

MARCHING THROUGH MISSISSIPPI: SOLDIER AND CIVILIAN INTERACTION
DURING THE VICKSBURG CAMPAIGN

by

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Bachelor of Arts, 2006
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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
AddRan College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Texas Christian University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of

Master of Arts

May, 2008

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CHAPTER 1

“DEVESTATION MARKED THE WHOLE PATH OF THE ARMY”

The campaign for Vicksburg, Mississippi, determined the national survival of the Confederacy. Successful secession depended on control of the Mississippi River, the vast waterway historian Terrence J. Winschel acknowledged as “the single most important economic feature of the continent, the very lifeblood of America.”¹ The river separated the South into two distinct sections, presenting an ideal invasion route for Northern armies, as General in Chief Winfield Scott proposed in his famous “Anaconda Plan.” Union control of the Mississippi would prevent vital supply and manpower transport from one bank to another, reducing the Trans-Mississippi Theater to a detached region of the South powerless to influence the outcome of the war. As the Federal blockade tightened around Southern ports, the European trade from Matamoros, Mexico into Texas became increasingly important to the Confederate war effort, and a division of the South would deny these crucial supplies to hard pressed armies in Tennessee and Virginia.² As President Abraham Lincoln observed, Confederate command of the Mississippi River “means hog and hominy without limit, fresh troops from all the states of the far South, and a cotton country where they can raise the staple without interference.”³ Union Major General William T. Sherman stated even more directly, “The man who at the end of this war holds the military control of the Valley of the Mississippi will be the man.”⁴

Southern control of the river prevented Midwestern commerce from utilizing the waterway to access international markets, forcing trade to detour along railroads and canals to the Eastern seaboard. The blockade of the Mississippi was an invaluable economic and propaganda resource for the Confederacy, weakening war resolve and

fueling dissent within the states of the Old Northwest. Rebel control of the river maintained the geographic unity of the Southern nation and inspired the Confederate populace to continue resistance, presenting a key symbolic stronghold against the North, while a victorious Union invasion would permanently damage the Confederacy's international prestige and discourage the will to wage war throughout the South. In the bitter conflict of the American Civil War, the Mississippi River occupied a paradoxical position as the Confederacy's greatest weapon and its greatest weakness.⁵ Indeed, unrestricted Northern traffic on the river was so vital to the Union that Sherman declared, "To secure the safety of the navigation of the Mississippi River I would slay millions. On that point I am not only insane, but mad."⁶

At the outbreak of the war, the North mobilized immediately to secure the Mississippi River and penetrated deeply into the interior of the South with a well coordinated land and naval assault. Union victories progressed swiftly in the western theater early in the war along the northern and southern reaches of the river, and by the summer of 1862 only a tenuous 100 mile section of the river between Vicksburg, Mississippi and Port Hudson, Louisiana remained unconquered. The final campaign to capture Vicksburg would alter the course of the war and permanently transform the nature of interaction between Southern civilians and Union soldiers.⁷

In mid-1862, Union military policy toward Southern civilians reached a turning point. When the war erupted, Northern political leaders expected a swift subjugation of the seceded states and attempted to minimize the damage inflicted by implementing a policy of conciliation toward white civilians not directly associated with the Confederate government. This policy assumed the majority of the Southern population to be either

secretly Unionist or politically neutral, but misled and manipulated into supporting a separate “slaveocracy” by an elite minority of aristocratic plantation owners. Throughout the initial campaigns, invading Union forces attempted as much as possible to respect private property and limited as much as possible foraging for food and other supplies from civilians. Federal commanders officially prohibited stealing and plundering, issued orders protecting private residences, and even respected the human property of slave owners. In 1861, when the loyalty of the border slave states remained in doubt, President Lincoln rejected early attempts at emancipation and permitted slave-owners to reclaim their slaves that had fled to Union-occupied areas. As Northern advances penetrated deeper into the South in 1862, Confederate sympathy among non-slaveholding whites proved more extensive than previously thought and the policy of conciliation failed, despite the restraint observed by Federal soldiers.⁸

As the war continued with no end in sight, a harsher strategy evolved which Civil War historian Mark Grimsley terms “pragmatic” in his study *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy Toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865*. Rather than attempting to persuade rebellious Southerners to return to the Union with respectful conduct and political enlightenment, “pragmatic” commanders focused their efforts to obtain a military victory and “viewed civilians as peripheral to their concerns.”⁹ As occupation frustrations mounted, particularly in areas rife with guerilla resistance, Federal forces adopted measures that actively encouraged commanders to forage for supplies off the occupied countryside and severely increased retributions for guerilla activity. The earliest evidence of a more forceful treatment of secessionist sympathizers occurred in the Trans-Mississippi battleground states of Missouri and Arkansas, where guerrilla warfare

remained a perennial problem throughout the war, and in the controversial Union occupation of New Orleans overseen by Major General Benjamin F. Butler. When Confederate fortunes rose after a series of victories in the summer of 1862, many Union commanders realized that they needed a more forceful policy to break the Southern will to resist. In the eastern theater, Major General John Pope ordered his Army of Virginia to requisition supplies from disloyal civilians without restitution and collectively punish communities for guerilla actions. Pope's army compelled Secessionists to rebuild destroyed rail lines and pay monetary fines for guerilla acts occurring within five miles of their home, while directing that houses that offered violent resistance be burned and guerillas immediately executed if apprehended. Pope's directives elicited hatred throughout the South and clearly illustrate the evolution of Federal policy. In addition, Union soldiers began to deliberately liberate slaves in all theaters of the war, which provided invaluable labor for the South while the majority of able bodied white males served in the Confederate armed forces. In January 1863 President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation cemented this transition, and by the middle of the year thousands of former slaves had enlisted as Union soldiers, a transition that the South had feared since the earliest introduction of the "peculiar institution."¹⁰

That same year in the Mississippi River Valley, Major General Ulysses S. Grant perfected a brutal style of economic warfare that Grimsley terms as "hard war." Grant's own Army of the Tennessee had long practiced pragmatic foraging throughout early campaigns in West Tennessee and northern Mississippi, and for the common soldiers in the ranks hard war became a natural, albeit noticeable extension of previous policies conducted toward civilians. Grimsley defines "hard war" as "actions against Southern

civilians and property made expressly in order to demoralize Southern civilians and ruin the Confederate economy, particularly its industries and transportation infrastructure” which “involved the allocation of substantial military resources to accomplish the job.”¹¹ Hard war consisted of the intentional devastation of all possible economic and military resources, public or private, that aided the South’s ability to wage war and maintain Confederate morale. In this policy, which continued until the end of the war, the Federal army destroyed any civilian infrastructure employed in supporting the war effort, including factories, warehouses, rail transportation networks, and telegraph communication lines. Generally, Union forces left occupied residential dwellings untouched, but any surplus food and livestock located on the property were confiscated or destroyed. Northern soldiers ransacked all outlying buildings such as smokehouses and corn cribs, wrecked implements of agricultural production, leveled fences and burned the rails for fuel, and liberated all slaves. The invading blue host plundered and occasionally torched all unoccupied houses discovered, particularly large plantation manors that belonged to the secessionist elite who had the most to fear from the presence of Federal armies.¹²

If the owner of the house or nearby Confederate soldiers offered any armed resistance, the dwelling would often be burned down and swift retribution taken upon the residents. Stealing, though not officially condoned, remained impossible to stop, as stragglers and deserters from both armies preyed upon the collapse of law and order after the main body of Union troops had passed through. Throughout the war and even during the hard war phase, reported rapes by occupying Federal soldiers were a rare exception and typically resulted in the capital punishment of reported offenders. In areas that suffered hard war,

the material devastation of the countryside was astoundingly severe. In a few cases of repeated guerilla violence, Federal soldiers leveled entire towns, such as Greenville, Mississippi, and Randolph, Tennessee, and forced the residents to face an uncertain future as refugees.¹³

Psychologically, “hard war” was brutally effective at reducing resistance. If the United States government could not eliminate the South’s desire to continue the struggle, it would diminish the region’s power to do. There could be no greater evidence of the failure of the Confederate government and its army to protect Southern citizens than the wholesale devastation of a region by the Union army. Confederate regiments from the areas affected suffered a significant increase in desertions, and many soldiers from Mississippi returned home after reading accounts of misery and hardship from their loved ones. As the first state to feel the effects of “hard war,” Mississippi regiments serving in distant fields first experienced a fate that later befell units from Georgia and the Carolinas in a more dramatic fashion. These areas scorched by the hand of the invader, such as Central Mississippi, bore stark witness to the failure of the Confederate experiment. The damage of “hard war” essentially removed the region from active participation in the war even after Federal forces relocated to engage other military targets.¹⁴

The civilians encountered by the Union army in Mississippi fell into several distinct classes. Grimsley organizes white Southerners into three separate categories of Unionists, neutrals, and Secessionists, and observes that each received different treatment from Federal authorities according to their political affiliation. Historian Stephen V. Ash, author of *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865*, divides white Southerners into elites, yeomen artisans and farmers, poor whites,

and slaves. The upper class slave owners, who were almost universally staunch secessionists and comprised the ranks of Confederate government officials, usually fled before Union soldiers arrived. The large planters feared the possibility of Northern vengeance for their role in creating the conflict and relocated to the Southern interior to save as much personal and human property as possible. Yeomen and poor whites divided allegiance based upon their background and personal experiences, and generally sought protection from the dangers of either army. Often poor whites and other small property owners, who had the most to lose from the destruction inflicted by the presence of large bodies of soldiers, sought to avoid confrontation with military authority and gave their support to whichever side was currently present in their midst. Southern Unionists, while a sizable element in a few areas of the South such as East Tennessee and the western counties of Virginia, most often endured a precarious life as an oppressed minority of dissenters and either fled north or hid their political affiliations until Union forces secured the surrounding countryside.¹⁵

During the secession crisis, Vicksburg and most other towns along the Mississippi River supported compromise and elected Unionist delegates to the state convention as the local economy depended on trade upriver from the North. Areas farther removed from the river in Central Mississippi were largely pro-Confederate, as wealthy plantation owners in the state's interior feared the result of the election of a Republican candidate for president. It is difficult to calculate the true strength of Unionism, but it is certain that the Vicksburg area contained a sizable population of loyalists. One contemporary account in the *Atlanta Appeal* blamed the dissent on the presence of "a number of foreigners, comprising Germans, Italians, Irish, etc., who were large property holders, and who all

took the first opportunity of exhibiting their disloyalty to the Confederacy,” and “a few original Yankees of less note, whose presence was not of sufficient importance to require much attention, who went back to their first love.”¹⁶

As the war continued, the large slave population within the South confirmed the inherent weaknesses of the plantation economy. At the start of the conflict, many owners mistakenly assumed slaves would remain faithful to their masters, even in the presence of the Northern army. Despite this false sense of security, as Federal forces captured substantial amounts of Southern territory and drove large numbers of refugee planters with their relocated property into the Confederate heartland, more slaves attempted to escape. Tensions rose dramatically, especially in areas where the white male population had decreased significantly due to the manpower needs of the Confederate army. By 1862, authorities in Natchez, Mississippi, had executed forty slaves and imprisoned many others in fear of a possible rebellion. In other areas civilians relied on the militia to control the slave population, limiting its ability to mobilize against the invading enemy. Although a small percentage of slaves remained loyal to their owners after the Union army marched by, the vast majority fled to the enemy as quickly as possible, especially after the publication of the Emancipation Proclamation.¹⁷

While marching with Grant’s army in Mississippi, Colonel Manning F. Force of the 20th Ohio Infantry recorded a typical experience when his regiment arrived at an estate as slaves were plowing in the fields. Manning recalled that “The soldiers like mules, and the negroes gladly unharnessed them, and helped the soldiers to mount. I said to one, ‘The soldiers are taking your mules.’ The quick response was, ‘An’ dey is welcome to ‘em, sar; dey is welcome to ‘em.’”¹⁸ The Ohio officer remembered that the slaves “looked

wistfully at the marching column,” and soon began leaving the fields to join the regiment on the road in hopes of escaping the harsh existence of bondage. In particular Manning noticed that “one tall, stern woman strode along, carrying a wooden tray and a crockery pitcher as all her effects, looking straight to the front. Some one asked, ‘Auntie, where are you going?’ She answered, without looking, ‘I don’t car’ whichever way I go, so as I git away from dis place.”¹⁹

White southern civilians faced troubles from their own government as well. The Confederate Conscription Act of 1862 inspired persistent resentment among the populace, especially the poor whites, and Confederate commissary officers routinely impressed supplies, which only worsened civilian-military relations. Disaffected deserters and draft dodgers unleashed havoc upon communities that only increased as the war progressed and civil authority collapsed. As the supply situation deteriorated in 1862 due to a lengthy drought in the state, Confederate forces increasingly supplied their commissary needs from impressments and foraging, which received legal sanction in March 1863 with the passage of the Impressment Act. For the majority of Mississippian citizens, the presence of either army could be disastrous.²⁰

In November 1862, Major General Ulysses S. Grant initiated his first expedition southward to capture Vicksburg overland from northern Mississippi. Although Grant’s campaign ended in a retreat after Confederate Major General Earl Van Dorn led a daring cavalry raid that destroyed the Union supply base at Holly Springs, Mississippi, the expedition enlightened Grant’s perception of logistics and dramatically increased the maneuverability of the army when his soldiers sought substance from the surrounding countryside. As Grant later stated in his memoirs, “I was amazed at the quantity of

supplies the country afforded. It showed we could have subsisted off the country for two months instead of two weeks without going beyond the limits designated.”²¹ The raid at Holly Springs, though a tactical success, would ultimately have disastrous results for the secessionist cause in Mississippi. As Grant recognized, “Our loss of supplies was great at Holly Springs, but it was more than compensated for by those taken from the country and by the lesson taught.”²²

After the repulse of the first overland expedition, Grant attempted a number of operations aimed at seizing the Southern citadel over the next six months, none of which succeeded. In March 1863, Grant began preparations for an amphibious assault to land in southern Mississippi below Vicksburg to strike at the city from the rear. Reflecting upon his experiences from the previous fall, Grant determined to forage upon the countryside for the majority of his rations while maintaining a formal supply line for ammunition, coffee, hard tack, salt, and medical stores. To confuse the Confederate commander, Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton, Grant unleashed a cavalry raid led by Colonel Benjamin Grierson and ordered a division led by Major General Frederick Steele to gather intelligence along the Deer Creek plantations. The simultaneous operations provided Grant with a strikingly effective distraction and wrecked havoc upon the state’s rail transportation infrastructure.²³

The Deer Creek raid in particular foreshadowed the hard war that would follow. Union troops looted abandoned plantations, burned cotton and 500,000 bushels of corn, captured over 1,000 head of livestock, and liberated some 1,000 slaves.²⁴ One woman residing on Deer Creek, Lettie Vick Downs, recorded in her journal that “they destroyed every gin and all corn. . . . Four of the negroes left (not as many as I expected to leave).

