired into their comrades.

A council-of-war took place at Riley's Plantation on the evening of the 26th. Opinions about an assaultvaried drastically. Those opposed apparently included Augur and Brigadier Generals Godfrey Weitzel and Thomas W. Sherman. But Banks had made up his mind the previous day and would not be swayed by his subordinates. He felt that he must attack promptly because of the uncertainty of Grant's situation in Mississippi.

Banks' confidence in making a successful attack was not unfounded. He had an overwhelming advantage in men, his 30,000 outnumbering the enemy four-to-one. Excluding the navy, his artillery was superior both in quantity and quality. Although many of his soldiers had not fought a major engagement, his officers were seasoned.

Most of his top subordinates had both military education and combat experience. Weitzel, Cuvier Grover,


Augur, and Sherman had graduated from West Point. Graduating second in his class, Weitzel performed engineering duties until 1862, when he commanded at the Battle of Thibodeaux in August. Grover had fought in the Seven Days' and at Second Manassas (August 1862). Augur had seen action in the Mexican War and at the Battle of Cedar Mountain (August 1862), where he received a severe wound. At eighteen, Sherman walked from Rhode Island to Washington, D.C., to secure his appointment to the military academy from President Andrew Jackson. He served in the Mexican War and successfully commanded the expedition that captured Port Royal, South Carolina, in 1861. William Dwight had attended West Point, but "was discharged...for deficiency in studies" in his senior year. He proved himself at the Battle of Williamsburg the previous spring, however, where his regiment suffered fifty percent casualties. Dwight was wounded, left for dead and captured. Halbert Eleazer Paine entered the war as colonel of the 4th Wisconsin. In July 1861, while moving his regiment to the front, he declined to transport his soldiers in cattle cars. Instead, he armed his men with pickaxes and seized the next suitable train. He saw minor action in Louisiana and commanded the
successful evacuation of Baton Rouge.

Banks' staff and artillery officers had equally impressive credentials. His chief of staff, chief quartermaster, chief commissary, chief engineer, chief of ordnance and chief of artillery were all alumni of West Point. A majority of the artillery battalion commanders, in addition to several battery officers, had attended the academy or experienced combat.

Twelve men commanded brigades in the army advancing on Fort Hudson. Apparently only one, Oliver P. Gooding, ever attended West Point. Edward Payson Chapin had distinguished himself the preceding year during the Peninsula Campaign, where he received a serious wound. Franklin Stillman Nickerson fought at the Battle of Baton Rouge. Benjamin Henry Grierson had shown his worth by his famous raid just a few weeks earlier, and the others had experienced varying amounts of combat. Regimental commanders included at least one graduate of West Point and several seasoned


35. Cullum, Biographical Register, II, 47, 247, 278, 346-47, 373, 418, 538, 552; Warner, Generals in Blue, 10.
veterans. William Francis Bartlett always commanded the 48th Massachusetts on horseback because he had lost a leg the previous year at the Battle of Yorktown. Possibly even more important, Banks' officers and men felt confident.

But the commander made one mistake—the day selected for the assault. Even taking into account the stiff resistance, Banks' troops should have deployed for an assault no later than the evening of May 25. Had he advanced the following morning, the Federals probably could have crushed Steedman's forces and taken Beall and Miles in reverse. Banks' caution provided Gardner with an additional twenty-four hours to construct fortifications along Little Sandy Creek. After the evening of the 26th, success would hinge on a coordinated assault based on accurate knowledge of the terrain. Banks could have greatly enhanced his chances of victory had he delayed a day or two and obtained sufficient knowledge of what faced him. Yet, lacking the necessary information that night, he went ahead and ordered the assault for the next morning.

Sherman held the left, then Augur, Grover and Weitzel. In addition to his own brigade, Weitzel's command included

one brigade of Grover's division under Dwight, seven regiments under Paine, and two Negro regiments under Colonel John A. Nelson. The entire line would assault the fortifications simultaneously. The nature of the ground, however, determined that the right wing would advance first. There the Federals would have to drive the foe through wooded hills and ravines, then over precipitous terrain rendered virtually impassable by felled timber, before they could even see the fortifications. In contrast, their comrades on the center and left generally had only cleared fields separating them from the enemy. Consequently, Paine and Dwight had to deploy at 3 a.m. Pioneers would follow the infantry and clear a route for the artillery. Unfortunately for Union forces, Banks failed to specify a time for a simultaneous assault along the entire line. Rather, he instructed his commanders "to take instant advantage of any favorable opportunity,...afford mutual aid and avoid mistakes...[and] commence at the earliest hour practicable." The order concluded: "Port Hudson must be taken to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII

"The valley of the shadow of death."

It was early on May 27 that Colonel I. G. W. Steedman completed what preparations he could make to meet the impending Union onslaught. He sent four companies of the 1st Alabama to strengthen Lieutenant Colonel M. B. Locke's ad hoc command occupying the woods almost a mile north of the mill. But this reinforcement failed to match the detachments that returned to the fortifications, and Locke had only some 500 infantrymen and no artillery to buy the Confederates additional time to organize their defenses. Steedman's main concern was acquiring additional cannon to sweep the ravines, which provided the easiest access to the fortifications. Captain James Madison Sparkman moved two 12-pound Blakleys to Commissary Hill and deployed at the edge of the ravine, where only some bushes lent protection. The men quickly fashioned an abatis of beech and magnolia
trees and limbs.

The mortar vessels shelled the garrison throughout the night, but the battle proper opened about 5:30 a.m. Federal land batteries commenced a fierce, one-hour bombardment of the Confederate center and right, as an ominous silence prevailed on Steedman's front. The upper and lower fleets approached the fortress and began firing around 7 a.m., but ceased an hour later for fear of injuring their comrades ashore. Their brief participation proved ineffective.

Union Brigadier General Godfrey Weitzel formed his men in a column of brigades. Dwight's division headed the advance, Van Zandt's three regiments leading off, supported by Thomas' four. Paine's division followed, Fearing's four regiments in front and Gooding's three in the rear. Steedman's 1,700 infantrymen faced an overwhelming force. The fourteen Federal regiments encompassed at least 6,000 soldiers, ranging from the 8th Vermont, about 900 strong, to


the 298 members of the 8th New Hampshire. Even so, the
column moved forward considerably reduced. Absent from the
field were two regiments of Brigadier General William Dwight
and an entire brigade of Brigadier General Halbert E. Paine.
The 53rd Massachusetts, 160th New York and the 4th Wisconsin
each entered the battle with two companies detached.

Weitzel began his advance about 6 a.m. During the next
hour, the fight raged with great severity while Colonel
Jacob Van Zandt pushed the Confederates back through the
forest and ravines. Although heavily outnumbered, Locke
held his ground until the enemy threatened both his flanks,
at which point he withdrew to the fortifications. Both
sides lost frightfully for what amounted to a skirmish.
Locke lost nearly 200 men killed, wounded or missing,
including one colonel captured—forty percent of his

3. Richard B. Irwin, History of the Nineteenth Army Corps
(New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893), p. 169; Edward
Cunningham, The Port Hudson Campaign: 1862-1863 (Baton
John M. Stanyan, A History of the Eighth Regiment of New
Hampshire Volunteers . . . (Concord, N.H.: Ira C. Evans,
1892), p. 245; George W. Carter, "The Fourth Wisconsin
Infantry at Port Hudson," War Papers Read Before the
Commandery of the State of Wisconsin, Military Order of the
Loyal Legion of the United States, III (Milwaukee: Burdick &
Allen, 1903), p. 227; E. B. Quiner, The Military History of
Wisconsin . . . (Chicago: Clarke & Co., 1866), p. 503;
Henry A. Willis, The Fifty-third Regiment Massachusetts
Volunteers: Comprising also a History of The Siege of Port
121; Edward H. Sentell, Diary, May 27, 1863, Sentell Family
Papers, New York Historical Society, New York City, New
York.
command.

But the Union column had become disarrayed. The farther south the Federals advanced, the more they drifted to the west, trying to keep their right flank anchored on Big Sandy Creek, which meandered southwesterly. Dense woods and steep ravines broke battle lines. To press the attack, Thomas' troops passed through the gaps of Van Zandt's exhausted and widely dispersed men. By the time the Federals gained the crest north of Little Sandy Creek any sense of organization above the regimental level had vanished. And scores of blue-clad infantrymen, confused and separated from their officers, advanced no further.

At the edge of the woods lining the crest the Federals came to a halt, finally beholding their objective. Before them lay the valley of Little Sandy Creek, broken by small hillocks and ravines, in places dense with pines and magnolias, in others interlaced with branches of felled trees—a formidable abatis. Sharpshooters sniped away from the protective cover of the gullies and trees. Beyond the basin lay the opposite crest, crowned with the yellow dirt of unfinished earthworks, behind which the Federals could

4. O.R., XXVI, pt. 1, 530; Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 169-70; "Fortification and Siege," 319-20; Dabney to [Gardner], August 24, 1863, Louisiana Historical Association Collection, Manuscript Department, Special Collections Division, Tulane University Library, New Orleans, Louisiana. Hereinafter cited as LHA Collection.

5. Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 170.
see the garrison’s tents, shanties and warehouses, and the church and dwellings of the village. The only unobstructed route through the bottom was a wagon path leading straight into the blazing guns of the battery atop Commissary Hill.

First to respond to the challenge, Lieutenant Colonel Willoughby Babcock drew his sword and dashed ahead of the 75th New York shouting, "Come On!" Corporal John D. Mathews leapt forward, replying, "Here goes the Colonel, boys, we won’t leave the Colonel! Charge!" Their crossing over the rugged, obstructed valley soon dispersed the 75th into squads. The regiments that followed met with a similar fate, and something resembling an unorganized mob struggled toward the breastworks, their number growing ever smaller as the less steadfast members dropped out to the safety of some inviting crevass.

The Confederates stood in wait, Steedman stationing himself at the battery upon Commissary Hill. Through a telescope he watched his men withdraw and the enemy move to positions along the heights north of the creek. Steedman warned the newly arrived gunners of the 15th Arkansas beyond the creek. Lieutenant Jesse B. Edrington joined in the

7. Ibid., 114, 257.
8. Ibid., 114, 265.
9. Ibid., 114.
bombardment with two 12-pound howitzers stationed in the advanced lunette. The gunners soon obtained the range and exploded numerous shells amongst the advancing enemy. Their accurate fire caused much confusion, and Steedman watched the Yankees "mowed down in whole ranks, their lines...soon broken, yet undismayed they rushed down the hill...." Using felled trees and ravines for cover, some of the Federals approached within easy range of the rifle pits.

Pioneers followed the advancing blue-clad infantry to open roads through the woods for the artillery. The cannon soon rolled up, and the artillerists unlimbered their pieces along the crest. The Confederate gunners swiftly directed their fire at the guns of five enemy batteries. The Southerners had nailed white crosses to trees on the opposite ridge to mark the range. They zeroed in on a section of the 1st Maine Battery when it wheeled into position, leaving one soldier dead and twelve wounded along side thirteen dead horses. Premature discharge of another Confederate cannon hurled a rammer toward Battery F, 1st United States Artillery. Just before it reached the battery it struck a tree. Ricocheting off, the whirling staff killed five or six Federals. But it was Company A of that

10. Mobile Advertiser and Register, August 9, 1863; Garrett and Lightfoot, Maury County, 62; "Fortification and Siege," 320; Lawrence L. Hewitt, ed., A Place Named...Desperate! (Baton Rouge: VAAPR, Inc., 1982), pp. 1, 6.

regiment that suffered the most. The Confederates quickly
dismounted two of its guns, killed two men and fifteen
horses and wounded a lieutenant and eleven men.

Yet the deadly precision of the Confederate gunners' succeeded only in diverting Federal artillery fire from the
retreating gray-clad infantry. Captain Edmund C.
Bainbridge's U.S. regulars unlimbered the six guns of
Battery A next to the 6th Massachusetts' four cannon at the
edge of the woods, 400 yards from the lunette manned by the
15th Arkansas. Together, the two batteries quickly silenced
Edrington's guns. A shell struck the wheel of one cannon;
the explosion killed the lieutenant, wounded two of his men
and disabled the piece. The colonel of the 15th, Benjamin
W. Johnson, withdrew the remaining gun to a secure place,
where the remaining cannoneers double loaded it with
13 canister to cover his vulnerable left flank and rear.

Yankee gunners managed to knock out almost every gun on
Commissary Hill. Captain Sparkman jumped atop the breastwork:

12. Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 171; Stanyan, Eighth New
Hampshire, 225-26; William E. S. Whitman and Charles H.
True, Maine in the War for the Union: A History of the Part
Borne by Maine Troops in the Suppression of the American
387; Diary of Elon P. Spink, May 27, 1863 (typescript copy
in author's possession); William L. Haskin, comp., The
History of the First Regiment of Artillery from its
Organization in 1821, to January 1st, 1876 (Portland, Me.: B.

13. Garrett and Lightfoot, Maury County, 62; Hewitt,
Desperate!, iv-v, 5-6.
to see if he had correctly cut the fuse to explode the shell directly over the enemy's battery. When he did so, a shell fragment killed him by driving his powder flask into his groin. Another shell cut one soldier in two, tore the leg off another, and stunned several more. Artillery projectiles also riddled the large granary just to the right of the battery.

Three companies of the 12th Connecticut worked their way forward toward Commissary Hill. Dispersed among the fallen trees and firing as sharpshooters, they soon compelled the gunners to lie behind the parapet. The guns silenced, some of the Federals seized a ditch from which they poured an enfilading fire upon the battery. Confederate efforts to oust the Yankees proved costly and futile.

The assaulting force hit hardest Major Samuel L. Knox's six companies of the 1st Alabama and two companies of provost guards. The Alabamians stood five feet apart and

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14. Dabney to [Gardner], August 24, 1863, LHA Collection; Garrett and Lightfoot, Maury County, 62-63.

Illustration No. III

MAY 27: MORNING ASSAULT
LEGEND

A. Three companies, 1st Louisiana (U.S.)
B. 75th New York
C. 8th Vermont
D. Eight companies, 160th New York
E. 131st New York
F. 91st New York
G. Seven companies, 1st Louisiana (U.S.)
H. 133rd New York
I. Eight companies, 4th Wisconsin
J. 8th New Hampshire
K. 159th New York
L. 25th Connecticut
M. 12th Maine
N. 38th Massachusetts
O. 31st Massachusetts
P. 156th New York
Q. Three companies, 12th Connecticut
R. 24th Connecticut
S. 13th Connecticut
T. 173rd New York
U. Eight companies, 53rd Massachusetts
V. Six companies, 12th Connecticut
W. One company, 12th Connecticut; Battery F, 1st U.S. Artillery
X. Two sections, 1st Maine Battery
Y. Two sections, 2nd Massachusetts Battery; one section, 1st Maine Battery
Z. Two sections, 6th Massachusetts Battery; Battery A, 1st U.S. Artillery
1. Extreme right of Colonel Steedman's left flank: 39th Mississippi (detachment); 9th Louisiana Battalion Partisan Rangers (detachment); one 6-pounder, Company B, 1st Mississippi Light Artillery, all commanded by Colonel William B. Shelby
2. 10th Arkansas; one battalion, 1st Mississippi; one 12-pounder howitzer and one 6-pounder, Watson's Louisiana Battery, all commanded by Lieutenant Colonel M. B. Locke
3. Rifled 24-pounder, Company A, 1st Alabama
4. Two companies, provost guard
5. Six companies, 1st Alabama
6. Commissary Hill: rifled 24-pounder, Company A, 1st Alabama; two 12-pound Blakleys, Maury Tennessee Battery; two 6-pounders, Company F, 1st Mississippi Light Artillery
7. Road bisecting Steedman's line; flanked by arsenal and grist mill
VIII. 15th Arkansas; two 12-pounder howitzers, Company B, 1st Mississippi Light Artillery

Note: Units A-P listed in their order of approaching the breastworks.
carried outdated flintlock muskets. With an effective range of forty yards, the men loaded their guns with one ball and three buckshot, a deadly round at close range. They held their fire until the enemy came within forty yards, when the parapet blazed with a volley of musketry. The suddenness of the destruction caused the Federals to hesitate. The more courageous participants rallied quickly, however, and came on with a yell.

Each Southerner now loaded and fired individually while the Yankees struggled over brush and fired on the run. One Alabamian thought his comrades shot so rapidly that their muskets popped "as fast as canes when the fire is in a cane-brake." Fence rails in the breastworks manned by the provost guard battalion caught fire. To prevent a possible breach, the Alabamians assisted their comrades in tearing out the burning rails under enemy fire.

A few of the Federals almost reached the parapet before fleeing from the withering fire. The Confederates shot them in the back until they passed beyond range. Two Alabamians especially demoralized the Yankees. John C. Cantey, one of


18. A. J. Lewis to [Gardner], July 9, 1863, LHA Collection.
two crack shots in the regiment armed with a long-range rifle, dropped the gallant blue-clad color bearer of the 75th New York at the outset of the advance. And at the height of the assault Captain Richard Williams jumped atop the parapet and emptied his pistol into the charging column. His men had to drag him down from his perilous perch. The Federals who had actually done the most damage were three companies of the 1st Louisiana who lined the ridge in front of the Alabamians before the assault began. Keeping up a deadly fire upon the breastworks, these men killed far more Confederates than their comrades in the advancing column—a clear indication of the limited number of New Yorkers who participated in the final charge. The regiment of 700 lost only eighty-six men the entire day.

Almost in concert with Thomas' attack, the 91st and 131st New York of Van Zandt's brigade struck Bennett's Lunette, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Locke. Bullets and canister spewed forth from the breastworks with telling effect—the 131st New York lost about sixty killed and wounded during the assault. While waving his sword, Federal Sergeant Major William H. Aldis, Jr., took a minie ball in

19. Mobile Advertiser and Register, August 9, 1863; McMorries, First Alabama, 33, 63; "Some incidents connected with the 1st Ala. Regiment which have never been published. . . .", First Alabama Infantry Regiment, Military Records Division, State of Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama; Hall and Hall, Cayuga in the Field, [sect. 2], pp. 114, 118-19.
his right forearm. With his left hand and teeth he managed to tie a dirty handkerchief about the flesh wound while keeping pace with the advance. Confederate officers acted in a similar vein. A ricocheting bullet struck Locke in the neck, but bandaging it with his handkerchief, he stood his post.

The obliquing of Dwight’s brigades and the ensuing extension of the line, coupled with the fragmentation of regiments struggling through the valley, uncovered Paine’s front. To fill the gap, Paine ordered Fearing’s men forward. At first light, with the paper resting on the pommel of his saddle, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver W. Lull wrote Colonel Sidney A. Bean: “The Eighth New Hampshire greets the Fourth Wisconsin, and will march with you into Port Hudson to-day or die.” Lull then dismounted and gave his personal possessions to a friend. He positioned himself twelve paces ahead of the colors, waved his sword, and ordered, “Eighth New Hampshire, forward, smartly and steadily, and follow me.” It proved to be his last command. One of the first to fall, he took a minie ball in


his thigh. As he was carried to the rear, he called out, "Don't let the regiment break; we can whip them." He died about six that evening.