Some little furniture was saved, but the most of it was destroyed.”²⁵ One Confederate soldier, Private John A. Wilson of the 35th Mississippi Infantry, wrote his father that camp rumor asserted that the Union army unleashed “all kinds of depredations” in the raid, “destroying property & abusing helpless women & children. They burnt all of the corn wherever they went. They destroyed Col. Berrys plantation completely burning everything even the negro cabins except one & they put fire in that but it would not burn.”²⁶

One Union officer present during the raid, Brevet Major Charles Miller of the 76th Ohio Infantry, recorded that “The valley is rich in corn and cotton; immense quantities of the former were found stored in cribs which the army destroyed. It is estimated that a million dollars worth of property was destroyed or carried off by this expedition.”²⁷ Miller observed that the returning Federals “marched ‘rout step’ with all they could carry of the products of the country: pigs, chickens, turkeys and honey every day at the mess board.”²⁸ The Deer Creek expedition denied Vicksburg a vast amount of badly needed supplies and proved the efficiency of the campaign Grant would later enact against Central Mississippi. Miller witnessed that “A great number of mules, horses and cattle were led and driven along, and occasionally an old family carriage was seen in the procession, pulled by a pair of mules and laden with chickens, geese and bacon with ‘bummers’ riding in grotesque style on the cushioned seats,” while “three hundred negroes, men, women, and children, followed the army loaded with bundles of all descriptions.”²⁹ The civilians along the creek could only react in impotent fury, as Miller wrote, “The natives as on former occasions were very much exasperated, especially the women. We found the same old declaration repeated that we would never take

Vicksburg. ‘You will never take Nashville,’ ‘Never take Memphis,’ ‘Never take Corinth,’ had been rung in our ears before.”³⁰

On April 30th, 1863, Grant landed 24,000 men at Bruinsburg, Mississippi. With the arrival of General William T. Sherman’s XV Corps a few days later, Grant’s force exceeded 40,000 hard fighting veterans. Until they reached the outskirts of Vicksburg and established a reliable supply connection furnished by United States Navy, the entire army would be foraging for provisions in an area that had never before felt the tramp of Yankee boots. After fighting and winning the small but savage battle of Port Gibson, the invading Federals immediately contacted astounded civilians. Catching his Confederate opponent unprepared, Grant secured his beachhead and swiftly dispatched requisitioning parties into the surrounding area.³¹

Lacking a sufficient number of wagons to transport the necessary ordinance supplies, Grant ordered “immediately upon landing that all the vehicles and draft animals, whether horses, mules, or oxen, in the vicinity should be collected and loaded to their capacity with ammunition.”³² One Indiana soldier, Thomas Durham, later remembered that “it was equal to a circus parade in a country town to see this ammunition caravan.” As the Durham recalled, he wagon train contained “fine family carriages loaded with boxes of ammunition and drawn by an ox team, or an old mule and horse hitched together, rigged with plow harness, shuck collars and rope lines to drive with.” He noted that “cotton wagons, ox carts and even dog carts—everything that could be found in the country that had wheels, and every kind of animal and harness with which to pull them, were pressed into service. No such sight has ever been seen since old Noah entered the Ark.”³³

When the Federals entered Port Gibson with improvised wagon train stretching along behind them, townspeople disappeared behind closed doors. One Illinois soldier later remarked that when he “passed through the main street of the city, men, women and children filled the walks or gazed anxiously from the upper story windows, as though a monster show had come to town.”³⁴ Osborn Oldroyd, a member of the XVII Corps from Ohio, stated that after entering the town, “The boys found a lot of blank bank currency of different denominations, upon the Port Gibson bank. They signed some of them, and it is quite common to see a private of yesterday a bank president to-day.” Oldroyd observed that the notes “may not become a circulating medium to a very great extent, but it is not at all likely that it will be refused by the inhabitants along our route when tendered in payment for corn-bread, sweet potatoes, etc.”³⁵

After continuing the march, one member of the 20th Ohio regiment discovered a coffee-pot filled with silver dollars buried under a corner of the house while chasing “a poor lonely confederate chicken,” and distributed the money throughout his company.³⁶ Oldroyd asserted the opinions of most Federal soldiers when he exclaimed in his account, “How foolish it is for Southern people to flee and leave their beautiful property to the foe. We only want something to eat.”³⁷ The Ohioan recognized that some soldiers in the Union army had an increased appetite for the destruction of Southern property than others, writing that “There are some who would apply the torch to a deserted home, that would not do so if the owners remained in it. It is quite common here to build the chimneys outside of the houses, and I have noticed them still standing where the house had been burned.”³⁸

Another Iowa Federal recorded that “During the march this afternoon, we found a lot of bacon the fleeing rebels had left in the woods. Port Gibson is a pleasant business-looking place of about 2,000 inhabitants. The inhabitants deserted the town on our approach—only a few families remaining.”³⁹ Port Gibson lost more than bacon during the Federal occupation, as the advancing blue host provided episodes of pillage and plunder as well. One Illinois soldier wrote that “They drove the rebels for some distance back across Bayou Pierree taking their works and the town of Port Gibson. The boys looted the town going through the stores and taking whatever suited them best.”⁴⁰

The brief occupation of Port Gibson provided the Vicksburg campaign with one of its most enduring legends. According to local tradition, Grant refused to destroy the town because he considered it “too beautiful to burn.” This story contains more myth than fact, as Port Gibson did not burn to the ground because there was no justification from the behavior of the residents to warrant the torch. And while the city may have been too beautiful to burn, it was clearly not too beautiful to loot. Certainly during the campaign as a whole, Port Gibson’s treatment was no exception to that of most other towns Grant’s forces passed through. In actuality, only two Mississippi cities would suffer physical destruction on a large scale, the state capital of Jackson and Vicksburg itself, both of which were vital transportation and war production centers defended by large bodies of Confederate forces, turning each city into a battlefield. The Port Gibson legend does more to illustrate the postwar Lost Cause myth that swept the South, which exaggerated the numbers of towns destroyed and amount of suffering inflicted by the invaders, while overlooking the considerable damage imposed by the retreating Confederate army. It would not be the last legend to grow out of this campaign.

Some violent resistance from the civilians did occur, although it was far less than many Confederate officials hoped for. Osborn Oldroyd encountered firsthand the danger from guerillas when he wandered away from camp along a river bank on May 5th and recorded that “a bullet flew through the trees not far from my head. I looked across the river from whence it came, but could not see anybody. Did not stay there long, but got back to camp, where I felt safer.”⁴¹ While only a few actual attacks took place, enough violence occurred to keep Union soldiers alert to the ever present threat. When confronted by Federal soldiers, most Mississippians displayed affirmation of loyalty, as Oldroyd noted, “To our faces these citizens seem good Union men, but behind our backs, no doubt their sentiments undergo a change. Probably they were among those who fired at us, and will do it again as soon as they dare.”⁴² Oldroyd complained that he had “not seen a regular acknowledged rebel since we crossed the river, except those we have seen in their army,” and in frustration at the unseen enemy declared, “The South must suffer, but out of that suffering will come wisdom.”⁴³

After capturing Port Gibson and the landing at Grand Gulf, which he intended to use as a supply base for the campaign, Grant received that word that he would not receive reinforcements from Major General Nathaniel Banks and the Army of the Gulf for weeks. This development persuaded Grant to alter his strategy, as he later explained in his memoirs, “I therefore determined to move independently of Banks, cut loose from my base, destroy the rebel force in rear of Vicksburg and invest or capture the city.”⁴⁴ The bold resolution to march into the heart of Confederate territory with only minimal logistical support demanded immediate execution and forced Grant to act on his own authority without the approval of his superiors in Washington. Grant’s close friend,

Major General William T. Sherman, believed the audacious maneuver doomed to failure and urged Grant to stop until engineers constructed additional roads that securely connected the Grand Gulf supply base to the army. Grant replied that he did not “calculate upon the possibility of supplying the army with full rations from Grand Gulf. I know it will be impossible without constructing additional roads. What I do expect is to get up what rations of hard bread, coffee and salt we can, and make the country furnish the balance.”⁴⁵ This decision, while pragmatic in nature, ranks as one of the most influential commands made by any Federal commander during the war. In one decisive moment, Grant had issued the orders that ultimately transformed his army into an instrument of economic and psychological warfare that would attack Southern civilians and their ability to continue the war as well as Confederate armed forces.

Grant’s troops embarked on an epic march that historians often describe as a “Blitzkrieg through Mississippi,” and the farms of Central Mississippi provided all rations beyond the basic staples of hard tack and coffee.⁴⁶ Fortunately for the Union, the area had suffered little during two years of war, and rich bounty awaited the conquering Army of the Tennessee. As Grant later stated, “Beef, mutton, poultry and forage were found in abundance. Quite a quantity of bacon and molasses were also secured from the country, but bread and coffee could not be obtained in quantity sufficient for all the men.”⁴⁷ To remedy the shortfall of bread, Grant ordered soldiers to man occupied plantation grindstones and “these were kept running while we were stopping, day and night, and when we were marching, during the night, at all plantations covered by the troops.”⁴⁸

Grant's decision to forage almost entirely off the Mississippi countryside forced Union soldiers and Southern civilians into greater and more extensive contact than ever before and substantially increased the amount of damage the Union army inflicted upon civilian property. Foraging and confiscation had occurred before in other areas, but Grant's Vicksburg campaign vastly surpassed any previous campaign, raid, or expedition in its scale of foodstuffs consumed and material ruin. In the entire course of the war, few other decisions would have a greater impact on the war making methods employed and the eventual outcome of the conflict.

This new policy of reliance on the countryside excited some apprehension from the soldiers. One wrote that "My fear is that they may cut our supply train, and then we should be in a bad fix. Should that happen and they get us real hungry, I am afraid short work would be made of taking Vicksburg."⁴⁹ To keep the army supplied with rations beyond the hard tack coming up from the Grand Gulf supply base, Grant kept his army advancing at a rapid pace, continuing to forage and gain ground before his Confederate adversaries could unite superior forces against him.⁵⁰

Federal troops entering deep into Southern territory inspired a number of false rumors and reports of enemy cruelty and atrocities. In some cases the tales reached preposterously gruesome proportions. On May 2, 1863, the *Natchez Daily Courier* reported in an article entitled "Yankee Fiendishness" that in areas along the Mississippi River occupied by Union forces "private graveyards are all entered, the graves dug open, the coffins taken out, some much decayed, and broken open and the decomposed remains of them left lying exposed to the weather," all in search of a fabled "rebel treasure." Such

propaganda strengthened the terror aroused by the supposed inhuman Yankee invader determined to inflict a fate worse than death on Mississippi.⁵¹

The incidents that did occur were painful enough for the majority of Southerners. On May 6th Major General William T. Sherman wrote his wife about conditions he discovered in Louisiana, stating “We have found some magnificent plantations most horribly plundered. . . . All Rosewood furniture, pier glasses, splendid bedsteads were all smashed, books of the most valuable kind strewn on the floor & about the yard, and every possible indignity offered the palace.”⁵² Sherman, who had lived in Louisiana before the war, blamed the outrages on “the cursed stragglers who wont fight, but hang behind and disgrace our Cause & Country.”⁵³ Sherman admitted that “devastation marked the whole path of the army, and I know all the principal officers detest the infamous practice as much as I do.”⁵⁴ Sherman, perhaps remembering his friends in the South, declared to his wife, “Of course I expect & do take corn, bacon, horses, mules and everything to support an army, and don’t object much to the using fences for firewood, but this universal burning and wanton destruction of private property is not justifiable in war.”⁵⁵ Before the end of his sojourn in Mississippi, Sherman would change his mind regarding the use of the torch.

While most common soldiers would only have limited interaction with residents while marching through the unforgiving Mississippi heat, those assigned to foraging expeditions would have the most contact with civilians. One soldier, Owen Hopkins from Ohio, described a typical expedition in his journal on May 9th, 1863, as “a foraging Expedition, alias Stealing tour. I filled my Haversack full of the dainties of the country. We succeeded in Finding a wagon-load of molasses and Bacon which we shipped

immediately for the especial Benefit of the Forty-second Regiment Ohio Infantry Volunteers, U.S.A. Returned to camp tired But not hungry.”⁵⁶

Hopkins later recorded further information about the incident, writing that “we came to a plantation where no Yankees had ever trod, and after putting to flight a pack of blood hounds and frightening half out of their wits a motly group of alternatively black and white darkies, I discovered the *garden*,” while one of his comrades “had the honor of discovering a well-filled smokehouse,” another “accidentally fell over a barrel of dried peaches,” one companion “in the meantime capturing three or four fat hens,” and yet another “encountered a porker with such violence that Porker was killed and his hams amputated with great skill.”⁵⁷ Hopkins continued that the pursuit “extended to the mansion and bureau drawers, where I succeeded in finding a dozen pairs of cotton socks, a welcome discovery as my only pair needed the tender care of a mother who could darn. I’ll be darned if they didn’t!”⁵⁸ The foraging party returned to camp, “receiving as a reward from our ravenous comrades a round of hearty cheers, and before morning chickens, turkeys, calves, pigs, and everything had become food for soldiers.”⁵⁹ Similar expeditions stripped the countryside of food, leaving little substance behind for either the Confederate army or population.

Worse than a foraging expedition would be to have units of the army camp on ones property for any significant amount of time, as Logan’s Division of the XVII Corps did on the Bagnell plantation on the Big Black River from May 3rd through 7th. In a postwar account written for the Southern Claims Commission listing “Stock & Property Consumed & taken off by Gen. U. S. Grant’s Army,” the estate detailed a total loss of 95 cotton bales either burned or seized, and the confiscation of 15 mules, 2 horses, 40 head

of sheep, 15 cows, 10 oxen, 25 cattle, 100 hogs, 1 mule wagon, 4 sets of wagon gears, 3800 bushels of corn, 4000 pounds of bacon and hams, 5 tons of fodder, 30,000 feet of lumber used in the construction of tent shelters, and 8000 fence rails burned for fuel. Altogether, the unfortunate plantation owners estimated their loss at \$29,855, an amount that calculated the damage at the 1863 price of cotton, raised exponentially by the wartime shortage.⁶⁰

This account does not include the amount of human property lost, which would have raised the total cost by thousands of dollars. A plantation that produced over a hundred bales of cotton would need a sizable slave labor force, who either were relocated by their owners or gained freedom from Grant's army. Interestingly, also missing from this list is any buildings burned or personal property taken, which indicates that the owners most likely stayed during the Union occupation of the property. The damage inflicted by Logan's division in a few days would prevent this plantation from producing any agricultural supplies for the Confederate army until the war ended. With no slave or animal labor to plant with, and no fences to protect the crops, no large scale production would be possible. Unoccupied plantations suffered even greater devastation.⁶¹

On May 9th, Sherman wrote to his wife Ellen from Hankinson's Ferry, "We are short of wagons and provisions, but in this starving country we find an abundance of corn, hogs, cattle sheep and Poultry. Men who came in advance have drawn but 2 days rations in 10, and are fat."⁶² On the same day in Rocky Springs, Grant informed his wife Julia, "People all seem to stay at home and show less signs of fear than one would suppose. These people talk a greatdeal about the barbarities of the Yankees but I hear no complaints where the Army has been even of insults having been offered."⁶³ Grant

apparently did not know about the outbreak of looting in Port Gibson, or did not consider the property loss endured by the town's shopkeepers as comparable to the endless rumors of unspeakable Northern atrocities against civilians.