Colonel Hawkes Fearing, Jr., struck the breastworks at the "Bull Pen," where the Confederates slaughtered their cattle. Steedman had foreseen this possibility and requested reinforcements. Gardner sent Colonel O. P. Lyle with the 14th, 18th and 23rd Arkansas regiments, who arrived in time to check the enemy's advance. General Paine aptly labeled the resulting engagement a "huge bushwhack."

Under fire from the battery at Bennett's, the 4th Wisconsin halted about 300 yards from the breastworks to dress its line. The shot and shell tore through the trees with devastating effect. One solid shot cleared an entire file from the line. When the men moved forward, they reserved their fire while struggling over and under tree trunks and through branches, all the while under a deadly hail of missiles. By twos and threes they passed through what one

23. Ibid., 235-37.
24. Ibid., 235.
25. Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 170; O.R., XV, 1032, XXVI, pt. 1, p. 530; Map of Port Hudson and its defences, drawn by Major J. de Baun (9th Louisiana Battalion Partisan Rangers), Camp Moore State Commemorative Area, State of Louisiana Office of State Parks, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, Tangipahoa, Louisiana; "Fortification and Siege," 320.
officer termed "the valley of the shadow of death," and a few especially determined Federals reached the final summit. One hundred yards away they saw Lyle's Arkansans forming behind an irregular line of entrenchments. Confederate fire soon forced them to withdraw below the crest where they returned fire. But there they encountered yet another danger. Premature ignition of shells from the 1st Maine Battery caused the projectiles to explode around them, killing one man and wounding several others. Captain John M. Stanyan thought the terrain "very peculiar, looking like the skeleton of a huge fish, the backbone representing the long ridge running from the woods towards the fortifications, and the ribs the short ridges which partially protected us in the gullies." Like too many of his comrades, Stanyan had managed to find a safe refuge. But his regiment, the 8th New Hampshire, lost 124 men killed and wounded. Considering that the men were assaulting fortified defenders, the loss of forty-two percent (124 men) was not exceptional—but it was double the percentage of casualties of any other regiment and the largest number of killed and wounded.

The Confederates' determination and the timely arrival


of reinforcements alone cannot explain their successful defense. Rather, the answer lies with the Federals. Although the terrain and officer casualties contributed to their disorganization, sheer weight of numbers should have enabled the Federals to breach the fortifications. They failed because too many men had dropped out to seek safety. Admittedly, some of these soldiers acted as sharpshooters. But the paucity of casualties resulted from the fact that many troops failed to participate in the final charge against the enemy’s parapet. The Federals simply lacked the resolve needed to achieve victory.

Having failed to carry the fortifications, the Federals looked for whatever assistance was available on either flank. Two Negro regiments, the 1st and 3rd Louisiana Native Guards, occupied the extreme right. The 1st, including a majority of its line officers, consisted almost entirely of free Negroes from New Orleans. Several of its members were both educated and wealthy. The 3rd, on the other hand, comprised former slaves commanded by white officers. Dwight had stationed them on the flank because he thought little of the ability of Negroes on a battlefield, even if led by the best white officers. Like many of his colleagues, he believed garrison duty in some rear area the proper place for Negro soldiers. Dwight never intended to order them forward, and they had received an intoxicating
amount of whiskey earlier that morning, rather than the standard ration issued before an assault.

But Dwight desperately wanted to breach the Confederate defenses. After the assault along Little Sandy Creek ground to a halt, he ordered the Native Guards forward. Six companies of the 1st and nine of the 3rd Native Guards crossed the pontoon bridge accompanied by two cannon of the 6th Massachusetts Battery and some dismounted troopers of the 1st Louisiana (U.S.) Cavalry. The artillerymen deployed in the road, but enemy fire forced them to withdraw the guns after firing but one round. The infantry, however, filed to the right, where they formed line of battle among the willow trees that covered the old river-bed. Confederate River Batteries No. 1 and 4 bombarded the area with shell and solid shot, some weighing more than a hundred pounds.


The terrain made the Confederate defenses the Native Guards would assault the strongest at Port Hudson. Just south of the creek the road paralleled the inaccessible west slope of an abrupt ridge for a quarter-mile. Here both road and ridge struck the bluff. Stationed along the crest of the ridge, sixty riflemen had a front, rear and enfilading field of fire on any force assaulting this sector because the attackers would have to move down the road. About 300 men of Colonel William B. Shelby's 39th Mississippi, supported by four small cannon, manned the rifle-pits constructed along the edge of the steep bluff. With the Mississippi near its crest, backwater covered much of the flood-plain west of the road.

At 10 a.m. the Native Guards moved forward. Over 1,000 black troops emerged from the woods in fine order, advancing first at quick time and then double-quick toward the bluff, about 600 yards away. The 1st Native Guards led off, followed closely by the 3rd. Both regiments formed in a long line, two ranks deep.

As the Negroes rushed forward, bullets from the ridge ripped into their flank, causing confusion and disorder. Yet they pressed on toward the bluff, to a point 200 yards

31. "Fortification and Siege," 321; Shelby to [Gardner], August 5, 1863, LHA Collection; Wilson, Black Phalanx, 525.

32. Williams, History of Negro Troops, 216; Wilson, Black Phalanx, 525-26.
from the Confederate main line. At that moment Confederate artillery opened with canister, and Shelby's troops, eager to join in the fight, commenced firing without orders. Canister and minie balls mowed down the lead ranks by the dozens. The color sergeant of the 1st fell embracing the flag, a shell having torn off part of his head. Blood and brains stained the riddled banner. A free black and a resident of New Orleans, Captain Andre Cailloux led the advance with his left arm dangling, broken above the elbow by a cannonball. Shouting orders in both English and French, Cailloux pressed on until a second shell struck him dead. After firing one volley the blacks in front fell back in utter confusion. Their uncertainty spread through the second line and both regiments withdrew to the woods. The officers repeatedly attempted to rally them, and a few especially brave soldiers attempted to wade through the backwater. Both efforts proved unsuccessful. Barely fifteen minutes had passed from the time the blacks exited the woods until they returned to them. Although the Confederates had killed and wounded scores of the enemy,
they themselves had not suffered a single casualty.

The Negroes found little safety in their refuge. Confederate artillery continued to rain shell and solid shot into the woods, and splinters from fragmenting trees proved as dangerous as the projectiles themselves. His Native Guards unable to reach the enemy's breastworks, Colonel John A. Nelson sent an aide with a request to Dwight for permission to withdraw. "Tell Colonel Nelson I shall consider he has done nothing unless he carries the enemy's works," Dwight responded. Protesting, the aide argued that the black regiments had already suffered fifty percent casualties. But Dwight ended the argument with a verbose and pompous, "Charge again, and let the impetuosity of the charge counterbalance the paucity of the numbers."

But troops did not exist who could accomplish the objective Dwight had set for the Negroes. Even if Nelson


could induce the men to advance, he undoubtedly realized that another charge would be nothing more than suicide. So he chose not to make the attempt. But neither could he withdraw. To fool Dwight, who remained in the rear, Nelson had his men continue firing and later originated the story that the Negroes had made three distinct assaults. And for appearances, he made the blacks remain among the trees and endure the shelling for hours.

To support Weitzel, Brigadier General Cuvier Grover sent the 159th New York and 25th Connecticut on a wide detour to the west to link up with Paine's left flank. Lieutenant Colonel Charles A. Burt moved forward under the mistaken impression that few Confederates would oppose him and that his New Yorkers alone could breach the enemy's line. The men double-quicked down the road under a murderous fire from the battery on Commissary Hill and started through the valley choked with felled trees and heavy underbrush—a combination that undoubtedly influenced a number of the troops to drop out of the column. Turning west and advancing in single file, they waded across Little Sandy, and some of the men finally reached the side of the hill they were to assault. With beating hearts they waited a few moments for the order to charge. Then, at 10 a.m.,

36. Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 174; Daniel P. Smith, Company K, First Alabama Regiment, or Three Years in the Confederate Service (Prattville, Ala.: Published by the Survivors, 1885), p. 63; Wilson, Black Phalanx, 525.
with a terrifying yell, they rose and rushed forward, crashing through brush and bounding over the last tree only to emerge thirty yards from the breastwork, where it seemed to one Federal that "a thousand rifles were cracking our doom." Within seconds, the Federals suffered some fifty casualties. The survivors dove for cover. The colors of the 159th lay before the parapet, the standard bearer dead at their side. Sergeant Robert Buckley of the 25th Connecticut worked his way back and brought in the colors, only to be killed when he turned to pick up his gun.

When these two regiments failed to breach the defenses, Grover decided to increase the pressure even more. He extended the fighting eastward to encompass the lunette defended by the 15th Arkansas. Most of the Arkansans had fought in the advance line earlier that morning. Although their lieutenant colonel had fallen badly wounded and the regiment had lost thirty men and several officers during the skirmish, many of them falling prisoner when the Federals


blocked their escape, the majority of the Arkansans managed to escape. Confusion reigned when the survivors entered the lunette, and Colonel Johnson hastened to meet the anticipated attack. Disregarding proper company organization, he assigned the men to new positions. Two hundred Arkansans lined the quarter-mile-long lunette, while the major and thirty men prepared to hold the rear "at all hazards."

Grover dispatched the remaining four regiments of his division to engage the 15th Arkansas. Marching west, they passed through the woods littered with the dead and wounded of Weitzel's command. About 10:30 a.m. these fresh reinforcements, together with Gooding's brigade, moved toward Johnson's bastion. The 12th Maine led the assault, followed by the 38th and 31st Massachusetts and 156th New York. The advancing column received covering fire from one company of the 12th Connecticut on the right, and the 13th and 24th Connecticut on the left.


The Fédérais advanced in a long, crescent-shaped line that covered Johnson's front and partly overlapped both flanks. Although his situation appeared hopeless, Johnson devised a plan. He forbade his men to look over the parapet until the enemy was within sixty yards, at which point the Fédérais let out a lusty cheer and quickened their pace. The Arkansans rose with a yell and fired volleys of buck and ball cartridges with such rapidity that the Federal center broke and ran within ten minutes. But the absence of devastating volleys of canister from Confederate artillery enabled the more steadfast Fédérais to close both wings upon the center. Onward they came, only to have their center decimated a second time by Johnson's backwoodsmen, who carefully picked off the officers. They rallied a third time and advanced to within fifty yards of the works. Here they dropped behind stumps and logs or sought shelter in ravines.

A steady covering fire of artillery and musketry enabled about 300 Fédérais, less than twenty percent of the attacking column, to move up a ravine and into the ditch surrounding the lunette. The Arkansans crouched behind the breastwork, their guns at the "ready," each determined to shoot the foremost of the stormers and then to rely upon musket butt and bayonet to hold the line. The Fédérais

41. Hewitt, Desperate!, 6, 11-12; [Wright], Port Hudson, 34.
repeatedly attempted to scale the rampart, each time being bloodily repulsed. Finally a Federal officer shouted, "Are you ready?" Everyone replied in the affirmative and the officer screamed "Charge!" He scaled the parapet with only four men at his side. When their lifeless bodies rolled down into the ditch, the spectacle diminished whatever courage remained in their comrades. Another officer repeated the process, but when he shouted "Charge" not a single man rose above the parapet. The Federals crossed bayonets with the foe, and hurled sticks, dirt clods and verbal abuse, but they quickly discovered they could neither advance nor retreat.

Those infantrymen that had remained in the rear to guard the batteries now moved to support their comrades in the advance. The 53rd Massachusetts moved up to relieve the 91st New York, and the reserve companies of the 12th Connecticut rotated with those sharpshooting at the front. The 173rd New York marched to assist the 1st Louisiana, but that unit had the right flank securely anchored on Big Sandy, and the 173rd took position in its rear. Shortly after noon Grover relaxed his efforts because he heard nothing from the left, and Weitzel followed suit. Both men requested fresh orders and awaited their arrival or the sound of battle from the left before renewing their

42. Hewitt, Desperate!, 12; [Wright], Fort Hudson, 34-35.
assault. Federal victory would have to be achieved elsewhere.

Without question, desperate fighting had occurred along Little Sandy Creek, but such encounters were generally isolated, short-lived and involved few men on either side. Five of the twenty Federal regiments on the field did not actively participate in the assault. Union losses indicate that the remaining fifteen made no serious effort to breach the Confederate defenses. Out of over 8,500 blue-clad infantrymen, fewer than 700 were killed or wounded. One-fourth of these casualties occurred in the 8th New Hampshire and 4th Wisconsin, the units caught in the "huge bushwhack."

The terrain prevented any organized effort by separating most of the enlisted men from their regimental


officers. Once this happened, the more faint-hearted soldiers secreted themselves at a safe depth in a ravine. With little chance of embarrassment, these men remained hidden in their sanctuaries until nightfall. Consequently, few participants pressed the attack despite allegations to the contrary. The following account of the 156th New York, coupled with its number of casualties, typifies the action of many Federals in the assault:

In order to reach the enemy works they had to plunge through a dense forest of magnolias, choked with a thick undergrowth, brambles and wild honeysuckle, before encountering the maze of felled trees. All the time their broken ranks were subjected to a galling fire which pinned them down in ravines, woods or any shelter they could find. The protection thus gained kept their losses down, but they would always remember Port Hudson and May 27, 1863.

The terrain protected these New Yorkers so well that the regiment did not have a single man killed or wounded.

But despite the terrain, and without the aid of covering fire from two regiments and over twenty cannon, four regiments should have overwhelmed the 200 Arkansans in the lunette north of the creek. Although Colonel Johnson reported killing ninety and wounding over 300 of the enemy in front of the 15th Arkansas, many of these Federals apparently feigned death until nightfall. The combined loss 45

45. Flank, Banners and Bugles, 46.

of these four regiments amounted to less than eighty.

The shirking of numerous Yankees should not detract from those Federals who pressed the assault. The 8th New Hampshire, 131st New York, 4th Wisconsin and the Negro regiments performed gallantly. And the sharpshooters of the 1st (U.S.) Louisiana and 12th Connecticut kept up a withering fire on the enemy. For the outnumbered Confederates, it was a hard-fought engagement. Their view of the fierceness of the battle was best expressed by the men of the 15th Arkansas, who nicknamed their lunette "Fort Desperate."

Although most Civil War commanders favored the tactical offensive, assaults seldom proved decisive, even if successful. And such endeavors proved extremely costly against fortified defenders armed with rifled weapons. In four assaults during his defense of Atlanta, John Bell Hood lost nineteen percent of his command. Braxton Bragg suffered losses of twenty-seven percent at Murfreesboro and twenty-six percent at Chicamauga. Robert E. Lee lost thirty percent of his army at Gettysburg, twenty-one percent during


the Seven Days, and nineteen percent at Second Manassas and Chancellorsville. And Ulysses S. Grant lost forty-one percent during his offensive from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor. The loss of only eight percent by the attackers along Little Sandy Creek indicates that the Federals who entered "the valley of the shadow of death" clearly lacked the determination needed to achieve victory.

Chapter IX

"We are poorly led and uselessly slaughtered, and the brains are all within and not 'before Port Hudson.'"

By 11 a.m. the fighting along the Union right had settled into a stalemate. Despite several fresh regiments available to press the assault, the Union generals there chose to await developments on the Federal left. Banks' division commanders on that flank had allowed the morning to pass without launching an infantry assault. When they advanced that afternoon however, the blue-clad infantry would press the attack with a determination similar to that shown by the Negroes, rather than perform half-heartedly as their white comrades had along Little Sandy Creek.

While the fighting raged on the left, the bombardment on the center and right continued. The Confederates had the best of it while the Federals deployed their artillery. But soon thirty cannon, lined almost hub-to-hub, were in position at the edge of the woods opposite Beall's center, with the 50th Massachusetts in support. Confederate shells


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speedily destroyed one gun and caused the adjutant of the 21st Indiana to shout, "For God's sake hurry up, boys, they are shooting us down!" Company E of the 50th quickly stacked their weapons, threw off their accouterments, and helped serve the cannon. Their first time under fire, the men from Massachusetts dodged the artillery projectiles in a lively fashion. Shells flew swift and furious but in somewhat of a careless fashion during the morning. One did explode in a tree immediately above a sutler, who ran off and abandoned his goods. The men of the 50th truly appreciated this turn of events because they had had nothing to eat since the previous day.

Two Union field batteries met a similar fate when they deployed on Brigadier General Thomas W. Sherman's front. But the Confederate cannon, inferior in both quantity and quality, could not continue to compete successfully. The tide quickly turned, the Federals dismounted or otherwise disabled several guns, and the Confederate cannoneers suffered heavy casualties. A detachment of Company K, 1st


Alabama, manned "The Baby" at the Jackson Road Redan. Sharpshooters picked off so many of the crew that the lieutenant and sergeant served the gun alone, the former pointing and the latter loading. After several rounds, a minie ball mortally wounded the lieutenant and the sergeant carried him to the rear. Posted near the Slaughter Road sally port, Abbay's battery took a different course of action. When Union artillery drove the gunners from their positions, the Mississippian ran the cannon down inclines for protection but kept them loaded for instant use.

Throughout the morning, Banks listened for the sound of musketry on his left, but heard only the booming of cannon. About noon Banks rode to Sherman's headquarters, where he found the division commander dining in his tent. Following a heated altercation regarding Sherman's failure to advance, Banks returned to his headquarters and sent his chief of staff, Brigadier General George L. Andrews, to relieve


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Sherman. Upon his arrival, Andrews found Sherman in the process of leading his men forward and declined to assume command.

At approximately 2 p.m., the Confederates observed the enemy deploying in line of battle on Slaughter's field and along the Plains Store road. The transfer of three Arkansas regiments to the "Bull Pen" that morning left 150 pickets at twenty-yard intervals to oppose the Federals. Stretching his remaining troops to the right, Beall called upon Colonel William R. Miles for assistance. Miles had already heard of the pressing need and responded swiftly. Without waiting for orders, he extended his line to the left—his men barely arriving in time to meet the threat. Having secured extra rifles from the sick in the hospital and the arsenal, Miles provided his men with three apiece. He also had them count off by twos. When the order came to fire, every man would discharge his three guns and then No. 2 would confine himself to loading for No. 1. Having completed his instructions, Miles advised, "Shoot low, boys; it takes two men to take away a man who is wounded, and they never come

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back."

After emerging from the woods, Brigadier General Neal Dow's right flank rested on the road running past the smouldering ruins of the Slaughter residence. The brigade advanced shortly after 2 p.m., with 450 men of the 6th Michigan in the lead. The 15th New Hampshire, 26th Connecticut and 128th New York followed. Negroes in front of the column carried long poles to place across the moat fronting the breastworks. One hundred and thirty volunteers followed with heavy planks to lay across the poles.