The continued foraging not only stripped the material possessions of Mississippi, the increased contact resulted in a larger amount of soldier and former slaveowner interaction which astounded many of the Midwestern Federals who had never before witnessed the cruelty of slavery in the Deep South. One Union foraging expedition stumbled upon a "young mistress who had just been deserted by her Negroes, all alone, crying with but a scant allowance of provisions left her. She had never learned to cook, and in fact was a complete stranger to housework of any kind."⁶⁴ The liberation of slaves forced many owners, especially upper class women, to rely on their own labor for the first time in their lives, which only increased the hatred of the Yankees as inhuman savages. The myth of Northern brutality, created by the Secessionist elite, spread throughout all classes of society. Oldroyd discovered that the majority of Southerners "have been led, apparently, to expect to find the Lincoln soldier more of a beast than human. At least such is the belief among the lower sort."⁶⁵ Oldroyd commented on the disparate condition that existed between the planter class and ordinary Southerners, writing that "Negroes and poor whites here seem to be on an equality, so far as education is concerned and the respect of the better classes. I have not seen a single school-house since I have been in Dixie, and I do not believe such a thing exists outside of their cities."⁶⁶

After marching through Mississippi for ten days, Grant had encountered little opposition from the Confederate commander Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton. As the Army of the Tennessee advanced farther into the heart of the state, the Confederate

Army of Vicksburg began preparing to battle their Union adversaries. In the next few weeks, the campaign would reach a violent climax that would determine the ultimate fate of Vicksburg and the Mississippi River. For the citizens of Mississippi and Louisiana, the long ordeal of invasion had only just beg

CHAPTER 2

“THE ERA OF STEALING AND PLUNDERING”

As Grant’s forces marched deeper into Mississippi, Confederate Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton began maneuvering his Army of Vicksburg to repel the Federal incursion. Undaunted, Grant’s systematic foraging continued unabated. As war correspondent Sylvanus Cadwallader of the *Chicago Times* reported, “Army wagons by scores and hundreds were sent out daily from ten to fifteen miles, escorted by infantry details sufficient to protect them from any sudden foray by Confederate Cavalry.”¹ After scouring the countryside, Cadwallader added, the wagons “returned at nightfall groaning under the weight of impressed supplies, and increased by the addition to the train of every vehicle, no matter what its description, that could bear the weight of a sack of grain, pieces of salt meat, or pails full of butter, eggs, honey or vegetables.”²

The region, like much of the Old South, relied largely on livestock for food, which proved a particularly lucrative target for Union foraging parties. Cadwallader affirmed that “Horses, mules and cattle were brought in by droves of hundreds. I frequently saw horses, cattle and mules of all ages and condition; milch cows and calves; sheep, goats and lambs; turkeys, geese, ducks and chickens, driven together in one drove.”³ Unionists and Neutrals suffered from the requisitions as well as Secessionists, as only those who could unquestionably prove their fidelity to the Union received compensation. As Cadwallader declared, “The country was much richer in food products than we had expected to find it. If owners could establish their loyalty they were given regular vouchers for everything taken—if not, not.”⁴

One observer, War Department official Charles A Dana, recognized the substantial impact that voluntary military service and conscription had upon the Southern population. Writing after the war, Dana recalled, “A fact which impressed me was the total absence of men capable of bearing arms. Only old men and children remained. The young men were all in the army or had perished in it. The South was drained of its youth.”⁵ Dana also noticed the dramatic effect that Grant’s policies had upon the first Southerners to endure the innovative measures. Dana described encountering citizens who “had at first sympathized with the rebellion, and even joined in it, now of their own accord rendering Grant the most valuable assistance, in order that the rebellion might be ended as speedily as possible, and something saved by the Southern people out of their otherwise total and hopeless ruin.”⁶ These former Secessionists acted more out of self preservation than from any patriotic turn of heart. Dana quoted them as declaring, ““Slavery is gone, other property is mainly gone . . . but, for God’s sake, let us save some relic of our former means of living.””⁷

Grant’s march introduced the realities of war to the Mississippi home front with an intensity that no one could have imagined two years before. Each animal slaughtered and each bushel of corn consumed meant one less that the Confederates could use to sustain the war. Even though Grant’s forces had until this point seen little fighting, they were doing more to win the war by depleting the Southern home front if they had been defeating the Southern army on the battlefield. Even if a tactical disaster occurred and Grant’s invasion was eventually repelled, those areas of Mississippi through which he had marched would have little value to the Confederacy if recaptured. As Grant pressed on, each step brought his army closer to their ultimate objective of Vicksburg, and each

residence visited by the foraging parties brought the Union one step closer on the long road to total victory.

The foraging encounters inspired terrifying rumors of insult and outrage. Sylvanus Cadwallader remembered greeting a collection of children released from school as the Federal army approached, and wrote that “as soon as the children saw me they took to the fence corner thickets, like a covey of quail, and it required considerable persuasion to induce them to come out of hiding and answer some friendly questions. They had been taught to believe that the ‘Yankee Army’ was a horde of vandals.”⁸ When the civilians at home endured invasive Union foraging and occupation, the will to continue the Southern endeavor in nation building collapsed.⁹ A soldier in the 16th Mississippi Infantry from Hinds County, Jerome B. Yates, wrote his wife from Virginia, “I am in hopes we will gorge Lincoln with his own blood and put an end to the war, but I reckon you think it is most too late for us to gorge the lion since all of our property has been overtaken by the foe.”¹⁰

Women, left at home to manage farms and plantations without male assistance, particularly suffered from deprivation of support from husbands and other male relations. British observer Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Fremantle, one of the most fascinating figures then present in the state, asserted after spending the night in a Mississippi residence that “it is impossible to exaggerate the unfortunate condition of the women left behind in these farmhouses. They have scarcely any clothes, and nothing but the coarsest bacon to eat, and are in miserable uncertainty as to the fate of their relations, whom they hardly ever communicate with.”¹¹ Visiting an area of Mississippi still secure under Confederate control, Fremantle noted, “Their slaves, however, generally remain true to them.”¹²

Fremantle, quite naively, failed to grasp that the behavior of the enslaved changed dramatically when Northern forces and freedom approached.

On May 12th, Union Major General James B. McPherson's XVII Corps collided with Confederate Brigadier General John Gregg's brigade outside the small village of Raymond. While the fighting raged, local residents prepared an extensive meal for Gregg's brigade in honor of an anticipated triumph. After repulsing a vicious attack, the superior numbers of the XVII Corps drove Gregg's Confederates back in retreat, hastily leaving the elaborate banquet behind. The battle of Raymond ended with Union conquest, and the citizens of Raymond found their victory celebration devoured by Federal soldiers.¹³ Ohioan Osborn Oldroyd remembered wryly that "The citizens had prepared a good dinner for the rebels on their return from victory, but, as they actually returned from defeat they were in too much of a hurry to enjoy it."¹⁴

The triumphant and well fed Federals camped in Raymond without incident, but their comrades who passed through after the battle were less magnanimous. One Ohioan, Corporal Owen Hopkins chronicled, "By broad daylight, however, the Brigade was astir, and a regular pillaging of the town commenced; the rain poured in torrents, and the streets were a quagmire, rendered so by the tramping of men and mules."¹⁵ While Northern soldiers partook of the shops of Raymond, their wounded comrades filled the largest buildings in town.¹⁶ On May 15th the looting continued, as Hopkins recorded on that date, "a general Plundering prevails. Stores and ware-rooms, Kitchen and dining-room, Parlor and Pantry, undergo alike the ordeal of being Searched by the prying 'Lincolnites.'"¹⁷ Hopkins diary relates a vivid scene of wreckage, which he described as "Furniture and Crockery, Glass-ware and tinware are scattered and Broken

promiscuously, and the Forty-second [Ohio] Boys are wreaking their vengeance on the China ware in a Whole Sale establishment just across the Street. . . . Go ahead, boys! It all belongs to Rebels; go in on your 'mus' [muscle].”¹⁸

Another Federal, Brevet Major Charles Miller, stated that “We passed through Raymond on our march and saw the marks of conflict near that place. It was here that the boys discovered a stock of fine liquors in a druggist’s cellar, and the canteens of almost the entire Brigade were filled with choice old wine, brandy and whiskey.”¹⁹ The alcohol uncovered in Raymond likely increased the severity of looting. One citizen later wrote that Grant’s soldiers “burned all the fences for their cooking pots and emptied the hen houses and the smokehouses. I saw them drive off a cow and calf while my mother begged in vain to spare them.”²⁰

After securing victory at Raymond, Grant determined to change the direction of his advance. Rather than striking northward to sever the Southern Railroad of Mississippi, Grant oriented his columns to the northeast against the state capital and industrial center of Jackson.²¹ As the Army of the Tennessee proceeded toward its new objective, vast numbers of runaway slaves continued to join the advance. Sylvanus Cadwallader noticed that “afternoon and night refugee ‘contrabands’ came swarming into our lines by hundreds. They were of all ages, sexes and conditions, and came on foot, on horses and mules, and in all manner of vehicles, from the typical southern cart, to elegant state carriages and barouches.”²² Cadwallader witnessed that “Straw collars and rope harness alternated with silver plate equipments, till the moving living panorama became ludicrous beyond description.”²³

The influx of former slaves further drained Mississippi's labor potential, already severely diminished by the manpower demands of Confederate military service. As each slave became free, the power of the Confederacy to feed itself and produce the necessary articles of war diminished, while conversely, the Federal army gained the labor of the freedmen, who served as teamsters, cooks, laborers, and Union soldiers. Once again, Grant depleted Southern resources without firing a shot. Furthermore, in many instances former slaves appropriated valuable wagons and property from their masters before departing, a further material loss upon slave owners. As Cadwallader detailed, "The runaway darkies who had made sudden and forcible requisition upon their old masters for these varied means of transportation, generally loaded their wagons and carriages with the finest furniture left in the mansions when their owners had abandoned them at our approach."²⁴ He noted that "Feather beds and tapestried upholstery seemed to possess a peculiar charm and value to the dusky runaways."²⁵

By May 13th, Grant had maneuvered his army into a central position, completely outgeneraling his opponent and feasting upon the rich surplus of the Mississippi heartland. As Grant's army approached Jackson, his maneuver divided Confederate forces on either side of his own and presented the Union with a decided operational advantage. That same day, Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston arrived to defend Jackson and assess the strategic situation. Johnston, who maintained one of the preeminent martial reputations in the South, along with a correspondingly prominent ego, quickly concluded his position was hopeless. Johnston determined to evacuate Jackson after a brief rear guard action rather than defend the city, although his command contained enough troops to at least severely delay, if not defeat, Grant's all consuming

advance. The battle and occupation of Jackson would result in a new degree of destruction and present the first major urban demolition of the campaign.²⁶

Inside the Mississippi state capital, Junius Henri Browne, a captured Northern war correspondent from the *New York Tribune*, surveyed the panicked evacuation with elation. Browne noted that at “the street corners were knots of excited men, discussing the prospects of the future with more feeling than logic. To us, who had long been careful observers, it was evident they were at a loss what to do; and you can imagine we rather enjoyed the trepidation of the Rebels.”²⁷ As the Yankees approached, many Jacksonians fled to the surrounding countryside. Browne commented that he “saw a number of vehicles of various kinds loaded with household furniture, and men, women, children, and black servants, all greatly excited, moving rapidly out of town.”²⁸

In stark contrast to the Secessionists, the town’s enslaved population welcomed the invaders. Browne documented that “A panic of the most decided kind existed among all classes of society; but we had no difficulty in perceiving that the negroes of both sexes, young and old, enjoyed the quandary of their masters and mistresses.”²⁹ Despite pleas from the city’s mayor for violent resistance from the civilian population, few Jacksonians undertook any organized defiance against Union forces. Browne sarcastically observed that, “If the citizens were flying to arms, they must have concealed them somewhere in the country, and have been making haste in that direction to recover them. They were certainly leaving town by all possible routes, and by every obtainable means of conveyance.”³⁰

After driving back Confederate delaying forces in a brief action, on May 14th the Army of the Tennessee entered Jackson in triumph. Rather than detach valuable units to

remain as an occupying garrison, Grant determined to eliminate Jackson's capacity as a war production center and railroad junction. In a foreshadowing of events that would occur the following year in Atlanta, Grant selected Sherman's XV Corps to destroy the manufacturing facilities. Grant later explained concisely that "Sherman was to remain in Jackson until he destroyed that place as a railroad centre, and manufacturing city of military supplies. He did the work most effectually."³¹ The destruction of Jackson marked a turning point in the career of William T. Sherman. Before the Vicksburg campaign, Sherman had lamented the material damage associated with the conquest of the South and had felt that Grant's audacious attempt to supply his army off the civilian population doomed to failure. With the capture of Jackson, Sherman learned just how effective the use of the torch could be in modern warfare, and it was a lesson he would later apply with brutally effective results in Georgia and the Carolinas.