Within minutes of their appearance, the mounted officers drew enemy fire. Leaving Dow, Sherman and his staff rode across the interval between the brigades to


Illustration No. IV

MAY 27: AFTERNOON ASSAULT
LEGEND

A. Negroes carrying poles
B. Volunteers carrying planks
C. 6th Michigan
D. 15th New Hampshire
E. 26th Connecticut
F. 128th New York
G. 14th Maine
H. 24th Maine
I. 177th New York
J. 165th New York
K. Skirmishers
L. O'Brien's "forlorn hope"
M. Seven companies, 49th Massachusetts
N. Four companies, 50th Massachusetts
O. 48th Massachusetts
P. 21st Maine
Q. 116th New York
R. 2nd Louisiana (U.S.)
S. 2nd Vermont Battery
T. Massed U.S. Artillery
I. Lyle's troops moving to reinforce Steedman in the morning
II. Beall's troops moving to their right
III. Miles' troops moving to their left
IV. 16th Arkansas reversing their march after repulsing Sherman to meet Augur
hasten Brigadier General Franklin S. Nickerson's advance. A cannonball struck Sherman's horse, which lurched backward ten yards and fell in a ditch upon the general. Although dazed, he continued on foot until a shot shattered one leg below the knee. "O, my God, my Country!" exclaimed Sherman, who thought the situation hopeless without his leadership.

Four successive parallel fences and the debris of the Slaughter house disrupted Dow's formation. The men threw down the fences dividing the corn field and pressed on into an abatis immediately in front of the fortifications. The Federals faced a hail of lead when they climbed over trees or had their clothes shredded as they forced a passage through entangling limbs. Confederate gunners opened a heavy barrage, which caused considerable confusion in the advancing ranks but failed to arrest the enemy's advance.

While skirmishing in front, Private Josiah D. Thompson observed the works in front of Dow's men:

...behind the long line of rifle pits there was no sign of life. I looked again to the right and saw the long line of blue advance, with flags waving in the gentle breeze. I turned my eyes to the silent rebel rifle pits. Suddenly above them appeared a dark cloud of slouched hats and bronzed faces; the next moment a sheet of flame. I


10. Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 178; McGregor, Fifteenth New Hampshire, 353; Dabney to [Gardner], August 24, 1863, LHA Collection.

glanced again to the right; the line of blue had melted away....

At that moment the Federals came within 200 yards of the breastworks, and the cannoneers switched from shell to double charges of canister. Captain George F. Abbay, wearing a badly crushed kepi and smoking a small, "squatty" pipe, told his men, "Now boys, I want you to stick to the pieces and give the Yankees hell." Running their guns into position, they literally obeyed by blasting the Yankees with canister at the appropriate moment.

The Federals wavered and broke for the rear. Their officers quickly rallied them, and they moved forward a second time with similar results—the number of casualties constantly increasing as they repeated the process. A spent bullet rendered Dow's arm useless, and, no longer able to control his horse, the brigadier dismounted and proceeded on foot. Before Dow could assume command of the division, a bullet passed through his left thigh, forcing him to leave the field. Colonel David S. Cowles (128th New York) lay dead, a snow-white handkerchief covering his face. The plate of mail he wore upon his breast failed to stop the bullet that pierced his side when he turned to cheer his men on. The colonels of the 6th Michigan and 26th Connecticut


were wounded, and their regiments suffered nearly thirty percent casualties.

The attack finally dissipated approximately seventy yards from the breastworks, with droves of Dow's men seeking shelter in the ravine to their right. The collapse of the attack, however, brought about a strange occurrence. The defeated brigade commenced sharpshooting, and their deadly aim forced the Confederates to take refuge behind the breastworks without the ability to reply. The "eastern men" firing over the heads of those from Michigan only managed to shoot their comrades because their bullets did not carry far enough.

Nickerson's brigade moved forward in column of regiments. Out in front, the 14th Maine deployed as skirmishers, followed by the 24th Maine, 177th and 165th New York. With artillery shells tearing gaping holes in their


15. Kendall, "Recollections," 1116; Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 178; M' Murray, "Heroism of Union Officer," 428; John E. Hall to Wife, May 29, 1863, Hall Papers.
lines, they charged across a field of thick bushes and scrambled through a twenty-foot deep ravine choked with felled timber. By the time they reformed and emerged upon the open plain, the 165th New York had passed to the front of the column. Dressed in zouave uniforms of red trousers and caps, they made a magnificent spectacle—and a magnificent target.

Southern infantry poured forth a tremendous volume of minie balls when the attackers came within 200 yards. "Oh how they fall," commented Texas Lieutenant R. W. Ford, "...their red baggy Breeches the prettiest mark in the world." Some of the Confederates concentrated on the color bearers; the flag of the 165th New York went down three or four times. The seven-man color-guard had five killed, one fatally and one seriously wounded. Leaping upon a stump, Lieutenant Colonel Abel Smith, Jr., waved his sword in one hand and a small United States flag in the other. He urged his New Yorkers to seize the fallen banner and press on, but marksmen turned their attention to him and he fell mortally wounded. The regiment lost 186 of the 350 men who

16. Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 177, 179; "Diary of Lt. R. W. Ford (7th Texas Infantry)," May 27, 1863 (typescript copy), Port Hudson Battlefield Museum, Port Hudson, Louisiana; Clarence S. Martin, Three Quarters of a Century with the Tenth Infantry New York National Guard 1860-1935 (n.p.: n.d., n.d.), 20; One Hundred and Sixty-fifth New York, 17-18; Dabney to [Gardner], August 24, 1863, LHA Collection.

participated in the assault.

At one time the Confederate commander in this sector ordered his men to cease fire because of the gallant conduct of the New Yorkers. This expression of respect only inspired the New Yorkers to redouble their efforts, however, and the Confederates had to resume firing to prevent a breach in their line. The troops behind the zouaves failed to support them, and the New Yorkers ran or crawled back to the woods or lay upon the ground awaiting the coming of darkness to attempt an escape. Upon learning of Sherman's disabling injury, Andrews assumed command of the division and prepared to implement forthcoming orders. None came, however, and he attempted to reorganize the shattered command.

Cries for water from the wounded often went unheeded because some of the Federals had filled their canteens with whiskey before the assault. When the fighting ended, the zouaves' colors lay about seventy yards from the parapet. One youthful Louisianian, Private James Clark, could not resist the temptation to capture the flag. He dashed for the sally port but Captain Robert L. Pruyn grabbed him, lecturing, "Here, you, boy, you'll be killed out there! and

18. Kendall, "Recollections," 1116; One Hundred and Sixty-fifth New York, 70, 99, 142; Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 179, 182; [Wright], Port Hudson, 32-33.

then what will your mother say?" Private Matt Howley managed to seize the coveted trophy, and the indignant Clark howled, "There, now, Matt's got the flag, and he didn't get killed either."

To meet the threat along the Plains Road, Colonel Benjamin T. Pixlee hurried the 16th Arkansas northward, the movement exposing them to enemy missiles. The six-foot-tall Pixlee unsheathed his sword and shouted, "Sixteenth, follow me, every devil of you!" The remaining Confederates opposite Sherman's division, now having "time to blow," watched their comrades to the left meet the charge upon their front.

When Banks heard the rattle of musketry from his left, he instructed Major General Christopher C. Augur to advance. Augur had awaited the order all day and had already deployed his men at the edge of the woods, a quarter-mile from the Confederate lines. Standing near his men while bullets zipped past, the general saw the men jerk

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their heads. He told them, "No use boys to dodge them after you hear them," a fact the men soon learned. While awaiting the order to advance, the men listened to their officers' words of encouragement and appreciated the whiskey ration, for "it was almost impossible to swallow hard bread and salt beef."

Finally, the order came. Profoundly excited, Lieutenant Colonel James O'Brien shouted, "Come on, boys; we'll wash in the Mississippi to-night." The column advanced down the road until it emerged from the woods where the men deployed in line-of-battle. Skirmishers covered the front south of the road, immediately followed by O'Brien's 200 volunteers of the "forlorn hope." Next came Colonel Edward P. Chapin's four regiments, the 2nd Louisiana and four companies of the 50th Massachusetts from Dudley's brigade and the 2nd Vermont Battery.

The "forlorn hope" believed that half their group was


27. Dabney to [Gardner], August 24, 1863, LHA Collection; Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 179-80; Stevens, Fiftieth Massachusetts, 139.
to run from the woods, bridge the ditch fronting the breastworks with cotton bags and fascines and return to the shelter of the woods, while the remainder crossed the bridge and forced their way inside at bayonet point. None knew the nature of the moat, but they believed it to be fifteen feet wide and twelve feet deep.

They came forward with a whoop and a yell, clawing their way through briars and vines, over logs and around stumps. "Foolishness to talk about cheering or the 'double-quick.' We had no strength for the former, aye, and no heart either. We had gone but a few rods ere our Yankee common sense assured us we must fail," recalled Private Henry T. Johns. They had hardly moved when everyone found himself inextricably caught in an almost grasping abatis under a withering blaze of artillery and musketry. Field pieces shot directly down the road while two 24-pounders raked their flank; the gunners used railroad rails and broken chains for grape and rusty nails and other bits of scrap iron for canister.

The deadly hail of missiles decimated the Federals. A three-inch piece of bayonet struck one captain in the mouth. Almost upon exiting the woods, Chapin, conspicuous


29. Ibid., 229, 384; Dabney to [Gardner], August 24, 1863, LHA Collection.

because of his dress coat and white Panama hat, received a slight wound in the knee. The brigade commander continued but a few steps when a ball struck his face and passed completely through his brain. Blood stained the flag of 48th Massachusetts, the color bearer having embraced the banner when he fell dead. After a bullet passed through his wrist, Color Sergeant Hadley P. Dyer seized the banner of the 21st Maine with his good hand and cradled it with his injured arm. He hastened forward until falling with a lethal wound. One member of the 50th Massachusetts described the deluge of lead and iron as "perfect hell."

With a driving determination the Federals pressed onward. The color sergeant of 116th New York, riddled with bullets, fell near the breastworks. Captain Francis M. Smith of the 48th Massachusetts seized the banner and rallied the men until he fell wounded; miraculously he survived, even though thirty-eight bullets had pierced his uniform. Colonel William Francis Bartlett seized a regimental flag and rode ahead of the column. Severely wounded, he fell from his horse only sixty yards from the

parapet. He lifted the flag to signal his men to come on. Confederate officers thought this "the bravest and most daring thing we have yet seen done in the war," and shouted "Don't shoot him!"—and so he lay unmolested.

None of the Federals managed to struggle through the abatis. When they neared the fortifications, their line lost all sense of regularity, and it became evident that the assault was doomed. Word passed through the line to halt, and the men sought safety behind stumps, logs and uprooted trees, where they lay listening to missiles of death strip the bark from their shelters. The battery kept abreast of the advancing infantry and maintained a steady barrage, but the garrison's reply seemed hardly diminished. The underbrush burst into flames on the left of the Federal line, and the smoke and flames provided additional danger and discomfort to the men. Pinned down nearly an hour, O'Brien suddenly sprang forward over the logs. Waving his sword, he screamed, "Charge! boys, charge!" Less than a


33. M'Murray, "Heroism of Union Officer," 428.

34. Johns, Forty-ninth Massachusetts, 231; Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 180; Stevens, Fiftieth Massachusetts, 140; Woodward, 21st Maine, 33-34.
dozen men followed him in the foolhardy effort that ended his life. The seven assaulting companies of the 49th Massachusetts suffered thirty-five percent casualties, the 116th New York twenty-nine percent. Comrades assisted some of the injured to the rear, and friends managed to spread blankets over a few of the dead, but most had to lie where they fell till nightfall. Even so, Banks prepared to order the remainder of Dudley's brigade forward until word arrived of Sherman's repulse, and it became immeasurably clear that he had lost the battle.

The Federals on the left had lacked neither determination nor courage. Although the Confederates lost less than thirty men, the enemy suffered over 1,000 casualties—at least one man out of five was killed or wounded. Filled with admiration for their bravery, the Confederates sought out the Federals on the field and gave them water. They brought nine zouaves inside and took them to the hospital.


The intense heat of the afternoon sun beat down upon the men still engaged in deadly conflict. About five o'clock word passed through the ranks on the Confederate left that someone had raised a white flag. Hopelessly pinned down for almost six hours, the commander of the 159th New York hoisted a white handkerchief on a stick. Major Samuel L. Knox of the 1st Alabama met the flag and Lieutenant Colonel Charles A. Burt erroneously informed him that Banks desired a cessation of hostilities to bury the dead. Knox detained the man while he notified Gardner, who "at once rejected it as informal, and an unwarranted use of the white flag, and ordered that hostilities be resumed in half an hour."

Knox informed the enemy, and both sides sought cover, for the Confederates had taken advantage of the cease fire to stretch out atop the breastwork. They "swarmed out on the parapet like ants on an ant hill," commented Federal Lieutenant George G. Smith, who believed the enemy sufficient in number to sweep away any force assaulting across the plateau "like chaff from the summer threshing"

floor," before they reached the breastwork.

But during the interval, hundreds of Federals who had worked their way close to the Confederate works took advantage of the short truce to retire to safer positions. Burt's men had got themselves into a perilous position, and Colonel I. G. W. Steedman concluded:

I have now no doubt but that the flag was presented for the unlawful and cowardly purpose of withdrawing the troops from the dangerous position in which they found themselves. Had not this been done many must have been killed, as there was no possibility of escape until night came on.

When Colonel Benjamin W. Johnson received orders to respect the white flag, the Yankees marched from the moat with supreme impudence to a safe refuge in the woods. But the 15th Arkansas had held "Fort Desperate" with the loss of about forty men.

When Federal buglers sounded "cease firing" that evening, stretcher parties moved over the battlefield. The Confederates lounged atop the parapet and watched the enemy remove the dead and wounded. Both sides refrained from firing a shot or even shouting an unfriendly remark. They buried twenty Federals without coffin or shroud in a long


trench beside the Plains Store road. While the injured sought medical assistance, the able-bodied searched for missing friends, deployed to meet a counterattack, or began to entrench. Two fallen trees lying parallel to the enemy's breastworks enabled the 75th New York to build a crude fortification which they dubbed "Fort Babcock," in honor of their gallant commander.

After nightfall, the division commanders reported to Banks' headquarters. It then became known that the repulse was worse than anticipated. Banks called up reinforcements and ordered arms for the Negro engineers. The utmost confidence of the morning had transformed into gloomy regret mixed with surprise at such a disastrous defeat. "It was long indeed before the men felt the same faith in themselves, and it is but the plain truth to say that their reliance on the department commander never quite returned," concluded Banks' adjutant.

When the firing ceased that evening, the 1st Alabama had lost thirty-two killed and forty-four wounded. Blood saturated parts of the ramparts and flowed through the trenches to form puddles. The groans of the dying and

41. Stevens, Fiftieth Massachusetts, 140-41, 150; Plummer, Forty-eighth Regiment, 38; Woodward, 21st Maine, 35; Hall and Hall, Cayuga in the Field, 117.

42. Irwin, Nineteenth Corps, 181; [Banks] to Emory, May 27, 1863, 10 p.m., Letters Sent, December 1862-August 1863, Department of the Gulf, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Woodward, 21st Maine, 35.
pitiful cries for water from injured Federals lying before the breastworks brought the deepest sympathy to the Alabamians. Several risked their lives to carry canteens of water to those they had just engaged in deadly strife. While on their mission of mercy, the Southerners discovered the ground littered with Enfield rifles. Upon reporting this information, their comrades quickly secured some, so that in the future each member of the regiment had two loaded guns, the Enfield for the "long taw," and the flintlock for close quarters. Members of the 12th Arkansas managed to secure a fresh supply of percussion caps, ammunition and Enfield rifles, which were far superior weapons to their indifferent shotguns.

Like his subordinates, Gardner prepared to meet the next assault. Almost every able-bodied Southerner, even though he had fought all day, had to perform fatigue duty throughout the night. They strengthened the hastily constructed rifle pits on the left wing and repaired any damage inflicted by artillery projectiles throughout the garrison. Units redeployed along the line, and Gardner issued an order that if a white flag appeared his men should open fire if the enemy refused to halt "some distance" from

the breastworks. He added, "A battle does not necessarily cease on the presentation of a white flag."

The Confederates took great satisfaction that evening. They believed that only their cool determination had saved them. Had they wavered but a moment or slackened their murderous fusillade at a critical time to seek shelter, the enemy would have breached their works and forced them to surrender. The Southerners also learned a valuable lesson that day—determined men could hold a fortified position against considerable odds. Yet the outcome of the battle on May 27 still amazed them.

The Confederate triumph that day resembled Robert E. Lee's stand against George B. McClellan at Sharpsburg the previous fall—and it was just as surprising. The only significant difference between the two engagements was that McClellan ordered his troops to attack piecemeal. Had Banks' subordinates implemented his plan for a simultaneous assault, his troops would have surely breached the Confederate defenses. Brigadier General Thomas W. Sherman's delay allowed Confederates on the right to reinforce Colonel Steedman on the left. Had these troops not arrived at the

44. [Gardner], G.O. No. 49, May 27, 1863, General and Special Orders, Port Hudson, La., 1862-63, 3rd Military District, Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana, Chap. II, Vol. 198, Record Group 109, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Dabney to [Gardner], August 24,1863, A. J. Lewis to [Gardner], July 9, 1863, LHA Collection.

45. [Wright], Port Hudson, 37; McMorries, First Alabama, 65.
"Bull Pen" when they did, even the half-hearted Federal attack against Steedman would have overwhelmed his line. This turn of events had a tremendous impact on the outcome of the Civil War.

Having moved against Port Hudson, the Federals committed themselves to capturing the garrison. Their initial failure brought an irreversible stalemate, one that would drag on until the fall of Vicksburg ended the need for a Confederate bastion on the Mississippi below the mouth of the Red River. By the time the struggle for Port Hudson ended on July 9, 1863, the longest true siege in American military history (forty-eight days) would occur, and the men in gray would undergo the greatest deprivation ever experienced in the Confederacy.

Regardless of their isolated position, Southerners felt confident after their initial success and seemed more determined than ever to hold out. Despite shortages of everything except gunpowder, Gardner apparently never despaired. He divided his perimeter defenses into zones, with an engineer in charge of each. The soldiers strengthened the fortifications and constructed loopholes in the top of the parapet for sharpshooters. The Confederates had fewer than sixty cannon, and most of them were obsolete or of small caliber, or lacking projectiles. Officers and men quickly realized that they must improvise if they were to successfully defend the post. Gardner ordered the cannon
positioned for greater effect upon the enemy. He also had
his men dig pits in which to place the guns when not in use
to protect them against incoming shells. At least three of
the guns along the river lay on center-pivot carriages,
which enabled their crews to swing them around and fire at
the Federal army. The 10-inch Columbiad in Battery No. 4
proved so menacing that the Yankees christened the gun "The
Demoralizer" and incorrectly believed, because of its wide
range of fire, that the Confederates had it mounted on a
railroad car. The men tore off their shirt-sleeves and
filled them with spent bullets and pieces of iron to provide
rounds of canister for the cannon.