At one particular textile factory, Grant and Sherman watched as workers, mostly young women, labored at looms producing cloth labeled "C.S.A." The two Union commanders stood by silently observing the scene until, as Grant later recalled, "I told Sherman I thought they had done work enough. The operatives were told they could leave and take with them what cloth they could carry. In a few minutes cotton and factory were in a blaze."³² Later, when Grant served as President of the United States, the owner of the razed factory traveled to Washington in an attempt to gain restitution for the property on the grounds that it had been private, not government property, a request which President Grant swiftly denied.³³

Grant, preparing to turn his march to the West, gave little time or consideration to the concerns of residents for the protection of private property. As war reporter Cadwallader

remembered, “Many calls were made upon him by citizens asking for guards to protect their private property, some of which perhaps were granted, but by far the greater number were left to the tender mercies of Confederate friends.³⁴ Those “Confederate friends” had started Grant’s work of ruin before he had even arrived. As Johnston’s army retreated they set fire to commissary stores that could not be removed, which were still blazing when Federals entered the city. In an appalling case of poor judgment, prison officials released the incarcerated inmates of the state penitentiary at the approach of Grant’s forces. The freed convicts burned their former prison and took full advantage of the lapse in law and order to pillage freely from Jackson merchants and residents. As the Army of the Tennessee began their mission of wreckage, flames were already spreading throughout the city.³⁵

When Union soldiers embarked upon reducing Jackson’s war making potential, they transformed much of the city into ashes. Cadwallader asserted that “Foundries, machine-shops, warehouses, factories, arsenals and public stores were fired as fast as flames could be kindled. Many citizens fled at our approach, abandoning houses, stores, and all their personal property, without so much as locking their doors.”³⁶ In addition to the military supplies, the conflagration consumed an immense amount of cotton stored in the capital. Charles Dana recorded that “I remained with Sherman to see the work of destruction. I remember now nothing that I saw except the burning of vast quantities of cotton packed in bales, and that I was greatly astonished to see how slowly it burned.”³⁷

As the destruction and fires raged, total anarchy was unleashed before Grant could restore order. Cadwallader watched helplessly as “the negroes, poor whites—and it must be admitted—some stragglers and bummers from the ranks of the Union army—carried

off thousands of dollars worth of property from houses, homes, shops and stores, until some excuse was given for the charge of ‘northern vandalism,’ which was afterwards made by the South.”³⁸ The newspaperman further testified, “The streets were filled with people, white and black, who were carrying away all the stolen goods they could stagger under, without the slightest attempt at concealment, and without let or hindrance from citizens or soldiers.”³⁹ Certainly, Union soldiers were not solely responsible for the acts of plunder that occurred in Jackson, as Confederate deserters, lower class whites, released prisoners, and freed slaves took full advantage of the lapse of civil authority to sack storefronts, shops, and private homes at will. The looting of Jackson lasted throughout the night of the 14th, and it was not until the following day that Sherman established order under martial law.

During the ransacking, a group of soldiers entered the Jackson Masonic Lodge during the mayhem. Private J. W. Greenman wrote that they “soon were decorated with aprons and sashes and collars, and then started to go out on the street for a parade but Col. Mower heard of the business and met the Boys just as they came down the stairs from the Lodge room.”⁴⁰ Mower apparently felt a deal of regard for the fraternal organization, as Greenman recorded, Mower “ordered the Boys to take everything back and then get out, which was quickly done.”⁴¹

Another Federal present, Charles A. Wilson, wrote of the Jackson inferno that “What grieved me most I think was to see the sugar warehouses with their tiers upon tiers of sugar hogsheads, going up in fire and smoke. I loved sugar—it had always been a luxury with me. . .”⁴² Despite the reigning confusion, Wilson managed to leave with “eight or nine canteens of it, hung to my shoulders, as we marched out of the city. But my

endurance proved not equal to my zeal for sugar. One by one the canteens had to go as the straps cut into my shoulder.”⁴³

The Federals also discovered a large supply of tobacco in Jackson, as Wilson affirmed, “An immense amount of plug tobacco was brought out by the soldiers, their hankering for the weed evidently on the same scale as mine for sugar. I think enough was left strewed over the ground at our first camp to thatch a good-sized village.”⁴⁴

Johnston’s retreating forces burned the Pearl River railroad bridge, and Grant’s army tore up the remaining railroad tracks that entered the city for at least three miles out.

Sherman’s men placed the rails upon burning ties to twist the track beyond repair into a worthless pile of metal termed “Sherman’s neckties.”⁴⁵

Not even the state library escaped unscathed during the orgy of destruction. Charles Dana Miller remembered that on May 16th he “visited the Mississippi State Library where the soldiers were helping themselves to books apparently without objections being made by General Sherman. I secured a few small volumes such as I could carry conveniently, but saw a good many expensive works I would have liked, could I have obtained transportation.”⁴⁶ Books were common items always desired by soldiers who had little reading material to help pass the long hours of drudgery in camp. On the march to Jackson, Osborn Oldroyd wrote that “The boys frequently bring in reading matter with their forage. Almost anything in print is better than nothing. A novel was brought in to-day, and as soon as it was caught sight of a score or more had engaged in turn the reading of it.”⁴⁷

The fires that raged within Jackson did extensive damage and smoldered for days afterward. On the evening of the 14th, Private J. W. Greenman of the 8th Wisconsin

recorded in his diary, “Some one started a fire just at dark, and the City is burning, and although every effort is being made to put out the fire it is spreading, and it looks as though the whole City will be destroyed.”⁴⁸ While the Union army did labor to prevent fires from threatening residential areas, controlling the flames proved impossible. Osborn Oldroyd wrote that “Some of the boys went down into the city to view our new possession. It seems ablaze, but I trust only public property is being destroyed, or such as might aid and comfort the enemy here-after.”⁴⁹ The first Union occupation of Jackson lasted only thirty-six hours, yet reduced invaluable industrial and transportation resources to rubble. When Confederates returned to the capital, then Mississippi Governor John Jones Pettus calculated the total costs of the damage at ten million dollars.⁵⁰

After seizing and eliminating Jackson’s capability as a Confederate supply depot, Grant turned his army westward toward his long sought prize, Vicksburg. As the Union columns marched out of the city, one Federal soldier, Brevet Major Charles Dana Miller, recorded that his company “found a hotel here called the ‘Confederate House’ as the large sign indicated on its front. This had been painted over the words ‘United States House.’ The boys concluded that it had better close up business under its new title and accordingly applied the torch.”⁵¹ Four days after the Federals left Jackson British observer Arthur Fremantle entered the city on his three month tour throughout the South and recorded, “I saw the ruins of the Roman Catholic church, the priest’s house, and the principal hotel, which were still smoking, together with many other buildings which could in no way be identified with the Confederate government. The whole town was a miserable wreck, and presented a deplorable aspect.”⁵² Fremantle gave great sympathy to the residents, who appear to have suddenly regained their desire to fight the Federal army

after it had vacated. He observed, “Nothing could exceed the intense hatred and fury with which its excited citizens speak of the outrages they have undergone—of their desire for a bloody revenge, and of their hope that the Black Flag might be raised.”⁵³ Surveying the wreckage in the city, Fremantle testified that “during the short space of thirty-six hours, in which General Grant occupied the city, his troops had wantonly pillaged nearly all the private houses. They had gutted all the stores, and destroyed what they could not carry away.”⁵⁴

Fremantle also chronicled an account of one Jacksonian who protected his house from a mob of looters by sitting next to the front door armed with a loaded double-barreled shotgun. As the spoils seeking crowd confronted the owner, the man aimed the shotgun at the multitude with the declaration that “No man can die more than once, and I shall never be more ready to die than I am now. There is nothing to prevent your going into this house, except that I shall kill the first two of you who move with this gun. Now then, gentlemen, walk in.”⁵⁵ The mass of plunderers, whom curiously Fremantle does not specifically identify as Yankees, left the residence unmolested.

Other citizens were less successful in their attempts to retain personal property. Fremantle described meeting one despairing planter, “mounted on a miserable animal which had been left him by the enemy as not being worth taking away.” Fremantle observed that “The small remains of this poor old man’s sense had been shattered by the Yankees a few days ago. They cleaned him completely out, taking his horses, mules, cows, and pigs, and stealing his clothes and anything they wanted, destroying what they could not carry away.”⁵⁶ Embittered as they were, the citizens of Jackson no longer presented a viable threat to the Union and the city would be essentially useless to the

South for the rest of the war. In fact, when Federal soldiers vacated and forced local and state authorities to provide for the thousands of refugees and an ever growing indigent population, the strain on Confederate authority reached the breaking point.

As the Army of the Tennessee drew closer to Vicksburg with each passing day, Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton and the Army of Vicksburg marched out of the fortress for a climatic confrontation. On May 16th, Grant decisively defeated Pemberton at the battle of Champion Hill and drove the Confederate army back in serious disorder. The following day pursuing Federals routed Pemberton's rear guard at the battle of the Big Black River Bridge and chased the retreating Rebels into Vicksburg itself. In order to cross the river after fleeing Confederates burned the bridge, Union soldiers confiscated necessary building materials from nearby homes and constructed three temporary bridges. Sylvanus Cadwallader noted that the engineering "was done by tearing down the dwelling houses, barns, stables and cotton gins nearest at hand, and flooring the cotton bale and timber floats which were bound together and anchored in the river."⁵⁷ By the afternoon of May 18th, Grant's men were finally within sight of the Vicksburg defenses.⁵⁸

During the march from Jackson to Vicksburg, the Army of the Tennessee for the first time during the campaign felt the effects of hunger. The Confederate army had stripped this region of most of its edible resources by this point in the war, leaving little for Federal foraging parties to commandeer. Charles Dana Miller remembered that "The troops were short of rations and many went hungry. The country was bare of supplies after two armies had passed over it. It was very difficult especially for the officers to obtain food, and in some instances they paid fifty cents apiece for crackers."⁵⁹ Lacking an

established supply line, Grant knew he had to reach the Mississippi River before the effects of the short rations began sapping the fighting strength of his army. Osborn Oldroyd wrote on May 17th, “We are fighting hard for our *grub*, since we have nothing left but flour, and slapjacks lie too heavy on a soldier’s stomach.”⁶⁰

For those well supplied with currency, appetizing food was easier to locate. Correspondent Cadwallader recalled that during the march he “never paid less than ten dollars in Confederate money for a single meal, although that much was never demanded, and I was quite as willing to give twice that for a satisfactory dinner.”⁶¹ As to his generosity, Cadwallader admitted that he “had an abundance of it that cost me nothing, and there was no other way in which I could properly use it.”⁶²

Even as the army approached the ever defiant Confederate bastion of Vicksburg, the Federals discovered a surprising amount of Unionist support among local residents. On May 18th, while riding with Grant, Cadwallader recorded that “As we approached a tumble-down sort of log cabin near the road a poor sickly looking woman stood at the gate waving a little Union flag.”⁶³ Intrigued, Grant directed a staff officer to investigate the flag bearer’s identity, who proved to be the wife of an Illinois river pilot who had moved South before the war, suffered conscription at the hands of Confederate authorities, and at that moment lay in the cabin extremely ill. Grant immediately ordered his staff surgeon to render medical aid to the couple, and then later detached another official to “place a guard to protect the premises; and still another to see that the family was supplied with needful commissary stores. The sick man received daily medical attention till he was able to bear the trip north, when Grant furnished the family free transportation and subsistence as far as Cairo.”⁶⁴

Marching at the rear of Grant's army, Sherman's XV Corps followed behind after completing the destruction of Jackson. When Sherman passed through the small village of Bolton, he located a rare souvenir. While enjoying a drink of water mounted on his horse, Sherman stumbled across a discarded book which upon examination he discovered to be Confederate President Jefferson Davis's personal copy of the United States Constitution. Federal soldiers had evidently acquired and discarded the manuscript when ransacking the Davis plantation along the Mississippi River, or had located personal effects of the Confederate president stored inland in vain hopes of protection. Sherman authorized a small unit to inspect Davis's premises, which visited the property and promptly returned with two horses formerly belonging to the Southern president's older brother, Joseph Davis.⁶⁵

Until Grant reached the Mississippi River and established a secure supply line with the United States Navy, the growing commissary crisis confronting the Army of the Tennessee continued to worsen. As Grant inspected the Union investment of Vicksburg, his soldiers made their hunger known to the commanding general. Grant later acknowledged in his memoirs, "I remember that in passing around to the left of the line on the 21st, a soldier, recognizing me, said in a rather low voice, but yet so that I heard him, 'Hard tack.' In a moment the cry was taken up all along the line, 'Hard tack! Hard tack!'"⁶⁶ Grant quickly explained to his men that rations were forthcoming, and by that night, every soldier in the Army of the Tennessee was fully supplied for the first time since they first set foot in Mississippi.

In the span of three weeks, from May 1st to May 18th, the Army of the Tennessee had marched over 200 miles, won five engagements with the enemy, conquered and reduced

the capital city of Jackson, inflicted nearly eight thousand casualties, destroyed miles of invaluable railroad tracks, divided the opposing Confederate forces and trapped Pemberton's entire army in Vicksburg. As he traced the ground along Hayne's Bluff, where he had endured the worst defeat thus far in his career the previous December at Chickasaw Bluffs, Sherman admitted to his friend Grant, "Until this moment, I never thought your expedition a success; I never could see the end clearly till now. But this is a campaign; this is a success if we never take the town."⁶⁷ As the two commanders prepared to assault the elaborate fortifications of Vicksburg, the civilians trapped within the city resigned their futures to an uncertain fate and waited anxiously for the Northern onslaught to begin.