Gardner desperately needed and could not replace four
things: men, cannon, medicine and food. Rifles dropped by
the enemy or a fallen comrade and hand-grenades made from
unexploded enemy projectiles increased firepower and
compensated for the loss of manpower. Land mines or
"torpedoes" made from unexploded 13-inch mortar shells also
increased the killing power in front of the breastworks.

Such measures could not make up for desertions,
however. Colonel Steedman noted, Our most serious and annoying difficulty is the

46. Cunningham, Port Hudson Campaign, 68, 70-72; de Gournay
to [Gardner], September 12, 1863, LHA collection.
47. Cunningham, Port Hudson Campaign, 106.
48. Mobile Advertiser and Register, August 9, 1863.
unreliable character of a portion of our Louisiana troops. Many have deserted to the enemy, giving him information of our real condition; yet in the same regiments we have some of our ablest officers and best men.

Confederates entered the Federal lines in droves, especially members of Miles' Louisiana Legion.

Out-gunned three-to-one, Confederate cannon became choice targets for enemy gunners. Captain L. J. Girard was responsible for maintaining Gardner's cannon, and if any individual deserves special recognition for his performance, it is he. Almost single-handedly and without proper tools or materials, Girard kept the cannon firing. The enemy's cannonade disabled, dismounted or destroyed at least once virtually every gun, but Girard worked day and night making the necessary repairs. Another especially attractive target was the gristmill. Its destruction left the Confederates in dire straits until someone came up with an ingenious idea. The Southerners blocked up the locomotive, passed a belt from the drive-wheel to a grindingstone, and in this way the engineer "furnished meal at the rate of several miles an

hour.

Endless labor and improper diet brought deteriorating health conditions. The number of sick increased daily. Colonel Steedman commented, "Six ounces of quinine would save the army, as the mass of our diseases are intermittent and bilious fevers, with their many complications." The lack of stimulants and nourishment augmented the fatality rate from wounds and debility. By the end of June daily rations consisted of three small ears of corn, nicknamed "pinewoods nubbins" by the soldiers. The men retained their humor, however. When he distributed the rations, the commissary sergeant of Boone's Battery would call out, "Pig-gee, pig-gee, pig-goo-ah!" The artillerymen promptly fell in on all fours and began squealing and grunting, thereby keeping up the jollity of the camp.

But men could not long subsist on such a diet. Gardner had a mule butchered and set the example for his troops—fifteen pounds of the beast were prepared for his

50. Geo. N. Carpenter, History of The Eighth Regiment Vermont Volunteers, 1861-1865 (Boston: Press of Deland & Barta, 1886), p. 131; [Wright], Port Hudson, 30, 52, 62; Smith to Gardner, October 23, 1863, LHA collection; de Gournay to [Gardner], September 12, 1863, in ibid.; Dabney to [Gardner], August 24, 1863, in ibid.

51. Mobile Advertiser and Register, August 9, 1863.

52. Linn Tanner, "The Meat Diet at Port Hudson," Confederate Veteran, xxvi (November 1918), p. 484; Mobile Advertiser and Register, August 9, 1863.

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mess. On July 3 Colonel Steedman described the desperate
strait in a letter to his uncle:

For two days a number of horses have been slain
and eaten by men and officers. Rats, which are
very numerous in our camps, are considered a
dainty dish, and are being considerably sought
after...I have eaten a piece of horse this
morning. I do not fancy it, but will eat it as
long as I can sustain life upon it, before I will
give any consent to surrender. The whole army
exhibit [sic] the same spirit.

Private Linn Tanner "believed that good fat mule (not sore
back) is a better and juicier as well as a finer grained
meat than beef, and would have or make no objection to
eating it if it is properly dressed and cooked." His
comrades often imitated a mule by uttering "ye-haw", kicking
or trotting. The shortage of food, however, nearly proved
the undoing of the garrison. The men preferred mule meat to
surrender, but even that delicacy would have been exhausted
by mid-July.

Banks had as much determination as the Confederates.
And unlike Gardner, Banks could draw upon the resources of
his entire department, which stretched from Texas to
Florida. Shocked by the initial repulse, he sought to

53. West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, February 24, 1866.
54. Mobile Advertiser and Register, August 9, 1863.
55. Linn Tanner, "Port Hudson Calamities--Mule Meat," Confedera
tee Veteran, XVII (October 1909), p. 512; Booth, Louisiana
Soldiers, III, bk. 2, p. 766.
strengthen his command and thereby increased the lopsidedness of the contest. By June 1 nine additional regiments joined the besieging army, more than enough fresh troops to offset the Federal losses of May 27. And reinforcements continued to arrive throughout the siege. Banks also brought up additional cannon. Soon, eighty-nine field pieces, forty siege cannon and mortars, four 9-inch Dahlgrens brought ashore from the Richmond, and the long-range rifled-cannon and six 13-inch mortars of the fleet pounded the Confederates.

His preparations complete for a second assault, Banks began a hour-long bombardment at 11:15 a.m. on June 13. The Confederates hugged their trenches while the projectiles fell at the rate of more than one a second. When the shelling ended, Banks demanded that Gardner immediately surrender in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. He responded, "My duty requires me to defend this position, and therefore I decline to surrender."

Banks resumed the bombardment and the firing continued throughout the night. Gardner's refusal apparently caught Banks by surprise because he did not issue the final orders for the second assault until 1 a.m. on June 14—only two

57. Cunningham, Port Hudson Campaign, 70, 72; O.R., XXVI, pt. 1, p. 141.

58. O.R., XXVI, pt. 1, p. 553; Cunningham, Port Hudson Campaign, 79.
and a half hours before the assault was to begin. These last-minute preparations and a heavy fog almost assured the disorganization of the simultaneously scheduled three-pronged assault. And a piecemeal attack against a fortified enemy alerted by an artillery barrage made failure a foregone conclusion.

The middle column struck the center of Beall's line about 4 a.m. Initial Federal success ended quickly, and the struggle there had almost ceased by the time the right-wing of the assault struck "Fort Desperate" some three hours later. The left-wing failed to make any serious effort whatsoever. As unsuccessful as the May 27 attack, that of June 14 only lengthened the casualty list and depressed Union morale to an all-time low. One regiment even mutinied. Banks and his staff made plans for a third assault led by a "forlorn hope" of over 1,000 volunteers, but the garrison surrendered before the attack took place.

The outcome of May 27 had convinced many men on both sides that the garrison could withstand anything the besiegers threw at it. The second assault only intensified this belief. Undoubtedly the morale of both sides significantly influenced the ability of the Confederates to

59. Cunningham, *Fort Hudson Campaign*, 79.

maintain such a one-sided contest. On July 1 Colonel Steedman surmised, "...we all know the absolute necessity of holding Banks' army here until Gen. Johnston can drive Gen. Grant from the rear of Vicksburg. We still have a strong hope of doing that." McMorries recalled, "All through the siege we cherished hope of relief...we had no fears of the enemy, who was thoroughly whipped and demoralized already, yet having nothing to eat and being nearly out of ammunition, all foresaw our inevitable doom." Some Federals lamented, "...we are poorly led and uselessly slaughtered, and that the brains are all within and not before Port Hudson'...." This mental outlook, together with the unwillingness of Banks to admit defeat by withdrawing and of Gardner to surrender or attempt an

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61. Mobile Advertiser and Register, August 9, 1863.
62. McMorries, First Alabama, 68.
Illustration No. V

JULY 7: SIEGE LINES
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evacuation, made a lengthy siege inevitable.

The deadlock could have had a different outcome only if a Confederate relief force had raised the siege. Colonel John Logan's troops did an excellent job harassing Banks' rear, but they lacked the strength to compel him to withdraw. Confederate authorities had forces for such an expedition but committed these soldiers to relieve Vicksburg. When troops finally moved to aid Port Hudson, they succeeded in disrupting Banks' supply-line with New Orleans. By then, however, the fall of Vicksburg had determined the outcome at Port Hudson, and it is impossible to determine what effect a shortage of supplies would have had upon Banks' army. But one does not have to speculate about the consequences of the Confederate victory on May 65

64. Elias P. Pellet, History of the 114th Regiment, New York State Volunteers (Norwich, N.Y.: Telegraph & Chronicle Power Press Print, 1866), p. 130; Cunningham, Port Hudson Campaign, xii. Contemporaries and historians have criticized Gardner for his passivity during the siege. Edward G. Cunningham contended, "At any time after 10 a.m. on June 14, a major Confederate counterattack at the 'Priest Cap' would have almost certainly broken the siege...By using the ravines and gullies running along Confederate Battery No. XI, the Confederates could have broken the backbone of the Federal works and lifted the siege by destroying Banks's heavy guns." Such remarks ignore Gardner's objective of holding Port Hudson to the last. He had no desire to evacuate the garrison. Nor did he wish to expend lives and ammunition in sorties at the cost of hastening his capitulation.

65. Cunningham, Port Hudson Campaign, xii-xiii, 113-16.
EPILOGUE

"They fought splendidly!"

Although Port Hudson became the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River, its capitulation following the loss of Vicksburg had little strategic impact on the war. Despite having to surrender the entire garrison, Gardner could claim a significant tactical victory. Less than 3,000 men could stand in line during the surrender ceremony on July 9; yet Gardner's army had held nearly 40,000 Federals at bay for almost two months. His men had inflicted more than 5,000 casualties on the enemy while sustaining only 500. Sunstroke or disease hospitalized an additional 4,000 Federals; only 200 Confederates died from these causes. Port Hudson had proven a field of slaughter for the Federals.

One historian has suggested that the Confederates, "by

their dogged resistance, stalled the Union victory schedule and thereby prolonged the conflict." But a closer examination of the consequences of the Confederate victory on May 27 tells a different story, one that had a far reaching and devastating effect upon the South.