CHAPTER 3

“WE WERE ALL CAUGHT IN A RAT-HOLE”

As the Army of the Tennessee invested the Southern fortress city of Vicksburg, the surrounded Confederates made their final preparations for the inevitable Federal assault. Before the roads were blocked, Lieutenant General Pemberton ordered the evacuation of the city’s non-combatants. Few residents obeyed the command, as fears of the approaching Union army surpassed the mounting threat of siege. Mary Loughborough, a displaced civilian seeking refuge in Vicksburg, expressed the opinion of many citizens when she wrote, “Where can we go? Here we are among friends—we are welcome, and we feel in safety. Let us at least share the fate of those we love so much.”¹ Remaining in the city risked shells and starvation, but fleeing into the anarchic Mississippi countryside offered little hope of security, and in the case of Southern white women, hazarded fates worse than death. As Loughborough stated, “If we leave, we cannot tell to what we may be exposed—even now, probably, the Federal army occupy Jackson; if we go into the country, we are liable at any time to be surrounded by them; and to whom can we apply for protection from the soldiery?”² A majority of the residents concluded, as did Loughborough, that “we must stay, come what will.”³

On May 17th, the civilians staying within the town encountered the defeated remnants of the Army of Vicksburg streaming into the streets in panicked disorder. Mary Loughborough recorded that supply wagons were “rattling down the street—going rapidly one way, and then returning, seemingly, without aim or purpose: now and then a worn and dusty soldier would be seen passing with his blanket and canteen; soon, straggler after straggler came by, then groups of soldiers worn and dusty with the long

march.”⁴ When Loughborough and her companions anxiously inquired the cause of the flight, the retreating Rebels exclaimed, ““We are whipped; and the Federals are after us.””⁵ After enduring successive disasters, the morale of Pemberton’s army collapsed in confusion and utter despair. As Loughborough avowed, “Where these weary and wornout men were going, we could not tell. I think they did not know themselves.”⁶

The day Vicksburg residents had dreaded for so long finally came to pass, and outside the fortifications, a seemingly unstoppable Northern juggernaut stalked in wait as if an instrument of Old Testament judgment. Almost instantly, sheltered caves appeared dug into the slopes of hills, and the small business of cave construction emerged overnight. Mary Loughborough reported that “Caves were the fashion—the rage—over besieged Vicksburg. Negroes, who understood their business, hired themselves out to dig them, at from thirty to fifty dollars, according to the size.”⁷

The caves varied in size and in some cases became quite elaborate, containing many features of home, including furniture, decorations, and servants. Mrs. Loughborough described her new abode as “an excavation made into the earth, and branching six feet from the entrance, forming a cave in the shape of a T. In one of the wings my bed fitted; the other I used as a kind of dressing room.”⁸ Such caves were dark, damp, depressing, and dangerous, but residents had no other means of protection from Grant’s unceasing artillery fire. When General Stephen D. Lee asked diarist Emma Balfour if she had relocated her family to a “rat-hole,” Balfour remembered that “I told him it seems to me that we were all caught in a rat-hole.”⁹

In front of the earthworks, defending Rebels burned houses that obstructed lines of fire and secured as many provisions as possible from the area. On May 19th, Emma

Balfour chronicled, “Last night we saw a grand and awful spectacle. The darkness was lit up by burning houses all along our lines. They were burnt that our firing would not be obstructed. It was sad to see.”¹⁰ One notable house escaped Confederate torch, the white home of Unionist James Shirley, which would later become a famous symbol of the siege. Shirley, born in New Hampshire, had long endured local distaste for his staunch political beliefs and had nearly lost his son to lynch mob when the younger Shirley refused to serve in the Rebel army. As the Union army approached Confederate lines, the resulting crossfire trapped the Shirley family inside the house. The residence survived after Union gunfire struck the Rebel soldier attempting to fire the building, and soon thereafter Federal soldiers relocated the Shirley family to a safer area behind the lines.¹¹

On May 19th, Major General Ulysses S. Grant ordered his men to storm the Vicksburg defenses. After conclusively winning the battles of Champion Hill and Big Black River Bridge, Grant believed a vigorous assault might capture the city quickly, avoid a costly siege, and allow him to concentrate his forces against General Joseph E. Johnston’s Confederate army then lurking in his rear. Sensing a fleeting opportunity, Grant determined to strike before Pemberton could stabilize morale. Behind the formidable earthworks, Pemberton reorganized his forces and deployed fresh troops to the front lines from the two divisions he had left behind to defend Vicksburg when he marched to Champion Hill. The reinforced Rebels dug into their trenches and waited, ready for any Federal assault. With little preparation, at 2:00 PM Grant’s men charged into a well designed killing field, enduring heavy losses, but failed to breach the Confederate line. The futile effort cost the Federals 942 casualties, while only inflicting an estimated 200 on their enemy.¹²

Despite the bloody repulse, Grant determined to try again. On May 22nd, after gathering more intelligence on Confederate defenses, he unleashed a broad attack over the entire line. The enormous assault frightened the residents, who nonetheless left the safety of the caves to view the action. Emma Balfour wrote that “we were all so interested in the result of the general attack which was then made all around the lines that no one thought of personal danger. That was a glorious day for us.”¹³

Although Union forces fought valiantly and in one case breached the Confederate line, the Southerners drove the Federals back. The second assault ended in the same result as the first, but this time Grant’s army suffered 502 killed, 2,550 wounded, and 147 missing, while the defending Rebel casualties likely did not exceed 500. After realizing that storming Vicksburg would cost too much, Grant determined to starve the Secessionists out.¹⁴ As the general stated in his memoirs, “I now determined upon a regular siege—to ‘outcamp the enemy,’ as it were, and to incur no more losses. . . . As long as we could hold our position the enemy was limited in supplies of food, men and munitions of war to what they had on hand. These could not last always.”¹⁵

As the siege unfolded, Federal forces bombarded the town night and day, from both land based artillery and naval gunfire. By the end of the siege, Grant’s army alone had 220 artillery pieces firing at Vicksburg, ceasing only when the gunners stopped to eat.¹⁶ The continual cannonade terrified civilians within the town and even elicited sympathy from Union soldiers. One Wisconsin soldier, James K. Newton, wrote after witnessing the nightly shelling of Vicksburg that “at such times I can distinctly hear the shells crash through the houses. Indeed some of the boys went so far as to say they could hear the screams of the women and children. but their *ears must have been better than mine.*”¹⁷

Ohioan Osborn Oldroyd recorded that “the inhabitants are now living in caves dug out of the sides of the hills. Alas! For the women, children and aged in the city, for they must suffer, indeed, and should the siege continue several months, many deaths from sickness as well as from our shells, must occur.”¹⁸

Inside the besieged city, the ongoing cannonade drove civilians and soldiers to the breaking point. Dr Joseph Dill Alison recorded a typical day’s entry in his diary on June 10th, writing that “Our situation now becoming desperate. No place of safety, if you stand still there is danger from the pieces of shell that fill the air, and if you move the danger becomes greater. The whole town is enfiladed.”¹⁹ As a medical provider, Alison witnessed the suffering of the wounded within Vicksburg, testifying that “The wounded are killed in the hospitals, Surgeons wounded while attending to their duties. Two days since Major Hoadley was killed in Camp twenty feet of where I was dressing a wound. . . . Night is almost as bad as day. The air is filled with missiles of destruction.”²⁰

After enduring weeks of siege, Alison concluded that “I have read of besieged cities and the suffering of the inhabitants, but always thought the picture too highly painted. But now I have witnessed one and can believe all that is written on the subject.”²¹ Alison ended his entry with the repugnant observation that “Rations though short, are still enough, and we have good water most of the time, so do not as yet suffer on that source. But the stench from dead mules and horses (killed by shell) is intolerable.”²²

Another Vicksburg resident, diarist Emma Balfour, declared, “every shell from the machines as they came rushing down like some infernal demon, seemed to me to be coming exactly on me, and I had looked at them so long that I can see them just as plainly with my eyes shut as with them open.”²³ On May 24th, she reported that a “child was

buried in the wall by a piece of shell, *pinned to it*,” and that in one of the Vicksburg hospitals, where many “wounded had just undergone operations, a shell exploded and six men had to have limbs amputated. Some of them that had been taken off at the ankle had to be taken off to the thigh—and one had lost one arm had to have the other taken off.”²⁴ The strain of daily shelling is poignantly evident in her entry, particularly when she observes, “It is horrible and the worst of it is—we cannot help it.”²⁵ Another civilian, Mary Loughborough affirmed, “But this was unexpected—guns throwing shells from the battle field directly at the entrance of our caves. Really, was there to be no mental rest for the women of Vicksburg?”²⁶ In the end, although reports vary, at least three civilians died from Federal shellfire and twelve suffered wounds.²⁷

Outside of the Vicksburg defenses, Mississippi civilians endured a bitter occupation from their Northern conquerors. As the Army of the Tennessee received reinforcements from other Union armies, Grant subsequently detailed expeditions to harass Johnston’s army and complete the wreckage initiated on his march to Vicksburg. In late May, he sent 11,000 men commanded by Major General Frank Blair along the Yazoo River to secure Federal supply depots, an area that he described as “rich and full of supplies of both food and forage.”²⁸ As Grant confirmed in his memoirs, “Blair was instructed to take all of it. The cattle were to be driven in for the use of our army, and the food and forage to be consumed by our troops or destroyed by fire; all bridges were to be destroyed, and the roads rendered as nearly impassable as possible.”²⁹

In early June Grant directed a force of three infantry and one cavalry brigades under Brigadier General Nathan Kimball to march to Mechanicsburg, a region that provided a significant amount of Confederate commissary provisions. Grant explicitly ordered

Kimball to “Collect all the forage, cattle and provisions you can and destroy what you cannot bring away. It is important that the country should be left so that it will not subsist an Army passing over it.”³⁰ Grant further instructed that “Wagons horses & mules should be taken from the Citizens to keep them from being used with the Southern Army.”³¹

The expeditions achieved extremely successful results and removed the vital agricultural produce along the Yazoo River from supplying Southern armies, further weakening the ability of Mississippians to continue the war. In late June Grant ordered another expedition against Greenville, and his directives precisely display the means and methods of “hard war” that would later be utilized throughout the South. Grant decreed that Union officers “Keep your men out of the houses of citizens, as much as possible, and prevent plundering. Give the people to understand if their troops makes raids necessary, all their crops and means of raising crops will be destroyed.”³² Although the plundering prohibition proved impossible to enforce, the practice of “area denial” during the Vicksburg campaign rarely resulted in physical harm to residents.³³

The operations in the Yazoo region greatly increased the animosity Mississippians felt for their enemies. One Wisconsin soldier, Chauncey H. Cooke, wrote his parents from Hayne’s Bluff, “the boys went wild raiding and foraging the country for anything they could eat or wear or destroy, and it was all right, for every white man and woman was ready to shoot or poison us.”³⁴ Cooke related a story of Federal vandalism that indicates how the stress of war could lead to a breakdown in discipline among the young men that filled the ranks of the Union army, writing “some of our boys raided a big plantation, took everything in sight, and came into camp with a mule team and wagon loaded with a fancy piano. They put the piano on board a steamboat and blindfolding the mules, which

were wild, turned them loose in camp.”³⁵ After enduring a hard campaign, Cooke and his comrades sought any release from the boredom and fear of military life they could find, and Cooke admitted in his letter that “It was a crazy thing to do.”³⁶ He noted that “There was some bee hives in the wagon full of honey and bees. The mules ran over some tents nearly killing a lot of soldiers and scattering bees and boxes along the way. It was fun all right for some of the boys got badly stung.”³⁷

One Southern woman, Ida Barlow Trotter, recounted years later that a party of Federals rode by her home outside of Vicksburg and asked her father if he knew of any Confederate soldiers nearby. When her father answered honestly that he did not, and the Northerners subsequently rode into an ambush a few miles further down the road, the Yankees returned seeking vengeance. Trotter remembered with horror “that they at once put the torch to our home and told my father that if he was on the premises at sun-down they would hang him. Leaving our home a mass of smouldering ashes, we went bare headed with nothing except what we had on.”³⁸

After burning the house, the Federals foraged for the farm for any food they could locate, taking “All the provisions they could find, all the stock and fowls and the gardens, orchards and growing fields had been turned into pastures for their horses.”³⁹ Left with no stocks of food, Trotter’s family had no choice but to rely on their enemies for sustenance. Trotter described their humiliation at eating Federal fare: “We drew our rations just like the soldiers did (and awful living it was to) fat pickled pork, hard tack so old it had bugs in it, a little flour and coffee.”⁴⁰ In order to eat the unpalatable ration, Trotter’s grandmother “soaked the hard tack in water over night to soften it, then fried it in the grease that came out of the meat and drank the coffee without sugar.”⁴¹ Another

woman, Lettie Vick Downs, recorded with anger, “The Yankees ripped up my carpets and used them for saddle blankets; took one chair off and threw my dining-room table into the house while it was one fire. Yankees have all of Deer Creek negroes except 4 or 5 old ones.”⁴²

The least restrained Federal soldiers searched houses for possible treasure, such as gold, silver, and other items. The Yankees often utilized slave dissent to discover the hidden valuables, which was most often buried somewhere on the property. After losing her house to a Union torch and relocating to her grandparent’s residence, Ida Trotter noted that “My grand mother had hid every thing in the house and store rooms that she could possibly hide, and curious were the places in which she secreted them. She had a few shingles taken from the roof, and had many things put in on the ceiling.”⁴³ Trotter recalled that “She had all the silver and jewelry buried, in boxes under the house and to keep some meat where we could get it to eat, she put two mattresses on a bed and placed a layer of bacon, hams between them.”⁴⁴

While Trotter’s family successfully retained their expensive possessions, Emilie McKinley, a Pennsylvanian who had migrated to Mississippi, recorded on June 14th that “The Yanks have found all of Mrs. Lane’s silver, also Mrs. Sexton’s and her jewelry, all buried. Took Mrs. Frank Gibson’s dead son’s clothing, which she had kept for years.”⁴⁵ The repeated acts of thievery and the complete inability of Southerners to retaliate inspired McKinley to rage in her diary, “I pray God will visit these devils with punishments equal to those they are inflicting on us.”⁴⁶ She bitterly exclaimed, “I would call down curses on their heads. I wish we had guerillas so that these men could not so securely tramps around. I would willingly see my house burnt (if I had one) rather than

see the wretches so secure from harm.”⁴⁷ Indeed, in the postwar era, many of these white Southern women would become the most ardent defenders of the Lost Cause and implanted their embittered anger of the war into the cultural identity of the defeated South.

Another Mississippi woman, Mrs. T. B. Fox, endured the destruction of home and accompanied family to the Woodburne Plantation on the Big Black River. Although she was born in the North, she received the same harsh treatment from the occupiers as her native born neighbors. In a July 3rd letter to her mother, she wrote that her family had “drawn no rations from the Northern army but we shall be obliged to do so soon. Many of the negroes have left, the corn & meat were taken the first week the Yankees came in here & they are driving off cattle & sheep & killing the hogs every day.”⁴⁸ To make matters worse, Fox lamented that “The garden is a perfect waste & nothing is left but a few green apples & the flowers & weeds. We are not allowed to pass outside the pickets to gather berries.”⁴⁹

Four other families stayed at the plantation, and the extra mouths further strained the limited food. Fox writes, “The cows are yet left to us, but may be taken any day & I cannot but shudder to think—how are these nine children to be fed then—they are all under six years of age.”⁵⁰ Fox agonized to her mother, “Older people can get along with a piece of dry corn-bread, but the little ones will soon suffer from diarrhea & dysentery. Oh! Mother! You Northern people know nothing of the horrors of war & may you be spared what I have suffered during the last year.”⁵¹ Certainly, as historian Peter F. Walker concludes in his study *Vicksburg: A People at War*, poor diet and malnutrition increased

civilian death rates from disease, especially from an outbreak of measles within besieged Vicksburg, but exact fatality figures are impossible to calculate.⁵²

Rumors of Yankee atrocities and crimes against humanity permeated the landscape. Ida Trotter remembered being told of the tragedy of the Cook family, writing that freed slaves “had reported their Master’s cruelty to them and the result was, a squad of soldiers went to the Cook home and over-powered the entire family except one little girl who hid under the house.”⁵³ According to the story, Trotter relates, “The father was most horribly mutilated, both arms and legs were cut off—a candle was put into a gun and shot into the Mother—a bayonet was thrust through one child—pinning her to the wall.”⁵⁴ Another alleged episode of Yankee barbarity involved taking revenge on a paralyzed Southern sympathizer with numerous sons in the Confederate army. Trotter detailed that after tarring and feathering the man’s wife with molasses, “They rolled the old gentleman out on his gallery in his rolling chair—they then set fire to the house. . . . leaving her thus to watch her husband burned to death—sitting in his own gallery.”⁵⁵ As a child during the war, Trotter’s tale is most likely more legend than fact, but as Peter F. Walker recognizes, “These stories were part of the mind of Vicksburg; that they were unfounded made no difference, the mind believes what it chooses to.”⁵⁶ Such stories represented how the Vicksburg community remembered the campaign in later years, regardless of historical accuracy.

Outside of Vicksburg, the peculiar institution was collapsing at an astounding pace that shocked those who had known no other way of life. During the campaign, rumors flew that Grant’s army intended to instigate a slave insurrection to aid the Union advance, encouraging the bondsmen to tear up railroad tracks, cut telegraph lines, and wreak havoc

behind Confederate lines.⁵⁷ Lettie Vick Downs wrote on May 29th that “Heard today that General Ried of the Yankee army had organized 600 negroes and intended on turning them loose upon the country, whereupon Pa decided that if possible he would send Katy, Matty, self and two children to Kentucky.”⁵⁸ Emilie McKinley recorded being told the fate of the McGaughey family, whose “negroes came to the house to whip Mrs. McG. Mr. Brick defended her as long as he could, but finding himself overpowered, he told her to run for her life. . . .When they got Mr. Brick down, they whipped him and made him call them Master and Mistress.”⁵⁹ The incident ended only when two Federal soldiers arrived in time to intervene to prevent the slaves from gaining further vengeance. As the former slaves departed, one warned that “Mrs. McG had better leave as the negroes said they were coming again.”⁶⁰ The experiences shocked McKinley, who could never have imagined the rage slaves repressed behind their forced obedience. She proclaimed in exasperation “What we are brought to, how humiliating. I feel that I cannot stand it. I am not afraid at all, but the disgrace almost—oh, it is horrible. Negroes rule the land.”⁶¹

Although the rumored slave revolt never occurred, in areas where the Union army approached slaves began resisting their owner’s authority on their own accord and aided the Federal invader as much as possible. At Hayne’s Bluff, Wisconsin soldier Chauncey Cooke reported, “The negroes were our only friends, and they kept us posted on what the whites were doing and saying.”⁶² Cooke stated that white plantation owners told their bondsmen that Northerners had “horns, that they eat nigger babies, and that they lived in the North in houses built of snow and ice, and that the Yankee soldiers were fighting to take the niggers back north where they would freeze to death. It is a fright what stories the whites tell their slaves.”⁶³ Despite the propaganda, liberated African Americans

welcomed the Union army. Cooke observed that the former slaves “seem to know what the boys want. They bring in chickens, turkeys, eggs, molasses, sugar corn pones, smoked meat, and honey.”⁶⁴ Nonetheless, the majority of the Federal army had no conception of racial equality, as Cooke remarked “The boys don’t treat them right. They cheat them out of a lot and their excuse is they stole the stuff from their white masters.”⁶⁵

While marching with his company on one of the expeditions into the Yazoo River bottom Osborn Oldroyd and his comrades arrived at a large plantation. In the surrounding fields, a large number of slaves were plowing with a number of mules. Oldroyd later recalled, “As our boys, accordingly, were unhitching the mules, some ‘dutchy’ in an officer’s uniform rode up yelling, ‘mens! You left dem schackasses alone!’”⁶⁶ While the German officer demanded restraint and attempted to protect the owner of the mules, his efforts were in vain. Oldroyd commented sardonically, “I doubt whether he had authority to give such an order, but whether he had or not he was not obeyed. When we marched off with our corn-bread and ‘schackasses,’ some of the darkies insisted on following.”⁶⁷

The actions of Union soldiers provoked scattered, but disturbing episodes of civilian and guerilla retaliation, which only hardened Federal treatment of Southern civilians. When ordered to stand guard one night near Haynes Bluff, Chauncey Cooke reported that the soldier he relieved advised him that it “would be nice during daylight, but to look out to-night. He said he had seen the glint of a gun barrel last night in the edge of the cane brake. He advised me to keep my eyes peeled and stay as much as possible in the shadow of the trees.”⁶⁸ When Chauncey questioned how he would do this and continue to march his beat, the Federal replied “I don’t give a damn for orders when I am alone here at midnight, and the officer of the guard asleep in his tent miles from here.”⁶⁹ As a final

word of advice, Chauncey recalled, “One thing he said, you will hear a lot of hogs grunting in the cane brakes. Maybe they are hogs and maybe they ain’t. Some of the boys have been shot by those hogs so look out.”⁷⁰ The exact number of violent incidents that occurred was likely small, but enough retaliation occurred to keep Union forces vigilant, especially at night.

As the siege of Vicksburg continued, Grant detailed 34,000 men under William T. Sherman to defend against Joseph E. Johnston’s lingering army. In June, Sherman and his newly created Army of Maneuver constructed an “Exterior Line” to prevent Confederate reinforcements from rescuing Pemberton’s trapped army. The “Exterior Line” ran from Haynes’ Bluff in the north to the Big Black River, and permitted Sherman to interact with numerous residents coping with the Union occupation.⁷¹ Sherman wrote to his wife of one meeting with a Southern lady who implored him, “Do, oh do General Sherman spare my son, in one breath, and in another, Lincoln was a tyrant and we only Murderers, Robbers, plunderers and defilers of the houses and altars of an innocent & outraged People.”⁷² Throughout the war, Southern women proved to be a constant annoyance to Sherman, who complained, “She and all the women were real secesh, bitter as gall & yet Oh do General Sherman protect my son. . . .I doubt if History affords a parallel of the deep and bitter enmity of the women of the South.”⁷³

Sherman observed the damage he and his soldiers had inflicted upon Mississippi, and commented, “Not a man is seen—nothing but women, with houses plundered, fields open to the cattle & horses, pickets lounging on every porch, and desolation sown broadcast.”⁷⁴ It is interesting that Sherman, who had lived in the South for years before the war, would become the most reviled Northern commander during the Lost Cause era for his

application of “hard war” in Georgia and the Carolinas, while Grant, who killed many more Confederate soldiers on the battlefield and perfected the exact methods Sherman used to break the civilian will to continue the struggle, would garner more respect in the later remembrance of the conflict.

Sherman, who had warned his Southern friends in Louisiana that secession was madness, surveyed a scene that must have confirmed his earlier forebodings of doom, stating, “Servants all gone and women & children bred in luxury, beautiful & accomplished begging with one breath for the soldiers Ration and in another praying that the Almighty or Joe Johnston will come & kill us, the despoilers of their houses and all that is sacred.”⁷⁵ Although Sherman had many friends from before the war serving in the Confederate ranks in Vicksburg, he had little sympathy for the cause for which they fought, writing, “Should it fall into our hands I will treat them with kindness, but they have sowed the wind & must reap the whirlwind. Until they lay down their arms, and submit to the rightful authority of their Government, they must not appeal to me for mercy or favors.”⁷⁶

Opposite Vicksburg in the aptly named “Interior Line,” Union soldiers continued the siege, shoveling closer to Confederate lines each day. From his vantage point in the trenches, Osborn Oldroyd noted the growing effectiveness of the siege, “If they have had to eat mules such as we have killed in the trenches, I pity them, for they are on a tough job. Several cows which I suppose had served families there with milk, we had to kill for browsing too close to our lines.”⁷⁷

While Vicksburg suffered from the effects of “General Starvation,” Union soldiers enjoyed a veritable feast. Grant recalled in his memoirs that many prominent Northern

visitors to the army would “bring a dozen or two of poultry”⁷⁸ to boost the morale of the soldiers. As Grant remarked dryly, “They did not know how little the gift would be appreciated. Many of the soldiers had lived so much on chickens, ducks and turkeys without bread during the march, that the sight of poultry, if they could get bacon, almost took away their appetite. But the intention was good.”⁷⁹

Within the city, conditions deteriorated rapidly. Food and clean water became scarce, and soon Confederate soldiers were dining on the butchered flesh of mules, rats, horses, and the infamous “pea bread,” a thoroughly miserable substitute for cornbread concocted from ground peas. A Louisiana rebel later recounted, “This food was very unhealthy, as it was almost impossible to thoroughly bake the mixture so that both pea flour and meal would be fit for consumption.”⁸⁰ Disease became common inside the city, and eventually even the city’s newspaper, the *Daily Citizen* appeared published on wall paper.⁸¹ Mary Loughborough remembered, “Some families had light bread made in large quantities, and subsisted on it with milk (provided their cows were not killed from one milking time to another), without any more cooking, until called on to replenish.”⁸² Loughborough herself “lived on corn bread and bacon, served three times a day, the only luxury of the meal consisting in its warmth, I had some flour, frequently had some hard, tough biscuit made from it, there being no soda or yeast to be procured.”⁸³

As rations decreased and “the gaunt skeleton of starvation commenced to appear,”⁸⁴ Confederate soldiers began to forage within the town for food, and several incidents of thievery occurred. Several members of the Third Louisiana Infantry dodged shells to collect cabbage from a resident’s garden, while two soldiers of Missouri admitted to running a gauntlet of Minnie balls and guard dogs to hunt unsuccessfully for local

chickens.⁸⁵ The merchants of Vicksburg were particularly hated for their hoarding of food and war profiteering.⁸⁶ As the Louisianan later declared, “Such incidents are, perhaps, not very flattering to the morality of the regiment, and will serve to explain how the ‘boys,’ at times, had an abundance, while their less venturesome and wondering comrades of the Mississippi regiments suffered the pangs of extreme hunger.”⁸⁷

As the siege continued throughout June with no end in sight, the defenders of Fortress Vicksburg waited anxiously for Confederate reinforcements under General Joseph E. Johnston and in the Trans-Mississippi Department to come to their rescue and lift the blockade. These efforts to save the city across the Mississippi River in Louisiana and Arkansas would result in perhaps the worst destruction of the campaign and condemn Vicksburg to its ultimate fate.

CHAPTER 4

“NOTHING IS LEFT BETWEEN VICKSBURG & JACKSON”

As Ulysses S. Grant’s Army of the Tennessee slowly strangled the life out of Vicksburg, Confederate forces across the Mississippi River in “Kirby Smithdom”¹ desperately attempted to save the vital city. Under intense pressure from Richmond, the Confederate commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, Lieutenant General Edmund Kirby Smith, organized separate expeditions to strike at Union supply depots on the west bank of the river in Louisiana and Arkansas. Unfortunately for the Confederacy, Smith’s efforts occurred too late to influence the siege as by this point Grant now received his supply shipments along the much safer Yazoo River north of Vicksburg. In late May, Smith ordered Major General Richard Taylor to assault Union garrisons at Milliken’s Bend, Young’s Point, and Lake Providence in Northeast Louisiana. Taylor felt that his small band of 5,000 men could accomplish little, but as he later remembered, “Remonstrances were to no avail. I was informed that all the Confederate authorities in the east were urgent for some effort on our part in behalf of Vicksburg, and that public opinion would condemn us if we did not *try to do something*.”²

Taylor’s small army consisted of Major General John G. Walker’s Texas Division, the only division formed during the Civil War comprised solely of units from the same state. Walker’s division contained two brigades commanded by Brigadier Generals Henry E. McCulloch and James M. Hawes, reinforced in this campaign by Colonel Horace Randal’s Texas brigade and Brigadier General James C. Tappan’s Arkansas brigade.³ One Texan in Randal’s brigade, Theophilus Perry, described the war-torn area of Northeast Louisiana as being as “desolate as can be.”⁴ The Texan described the

devastation as “fences and the houses broken in many places. Only a few old Negro women & children to be seen any where. Horses and cows and hogs all destroy[ed] and carried off. The most of the negroes, have been sent away to places of safety.”⁵ In the opening months of 1863, Grant’s army passed through the region before landing on the Mississippi shore and the lasting effects of thousands of Union boots were clearly evident.⁶

Taylor intended to seize desperately needed supplies at the outposts, defended only by a small force of a few Midwestern units and recently recruited African-American recruits. On June 7th Taylor ordered Walker to attack Milliken’s Bend and Young’s Point, while Confederate cavalry assaulted Lake Providence. The efforts against Young’s Point and Lake Providence stumbled through the swamps, forcing Taylor ultimately to abandon each. Only McCulloch’s Brigade at Milliken’s Bend actually assaulted its assigned target. At dawn, the Texans stormed into Union defenses located along a levee and supplemented by cotton bale breastworks, breaking through the Federal line in a savage hand to hand struggle. The charging Texans reportedly shouted “No quarters for white officers, kill the damn Abolitionists, but spare the niggers,” intending to return the former slaves to bondage.⁷ The inexperienced African American regiments, armed with old smoothbore muskets and barely trained, resisted with a courageous determination. After falling back from the first line, the Federals retreated to a second levee and the protection of two Union gunboats, the *Choctaw* and the *Lexington*. The gunboats’ artillery fire ripped into Confederate ranks and forced McCulloch to retreat.⁸

The small battle of Milliken’s Bend, while overshadowed by the larger battles of the war, was extremely costly for its size and had far reaching consequences. McCulloch

reported losses of 44 killed, 131 wounded, and 10 captured, while Union defenders suffered 101 killed, 285 wounded, and 266 missing out of 1,061 engaged, some of whom undoubtedly returned to slavery against their will.⁹ Milliken's Bend, along with Port Hudson earlier in the year, represented the first large scale combat in which African American regiments played a major role. The performance of the controversial recruits at these two battles forever altered the perception of black soldiers in the Federal army. Union observer Charles Dana reported that Milliken's Bend "completely revolutionized the sentiment of the army with regard to the employment of negro troops. I heard prominent officers who formerly in private had sneered at the idea of the negroes fighting express themselves after that as heartily in favor of it."¹⁰ Ulysses S. Grant, who would later utilize significant numbers of black troops in Virginia, wrote in his memoirs, "This was the first important engagement of the war in which colored troops were under fire. These men were very raw, having all been enlisted since the beginning of the siege, but they behaved well."¹¹

On the opposing side, the presence of armed freedmen provoked a reaction of enormous anxiety and extreme hatred among white Confederates. "All the reports which came to us," remembered Charles Dana, "showed that both citizens and soldiers on the Confederate side manifested great dismay at the idea of our arming negroes. They said that such a policy was certain to be followed by insurrection with all its horrors."¹² The sudden end of slavery and the creation of black Federal soldiers in many ways represented the Southern slave owner's worst nightmare. Surviving accounts differ as to the fate of black prisoners at Milliken's Bend, and it is impossible to determine how many, if any, black soldiers suffered execution at the hands of their Confederate captors. Reports of

rumored atrocities persisted and remain a heated subject of debate among historians today. Nonetheless, enough accounts of war crimes reached Grant to induce him to send a direct communication to Confederate Major General Richard Taylor, stating “Upon the evidence of a white man, a citizen of the south, I learn that a white Captain and some negroes, captured at Milliken’s Bend, La, in the late skirmish at that place, were hanged soon after at Richmond.”¹³ Grant threatened retaliation upon captured Confederate soldiers in response, which provoked Taylor to deny the accusation. Grant replied, “Having taken the responsibility of declaring slaves free and having authorized the arming of them, I cannot see the justice of permitting one treatment for them, and another for the white soldiers.”¹⁴ For the rest of the war the treatment of black prisoners remained a bitter dispute between North and South, and eventually became a predominant factor in Grant’s decision to cease the prisoner exchange system in 1864.