One aspect of this effect centers on the Union commander. When the fighting ended on the 27th, the opponents were dead-locked. To avoid the stigma of defeat, Banks had to remain until he forced Gardner to capitulate—thus delaying his juncture with Grant. In fact, the garrison at Port Hudson held out until Banks and his troops were no longer needed at Vicksburg. Thus Banks never moved up to join Grant.

If Port Hudson had fallen on May 27, Banks would have arrived at Vicksburg the conquering hero. He had dispersed Confederate forces in western Louisiana and won at Port Hudson. As ranking officer, Banks would have assumed overall command of the combined armies, his and Grant’s, and received the credit for capturing the doomed city. Considering his political connections, it is not improbable that Banks would have become supreme commander in the west and even general-in-chief.

Political considerations rather than military experience in the first place had influenced Lincoln to

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2. Cunningham, *Port Hudson Campaign*, vi.
commission Banks a major general. Politics had sustained Banks through military reverses in 1862, and politics would have sustained him through all but the most disastrous campaign. Lincoln also favored him because he appeared to share the president's views, particularly on slavery. This position made Banks popular with the moderate faction of the Republican party, and especially its leader, Secretary of State William H. Seward. And the politically astute Banks continued to change his views as circumstances dictated. Once Grant became his subordinate, Banks would have indefinitely, if not forever, blocked Grant's rise to supreme command. This change in command would have extended the war far longer than the delay brought about by the Confederates' "dogged resistance" at Port Hudson.

The initial success by Colonel I. G. W. Steedman's men on the morning of the 27th ironically dealt the Confederacy a deadly blow. And it had a more direct impact upon the war than simply the possibility of Banks superceding Grant, for it drew the black troops into the attack. Their assault proved the last undertaken by the Federals on their extreme right, and the last in which the 1st and 3rd Louisiana Native Guards participated at Port Hudson. Withering fire made their sector a death trap for any attacker. Casualties

among the Negroes amounted to nearly 600; proof of their losses lay in the arms and legs piled behind their hospital the night of the 27th. The Confederates counted 250 Federals, mostly Negroes, lying on the field where the Native Guards had charged. These casualties included only the dead—or those too badly wounded to crawl off.

The performance of the Negroes properly impressed Banks. "They fought splendidly!" he wrote his wife. He gave Brigadier General William Dwight command of a division and, needing every man possible, ordered additional black troops at Baton Rouge to hasten to the front.

All major engagements during the Civil War made headlines in the newspapers, but an assault by Negroes drew special attention from northern reporters. One correspondent wrote:

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6. O.R., LII, 559; [Banks] to Commanding Officer at Baton Rouge, May 27, 1863, 10 p.m., Letters Sent, December 1862-August 1863, Department of the Gulf, Record Group 393, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

One negro was observed with a rebel soldier in his grasp, tearing the flesh from his face with his teeth, other weapons having failed him. After firing one volley they did not deign to load again, but went in with bayonets, and wherever they had a chance it was all up with the rebels.

An illustration in Harper's Weekly showed the Negroes in hand-to-hand combat atop a parapet that bristled both with cannon and an abundance of Confederates.

Many Yankees who fought at Port Hudson agreed with the press' view. These men believed that the Negroes had fought valiantly and looked forward to the day when thousands of former slaves would swell the ranks of the Union army. On May 28 Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson wrote his wife: "...there can be no question about the good fighting quality of negroes hereafter that question was settled beyond a doubt yesterday." Captain Robert F. Wilkinson wrote his father on June 3: "One thing I am glad to say that is that the black troops at P. Hudson fought & acted superbly. The theory of negro inefficiency is I am very thankful at last thoroughly Exploded [sic] by facts. We shall shortly have a splendid army of thousands of them."


So too, Banks praised the Negroes in his official report. He took pleasure in writing

...that they answered every expectation. In many respects their conduct was heroic. No troops could be more determined or more daring...Whatever doubt may have existed heretofore as to the efficiency of organizations of this character, the history of this day proves conclusively...that the Government will find in this class of troops effective supporters and defenders. The severe test to which they were subjected, and the determined manner in which they encountered the enemy, leaves upon my mind no doubt of their ultimate success.

Not everyone accepted the newspaper accounts. Confederate Lieutenant Howard C. Wright gave a different evaluation of the media coverage in a letter to his mother:

"...The N.Y. Herald [sic] correspondence & all the Illustrations I have seen of the fighting, in Leslie [sic] & Harper, [sic] are preposterous, particularly the story about the negro troops fighting well...The story must have been gotten up for political effect." Other readers, including numerous Yankees, agreed with Wright. Colonel Halbert S. Greenleaf of the 53rd Massachusetts described the Negroes' charge as "an exhibition of cowardice on the part of the entire gang instead of that courageous and valiant spirit of

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which so much has been written." When the Confederates read that the black units had suffered 600 casualties, they concluded that the white soldiers supporting the Negroes must have shot them. Alabama Private Daniel P. Smith even reported hearing volleys of fire from the direction the Negroes fled. As in most cases, the truth lay between the extremes. Despite their failure to penetrate or even reach the fortifications, the Negroes deserve no criticism for their performance on May 27. Their baptism of fire resulted from an order to accomplish the impossible. Who can blame them for withdrawing after scores of their comrades lay dead and dying? Many white regiments failed to advance any closer than two hundred yards to the Confederate works during the attack; some hardly moved forward at all. And only the 165th New York suffered a higher percentage of casualties. Banks even ordered one of his division commanders relieved for not attacking promptly. The Negroes deserved the praise they received—even if somewhat


14. Daniel P. Smith, Company K, First Alabama Regiment, or Three Years in the Confederate Service (Prattville, Ala.: Published by the Survivors, 1885), pp. 63, 83.

exaggerated.

Abolitionist reporters and military officers made the Negroes' assault one of the turning points of the war—a turning point long overlooked both by contemporaries and historians. On June 11, 1863, the New York Times, noted for its accurate reporting and sober editorial policy, published extracts from Banks' report with the comment:

...this official testimony settles the question that the negro race can fight with great prowess. Those black soldiers had never before been in any severe engagement. They were comparatively raw troops, and were yet subjected to the most awful ordeal that even veterans ever have to experience—the charging upon fortifications through the crash of belching batteries. The men, white or black, who will not flinch from that, will flinch from nothing. It is no longer possible to doubt the bravery and steadiness of the colored race, when rightly led.

The excitement generated by the newspaper coverage of the Negro charge at Port Hudson proved pivotal in convincing whites to accept the enlistment of Negroes in the U.S. Army. The bravery exhibited by black troops in the July 18 assault on Battery Wagner, outside Charleston, South Carolina, dashed any serious doubts that remained after the Negroes' performance on May 27. The Negro had earned the right to

16. Cornish, Sable Arm, ix, 143.
fight for his freedom.

Nearly 180,000 black soldiers served in the Federal army before the war ended. Although the Negroes generally found themselves stationed in rear areas doing guard duty, this service freed white troops for combat. By the spring of 1865 black soldiers nearly equaled in number Confederate infantrymen present for duty throughout the South. In addition, this fresh source of manpower appeared when the war-weary North had grown tired of the seemingly endless list of casualties. And the positive impact the presence of these additional soldiers had on the Union war effort should not be underestimated.

Ramifications of a Confederate defeat on May 27 could have extended beyond the war. Imagine how different Reconstruction would have been if white troops had formed


the bulk of the occupation forces, and Banks, instead of Grant, had become the eighteenth president of the United States.

One does not have to speculate about events that actually occurred, however. Black soldiers fought at Fort Pillow, "The Crater," New Market Heights, Nashville and Fort Fisher. Over 32,000 Negroes died while in the army. Grant went on to defeat Lee and become president. And Banks remained in command of the Army of the Gulf until his disastrous defeat in the spring of 1864 brought about his removal from field duty. The Confederates' "dogged resistance" on May 27 moved the war along this course, thereby hastening the downfall of the Confederacy and making Fort Hudson a turning point of the Civil War.

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**Maps**

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Map of Port Hudson and its defences, drawn by Major J. de Baun (9th Louisiana Battalion Partisan Rangers)

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VITA

Lawrence Lee Hewitt was born on March 5, 1953, in Louisville, Kentucky. In January 1971, after attending public schools in Louisville, Tampa, Florida, Miami, Florida, Phoenix, Arizona, and Winter Haven, Florida, he graduated from Ahrens (Night) High School, in Louisville. Earlier that month he had entered Jefferson Community College. In June 1972 he entered the University of Louisville; in August 1973 the University of Kentucky; and in August 1974 the Graduate School of the University of Kentucky. In December 1974 he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from the University of Kentucky; in May 1975 an Associate of Arts degree in history from Jefferson Community College. In August 1975 he entered the Graduate School of Louisiana State University, and in May 1977 received the Masters of Arts degree in history. Having completed his course work in history, in November 1978 he joined the staff of the State of Louisiana Office of State Parks, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, as Historic Site Manager II at the Port Hudson State Commemorative Area. He currently serves as Historic Site Manager II at the Camp Moore State Commemorative Area. Mr. Hewitt is presently a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy.
degree at Louisiana State University.
Candidate: Lawrence Lee Hewitt
Major Field: History
Title of Thesis: "THEY FOUGHT SPLENDIDLY!": THE STRUGGLE FOR PORT HUDSON

Approved:

[Signature]
Major Professor and Chairman

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signature]
Charles Loyd

[Signature]
Patty E. Conner

[Signature]
Gary D. Camp

[Signature]
James Bohmer, Jr.

[Signature]
J. D. Crow

Date of Examination:
November 30, 1984