After failing to capture Milliken’s Bend, Taylor and Walker’s division spent the rest of the summer thrashing around in the Louisiana swamps, fighting heat, hunger, mosquitoes, malaria, and snakes, but achieving little else of value. After driving the Rebels out of Richmond, Louisiana, on June 15th, Union Brigadier General Joseph Mower burned the town to the ground, transforming the remaining residents into despondent refugees. The surviving citizens never rebuilt the small settlement after the war. The burning of Richmond and other towns in the region demonstrated how far Union commanders would go when moderate policies failed to secure stability or end conflict. As tensions mounted in an occupied region threatened with continued guerilla violence and suspected disloyalty, the presence of Confederate troops provided Mower with the opportunity to end permanently the Secessionist resistance of Richmond. Such

instances of deliberate, punitive destruction of entire Southern cities by Union forces were rare, but when they did occur they inspired both a resonating fear that coerced submission and a lasting bitterness that lingered on long after the war ended.¹⁵

With no hope of a feasible rescue of Vicksburg, Taylor's force raided along the west bank of the Mississippi River during the last days of June, employing a devastating scorched earth policy to eliminate the area's usefulness to the North and distract as many Federals as possible. On many occupied Louisiana plantations, the United States government leased the fields to Northern investors, who employed former slaves as a paid labor force to produce valuable cotton. Walker's division seared the landscape, capturing badly needed mules and horses and returning an estimated 2,000 African-Americans to slavery. In his report, General Walker proudly informed his superiors, "I am now engaged in burning all the cotton I can reach, from Lake Providence to the lower end of Concordia Parish, and shall endeavor to leave no spoil for the enemy."¹⁶ Walker further detailed that "I have also instructed the cavalry to destroy all subsistence and forage on abandoned plantations, that, from its proximity to the river, may give the enemy facilities for invasion."¹⁷

The desolation created by the Confederates surpassed any yet inflicted by the Yankees. Witnessing the ruin, Texan Theophilus Perry wrote his wife, "Our cavalry has destroyed the country between here and the Mississippi. They have burnt every thing I hear. It looks very silly to me for us to burn and destroy our own country. But this is the policy here."¹⁸ Another soldier from Arkansas wrote, "The torch was applied to *every* building: Gin houses, cotton, fences, barns, cabins, residences, and stacks of fodder. Mules were taken from the plows where the Negroes had left them at the approach of

danger, and driven off to the rear of our lines.”¹⁹ One Confederate officer in the expedition complained that the “enemy burns awhile then some of the planters take [the] oath of allegiance then our men [burn] them out and the plunderers and robbers end by sweeping what is left and the country once in the highest state of cultivation and pride of the South is nothing but a desert.”²⁰ As historian Warren E. Grabau observed, “Not even the Shenandoah Valley was scorched as thoroughly as this small region of Louisiana.”²¹

While soldiers on both sides burned civilian buildings and looted private property during the war, only Rebel forces forcibly kidnapped freed slaves to return them to bondage or executed blacks for bearing arms. Again, as in the case of Milliken’s Bend, rumors of murdered freedmen and white Unionists at the hands of rampaging Confederate soldiers surfaced after the raids along the Federal plantations, but the truth of the accused atrocities and the exact number of victims has been lost in time. For white civilians residing in the war-torn South, the approach of either army could be ruinous, as both armies regularly foraged for supplies and confiscated needed goods. In contrast, from the perspective of African-American slaves, the different armies presented vastly diverse policies of treatment. The Confederate army re-enslaved or killed escaped slaves, while the Union army, at least after 1863, actively liberated, hired, and in some cases, enlisted African-Americans into the military. It was in the Mississippi River Valley that black troops first engaged their former masters in large scale combat, which helped transform the struggle to preserve the Union into a social revolution that forever alter race relations in the United States.²²

During one particular skirmish with Confederate cavalry in Young’s Point, Louisiana on June 16th, a curious incident occurred that demonstrated a remarkable degree of

magnanimity among Union soldiers. After the engagement, Federal Private J. W. Greenman recorded, “We saw one of the rebel Cavalry coming toward us, we met him, and of course I took him prisoner, his wife and child were with him.”²³ As the Confederates had retreated, Union soldiers had set the torch to the town, which motivated the reluctant Rebel to leave his unit, collect his family, and defect. Greenman noted “that when he saw the town on fire he left his command as everything he had was in the town and he begged us to hurry with him and try to save something from the fire.”²⁴ Surprisingly, Greenman and his comrades quickly aided the former enemy, who had moments before been shooting at them. Greenman recalled, “We took him to the town and his house was just beginning to burn. We rushed into the house and got out everything of value so that his loss was not much, as he did not own the house.”²⁵ After retrieving the Southerner’s meager possessions, Greenman delivered the unlikely squad of prisoners to Brigadier General Mower and explained the unusual circumstances. “The General gave me the horse saddle and bridle,” Greenman wrote, “and the man and his wife and child came back with us to this place where we returned last night and today our prisoner with his family and goods were put on board an upriver steamboat and they went away happy.”²⁶ In this instance, Union soldiers were remarkably forgiving of a former enemy and unlikely ally.

Life deteriorated among Southern Unionists as well. Threatened by retaliation from both Secessionist neighbors and Confederate torches, planters who took the loyalty oath still suffered the confiscation of goods and supplies from Union foraging parties, and in mid-1863, became eligible for Federal draft. From that point on, eligible men in the South faced forced conscription from both sides, forcing many to hide in the interior

swamps and wilderness of the region and creating further disintegration of civil authority.²⁷

To the north in Arkansas, Kirby Smith's other offensives achieved even less success than the Louisiana escapades. The Confederate commander of the District of Arkansas, the elderly Lieutenant General Theophilus Holmes, collected a small force of some 7,600 men to launch an attack on the Federal garrison at Helena, another important Union supply depot located along the west bank of the Mississippi River. On July 4th, 1863, Holmes' veterans conducted a fruitless frontal assault against well prepared fortifications consisting of felled trees, rifle pits, five well-designed redoubts bristling with heavy artillery, the Union gunboat *Tyler*, and 4,000 Federal rifles. The poorly coordinated Confederate charge resulted in severe casualties of 1,528 men and a humiliating defeat. Union losses were minor in comparison, 239 killed, wounded, and missing. Although neither offensive in the Trans-Mississippi was successful in rescuing Vicksburg, at least Lieutenant General Kirby Smith made an effort, which is more than can be said of Joe Johnston and his ill-named Army of Relief.²⁸

In Arkansas, Union soldiers treated Southern civilians as harshly as they did in Mississippi. In July, at Cypress Bend, Arkansas, a Federal party landed in search of Confederates responsible for attacks on Union shipping down the Mississippi River. One Federal soldier present, Chauncey Cooke, recorded that he and a group of soldiers entered a plantation mansion after finding horse tracks and extinguished camp fires nearby, only to be greeted by an older woman and two young females imploring the Union men not to enter the house. The terrified women feared retribution for the actions of the rebels. In a letter to his father Cooke detailed, "The oldest one pleaded pitifully,

wringing and rubbing her hands first one and then the other, and then reaching out her hands toward us as far as she could urging us to stay out, all the while crying and at times screaming as if her heart was breaking.”²⁹ According to Cooke, the eldest daughter “said her mother was sick and likely to die and begged us to go away. I never felt meaner in my life.”³⁰ Despite the women’s emotional demonstration and his own regrets, Cooke and the remaining Federals forced their way into the house. Cooke admitted, “One of the boys pushed by the girls and opened a closet in the wall. The girl jumped into the door and with tears streaming down her face begged him to stay out. There is nothing in here she said but the wardrobe and relics of my dying mother.”³¹ The Federal search continued with little success, and Cooke reported, “The house was soon crowded with soldiers and the door of the closet opened and examined but we found nothing but dresses and cloaks and bonnets and blankets.”³² The whole dismal affair distressed Cooke, and he confessed to his father, “I got ashamed and wished that I was out of it. I went back into the big hall and found a bookcase. I stuck Longfellow’s *Hiawatha* in my pocket and Ed. Coleman and Elder Harwood took turns with me reading it on our return to Snyder’s Bluff.”³³ The bitter episode ended just as fruitlessly as many other futile searches for Confederate partisans ended along the river. Cooke concluded his account stating, “When I went outside I found several buildings on fire. The orders had been not to set any fires, but nobody cared and nobody would tell.”³⁴ The female residents, who likely were unaware or unable to stop the attacks of guerillas and Rebel cavalry from their property, bore the brunt of the resulting retribution.

In Central Mississippi that summer, Confederate soldiers in General Joseph E. Johnston’s Army of Relief anxiously awaited orders to challenge Grant and lift the siege.

Unfortunately for Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton and his trapped Army of Vicksburg, Johnston neglected to attempt any real challenge to the besieging Yankees. For reasons still debated today, Johnston refused to risk his recently created 32,000-man Army of Relief against Grant's unbeaten Army of the Tennessee, and spent the better part of May and June idle, accomplishing nothing more than arguing with President Davis for more reinforcements and supplies while Union forces steadily increased. When a despairing Pemberton asked when aid would arrive, Johnston bleakly responded, "I am too weak to save Vicksburg," and left the doomed garrison to survive on its own.³⁵ On June 15th, Johnston wired his superiors, "I consider saving Vicksburg hopeless."³⁶ Eventually, in early July Johnston reluctantly started his columns marching toward a confrontation with Grant's army, but he quickly called the operation off when word of the surrender arrived.³⁷

Inside besieged Vicksburg, Pemberton's army continued to endure ever decreasing rations and ever increasing Union shellfire throughout late June and early July. On June 20th Union soldier Osborn Oldroyd wrote, "Even if the defenceless women and children in Vicksburg are protected, or feel as if they were, such a screeching of shot and shell must prove a terror to them, and my heart has not yet grown so hardened that I can not feel for them."³⁸ As the garrison and residents lingered on the edge of starvation, any eatable animal, including rats, entered the daily fare. Diarist Mary Loughborough noted, "A certain number of mules are killed each day by the commissaries, and are issued to the men, all of whom prefer the fresh meat, though it be of mule, to the bacon and salt rations that they have eaten for so long without change."³⁹ She conceded, "There have already been some cases of scurvy: the soldiers have a horror of the disease; therefore, I

suppose, the mule meat is all the more welcome.”⁴⁰ On June 18th, Vicksburg’s sole surviving newspaper, *The Daily Citizen*, began to print its issues on wallpaper. With no hope of outside relief remaining, and Union approach trenches drawing closer each day, the end of the siege was in sight. It was only a question of whether Pemberton would surrender before Grant ordered the final assault that both commanders knew would succeed.⁴¹

During the waning days of the siege, Union soldiers continued their foraging expeditions into the countryside. Observer Osborn Oldroyd described the extremes taken by Federal soldiers to make a comfortable bed at night: “Everything possible is done by the soldier to secure a good night’s sleep. I have seen straw stacks torn to pieces, sheds pulled down, and fences melt away in the twinkling of an eye, about camp time.”⁴² Fences were the most common target, and Oldroyd recounted the story of one particular officer who “ordered his men to take only the top rail, which was obeyed to the letter, yet every rail disappeared—the bottom rail finally becoming the top one. I have seen half a regiment bearing rails, boards and straw toward camp before even the end of the day’s march was reached.”⁴³

On a separate occasion, Oldroyd and his comrades encountered a group of eleven young ladies celebrating a birthday party while roaming through rural Mississippi on a hunt for blackberries. The Ohioan recalled, “We asked, of course, where ‘the boys’ were, and they replied, as we expected, ‘out hunting Yanks.’ Well, we found it a treat to get a taste of sociality once more, after being so long famished.”⁴⁴ In keeping with true Southern hospitality, and shrewdly avoiding trouble, the young women politely invited the Federals to stay, and the soldiers gladly accepted. Oldroyd joyfully recalled, “The

eatables were good, and we had a splendid time—all the while, of course, keeping one eye on the girls and the other on the window. . . . they assured as we had nothing to fear from them, for they were all ‘for the Union.’ No doubt they will be whenever their ‘boys’ come home.”⁴⁵

On July 4th, 1863, John C. Pemberton formally surrendered the Army of Vicksburg to Ulysses S. Grant. The victory, along with George G. Meade’s repulse of Robert E. Lee’s second incursion into the North at Gettysburg, electrified the North and destroyed morale among civilians and soldiers throughout the Confederacy. One member of the 16th Mississippi serving in the vaunted Army of Northern Virginia, Jerome B. Yates, wrote home to his sister from Pennsylvania, “What is the use of us fighting so hard and whipping the enemy up here when through the neglect of those down at home we are to lose everything that we are fighting for?”⁴⁶ The disgruntled rebel further declared, “I for one am wishing to stop the thing unless the Southern army will give us a little help.”⁴⁷ Another, James Johnson Kirkpatrick wrote in his diary, “Got Richmond papers of the 13th stating again and more positively that Vicksburg capitulated on the 4th. The news is very discouraging . . .”⁴⁸ As word of the disaster spread, desertions within Mississippi units rose noticeably. One Magnolia State Rebel, J. B. Crawford, lamented, “News reached hear that vicksburg has gon up the spout. If it has wee had just as well quit and give up the Confederacy.”⁴⁹ As historian Ben Wynne concludes, “For some soldiers who had entered the service as part of a community enterprise, it was the successful federal invasion of their home state in 1863, not the subsequent fall of Richmond or the surrender at Appomattox, that marked the end of the war.”⁵⁰

Desertions also increased in Louisiana and Texas units as well, particularly after the fall of Port Hudson on July 9th.⁵¹ One Texas Rebel, Private Samuel Farrow, realized the magnitude of the defeat when he observed, “they have got full control of the Mississippi river from its fountain head to where it empties into the Gulf and the Northwestern states now will pour down their forces upon us in such numbers that we will be compelled to retreat before them as far as they choose to follow.”⁵²

As the triumphant Union soldiers marched into the streets of Vicksburg, they strode past stunned citizens and bombed out buildings. Federal soldier Thomas Wise Durham later recalled, “It was interesting, if not amusing, to see the women in hysterics, raving, pulling their hair, stamping their feet and cursing the Yankees.”⁵³ According to Durham, the women acted as though the Earth “had come to an end and they wanted to die hard, but they mellowed down a little when we began to feed them. We not only fed the army that had surrendered but all the citizens of the city, for they were all quite hungry when the surrender was made.”⁵⁴ Once within defiant Vicksburg, the Federal army immediately began distributing food to both Pemberton’s army and the residents of the town. One Yankee witness, Ira Blanchard, remembered, “The inhabitants were in a famishing condition, and when we opened a bakery where we made fresh bread for our regiment, the women, those too who had been wealthy before, would come out and beg a loaf as we carried it through the streets.”⁵⁵

Within the city, Mary Loughborough safely exited her cave, awestruck at the incredible magnitude of the Union artillery bombardment. “On the hill above us,” she noted, “the earth was literally covered with fragments of shell—Parrott, shrapnell, canister; besides lead in all shapes and forms, and a long kind of solid shot, shaped like a

small Parrott shell.”⁵⁶ She further described how “Minie balls lay in every direction, flattened, dented, and bent from the contact with trees and pieces of wood in their flight. The grass seemed deadened—the ground plowed into furrows in many places; while scattered over all, like giants’ pepper, in numberless quantity, were the shrapnell balls.”⁵⁷ As Grant’s men entered the city, a few instances of looting occurred by renegades in both armies until the victors restored order. One Missouri Confederate, Ephraim Anderson, admitted that none of the “private dwellings in the place were disturbed except those from which the families had removed for safety; and the furniture in these was appropriated by the [Federal] soldiers, who . . . seemed to survey themselves and surroundings with evident complacency, and used these new luxuries with the most nonchalant air.”⁵⁸ Anderson further recorded, “Sugar belonging to the Confederate government, and also some that belonged to private parties, were rolled out into the streets by the Federal soldiery, the heads of the hogsheads knocked out, and the rebs around were invited to come up and help themselves.”⁵⁹

After the surrender J. W. Greenman toured the Secessionist stronghold in order to “see the effects of our attack.”⁶⁰ “I went all through the City,” he noted in his diary, “and saw the shattered stores, Warehouses and dwellings, and saw and went into some of the Caves in the side of the hill where the wealthy people lived during the siege.”⁶¹ Greenman preserved an account of one interesting interview he conducted with a war weary woman of Vicksburg when stopped at a battered residence for a drink of well water. He asked the tenant if she was in the house when the shells landed behind her home and “She replied that she was, and very spitefully told me that all the nasty yankees in the North could not scare her away from her home. I admired her grit, but did not have much respect for her

discretion.”⁶² One Northern sight-seer, Thomas Durham, commented, “There was hardly a house in the city that was not riddled by our cannon balls and shells,” while another Yankee, William Winters, recorded, “I saw one house that had 27 round shot holes in it and I don know how many from musket balls and fragments of shell, but it was an awful sight.”⁶³

A few days into the Union occupation, Missouri Confederate Ephraim Anderson was horrified during a visit to the Vicksburg cemetery to discover plundered family mausoleums and ransacked tombs, which he derided as “a very barbarous and desecrating act.”⁶⁴ Anderson narrated, “I observed, to my horror, that the glasses had been broken and the bodies had been disturbed and desecrated by the foul touch of the ruthless invader,” and that “the hand of the robber had torn from its sacred resting place the jewelry that had been committed to the tomb as memorials of love and affection, the last tribute of the living to the memory of the dead.”⁶⁵ Although Anderson blamed the outrages on a “Federal regiment encamped close by,” in the momentary chaos following Vicksburg’s capitulation any number of dissatisfied Confederates, Union bummers, resentful freed slaves, or simply common criminals may have been responsible for the grave robbing.⁶⁶

On the day after the surrender, Major General William T. Sherman wrote to his wife Ellen, “Oh the wail of these secesh Girls when Vicksburg surrendered They cried and tore their hair, but I told them they had better not—they would survive the humiliating thought and eat whatever bread with as much relish as they ever did the corn dodgers of Aunt Dinah . . .”⁶⁷ In his letter, Sherman admitted it was “hard to see as I do” the fate of one Southern minister and planter who had fallen on hard times since Union soldiers had visited the area.⁶⁸ Sherman related that “Two months ago he had a dozen house servants

& 40 field hands, but now all gone, fences open & corn eaten up—garden pillaged by soldiers, house gutted of all furniture &c., indeed desolation, and he & his family compelled to appeal to us for the Soldier's Ration.”⁶⁹ Observing the effectiveness of his new “hard war” policy, Sherman wryly concluded that “This you will say is the judgment of God, but stiff necked he dont see it.”⁷⁰

After the reduction of Vicksburg, Grant ordered Sherman to turn his 46,000 men eastward against Joe Johnston and his retreating Army of Relief. Johnston's retrograde movement affected every citizen when Confederates poisoned the few reliable sources of drinking water along the route, but failed to halt the relentless Federals. Sherman pursued Johnston back to the rebuilt defenses of Jackson and surrounded the city on three sides, once again utilizing the shovel and spade to draw closer to the capital city each day. When sufficient ammunition arrived for a massive Union artillery bombardment, Johnston ordered the evacuation of Jackson for the second time, destroying the vital Pearl River railroad bridge in the process. On July 17th, Sherman reentered the city and immediately began completing the work of destruction he had begun in May.⁷¹ The Federals thoroughly wrecked the few manufacturing and rail facilities that had survived the original occupation or had undergone any repair since, until Sherman could safely state to Grant, “Jackson will no longer be a point of danger” and assure Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter that “the pride and boast of Mississippi is now a ruined Town.”⁷²

With his army in control of the Mississippi state capital for a second time and Johnston's army eliminated as a potential threat, Grant could afford to be generous in the much harder campaign to restore the loyalty of the local populace. In Jackson itself, Sherman provided 200 barrels of flour and 100 barrels of salt pork for starving residents

along with medicine for Confederate sick and wounded left behind. Grant's forces also issued Union relief supplies to the citizens in the countryside, as the region that the Army of the Tennessee stormed through on its epic march to Vicksburg lay in utter ruin. As Grant later stated in his memoirs, "Medicine and food were also sent to Raymond for the destitute families as well as the sick and wounded, as I thought it only fair that we should return to these people some of the articles we had taken while marching through the country."⁷³ Grant went so far as to direct Sherman to remind his soldiers to "create as favorable an impression as possible upon the people," and directed that "Provisions and forage, when called for by them, were issued to all the people, from Bruinsberg to Jackson and back to Vicksburg, whose resources had been taken for the supply of the army."⁷⁴

Mississippians desperately needed those Union supplies, as the physical desolation of central portion of the state reached a level that shocked even Northern observers. As war correspondent Sylvanus Cadwallader testified, "No subsistence of any kind remained. Every growing crop had been destroyed when possible. Wheat was burned in the barn and stack whenever found. Provisions of every kind were brought away or destroyed. Livestock was slaughtered for use, or driven back on foot."⁷⁵ Cadwallader reported that "Thousands were already applying for food to sustain life; and such heart-rending destitution had never been witnessed on the American Continent as in the region indicated."⁷⁶ Even Sherman admitted in a letter, "Our men are now all Expert thieves, sparing nothing not even the clothes of women, children & Negroes. Nothing is left between Vicksburg & Jackson so I can have peace here."⁷⁷

Passing through Port Gibson after receiving his parole, Ephraim Anderson noted, “As Grant’s army had passed up to the rear of Vicksburg, many of the houses had been visited by squads of cavalry, who were hunting ‘pretties,’ as they call it: this meant money, plate, watches, jewelry, spoons, and other valuables.”⁷⁸ The Missourian recalled that “visiting down toward Port Gibson, we found scarcely a house had been passed without receiving a call. The negroes had left the plantations, and all the fine equipages had been carried off by the Federals.”⁷⁹ The residents that remained were in dire straits, as Anderson recanted that “the handsome estates were in ruins; all the houses in the vicinity had been burnt, except one, and every means of living completely destroyed.”⁸⁰ Stunned by such sights, Anderson complained bitterly, “This was a sad state of affairs, and one well calculated to impress the beholder with a conviction, that the worst pestilence was preferable to a visitation from the Federal army.”⁸¹

Indeed, as war correspondent Cadwallader remembered, “the people of that part of Mississippi were the worst-whipped communities on the face of the earth. They were completely humbled and begged for mercy on every hand.”⁸² According to Cadwallader, Grant’s application of hard war policies was extremely effective, as the citizens “acknowledged themselves thoroughly conquered; admitted their inability to longer oppose the Federal government; expressed their willingness to come into the Union again on any terms; and begged of him [Sherman] in the name of everything held sacred to oppress them no further.”⁸³ In the span of three months, Grant had essentially eliminated Mississippi’s role in the war, and later that year he would lead his armies into other states of the South to enact the methods he had perfected in his conquest of Vicksburg.

Grant's Vicksburg campaign resounded as the most devastating catastrophe ever to befall the Confederacy. Not only did the Union gain the opening of the Mississippi River for Midwestern commerce, which greatly increased support for the war and greatly reduced the threat of the Copperheads in the region, it gained the largest surrender of Confederate soldiers during the entire war—29,491 men, the largest total in American history. The loss of an additional 6,340 Rebels surrendered to Nathaniel Banks at Port Hudson, which fell promptly after Vicksburg, along with battle casualties endured for the Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas battles, the figures added up to an appalling sacrifice for the Confederacy. An estimated total loss of manpower killed, wounded, and captured would likely exceed 46,000, almost double what Lee lost at Gettysburg, and does not include the increased number of Southern desertions that accompanied Grant's victory. Many of the soldiers in the Army of Vicksburg simply returned home and remained there throughout the war after receiving their paroles, despite Pemberton's vain attempts to restrain them. The material losses to Confederate forces are almost incomprehensible. At Vicksburg, Grant's army seized 172 artillery pieces, 38,000 artillery rounds, 58,000 pounds of gunpowder, 4,800 artillery carriages, 50,000 arms, 600,000 rounds of ammunition, 350,000 percussion caps, along with another 51 guns and 7,500 small-arms lost at Port Hudson, and 3 cannon, 1,396 weapons, and 23, 245 artillery rounds lost after Johnston's second evacuation of Jackson, much of which would be employed against their previous owners in battle.⁸⁴

The economic, agricultural, and psychological damage inflicted by the burnings of Jackson, the widespread foraging throughout the region, and the emancipation of an enormous number of slaves is incalculable. Grant accomplished all of this in the heart of

enemy territory, with no clear avenue of retreat, and until reinforcements arrived during the siege, against two opposing armies that combined outnumbered his own. No other campaign in the entire war, not even the most famous Overland campaign in Virginia, so weakened the Confederacy as the Union's effort to seize the Mississippi. And ultimately, the man who was most responsible for the success of the campaign was the North's foremost military genius, Ulysses S. Grant. No one person in the North, with the exception of President Abraham Lincoln, contributed more to the Union's triumph in the Civil War.

Perhaps even more decisive than the destruction of military resources, the campaign against Vicksburg transformed the way in which the war impacted the civilian population of the South. The drastic amount of damage inflicted upon the population and infrastructure by Grant's decision to forage intensely and deprive opposing armies of sustenance removed this area from the war and created the means that would enable the Union to win the war in the next two years. The Vicksburg campaign cemented the transition from pragmatic to hard war in the western theater, from which it would later spread throughout the Confederacy. As Mark Grimsley concludes, the Mississippi River Valley was the "Cradle of Hard War."⁸⁵

One important element of this campaign was that the common soldiers of the Army of the Tennessee almost universally approved of Grant's hard war and implemented the strategy without hesitation. In many respects, it appears that individual soldiers were actually exceeding the orders instituted by Grant and Sherman to protect civilian property and were practicing more of a punitive, rather than pragmatic, policy toward civilians during the campaign. These two Union commanders only expressly authorized hard war

policies after the Vicksburg campaign when the apparent effectiveness of the stricter methods became apparent. In some cases, a minority of soldiers drove the policies to a dangerous extreme not intended by Grant, but by and large a strong degree of restraint resounded throughout the entire campaign. Indeed, when compared to European experiences in the Napoleonic Wars and World War I, or even the contemporary frontier struggle against Native Americans within the United States, the treatment of civilians in the American Civil War was remarkably restricted.

While Grimsley argues that Union soldiers did not resort to punitive measures until the second Union occupation of Jackson in late July, it appears from surviving evidence that the rank and file were already practicing hard war during the march to Vicksburg. Interestingly, Grant's soldiers accelerated the severity of their treatment of Southern civilians beyond that practiced at the same time by Federal armies in Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. There are several factors responsible for this discrepancy, including the more reliable supply system in other theaters and a strong Unionist presence in the Upper South, but the most likely motivation that drove the Army of the Tennessee to this heightened degree of chastisement resulted from the extreme culture clash between Midwestern soldiers and the slaveowners of the Deep South.⁸⁶

Mississippi, the second state to secede after South Carolina and the home of Jefferson Davis, was one of only two Southern states to contain more slaves than white residents, and conversely supported the institution of slavery and the Confederacy far more intensely than in areas of the Upper South, with 48 percent of white families in the state owning slaves.⁸⁷ Federal soldiers in the Army of the Tennessee were the first major Union armed force to penetrate into the Deep South and encounter the harsh nature of the

plantation system practiced there, and the discovery horrified most Northern soldiers. As Charles Dana admitted, “I had seen slavery in Maryland, Kentucky, Virginia, and Missouri, but it was not till I saw these great Louisiana plantations with all their apparatus for living and working that I really felt the aristocratic nature of the institution, and the infernal baseness of that aristocracy.”⁸⁸ When Grant’s forces entered Central Mississippi, the Emancipation Proclamation and the realistic threat of African-American soldiers heightened tensions between Mississippians and the invaders, and guerilla activity lingered throughout the campaign. After enduring two years of bloodshed and bitter hostility from the local populace, it is not surprising that Union soldiers executed hard war before their officers understood or accepted its use. The amount of destruction rose markedly as Federal units entered this region and remained in practice until it accomplished results. The punishment slackened after Confederate armies retreated and Federal control stabilized, and the Union began providing food and medicine to the defeated civilian population. Sherman’s later, better known “March to the Sea” in Georgia, utilized the exact same strategy and means to achieve similar results.⁸⁹

Grant, who would go on to command the victorious Army of the Potomac in a bloody campaign against General Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia, declared after the war that “The fate of the Confederacy was sealed when Vicksburg fell. Much hard fighting was to be done afterwards and many precious lives were to be sacrificed; but the *morale* was with the supporters of the Union ever after.”⁹⁰ Year later, while contemplating the event that transformed the war and created the means to win it, even the usually non-religious Grant would admit, “It looks now as though Providence had

directed the course of the campaign while the Army of the Tennessee executed the decree.”⁹¹

NOTES

Chapter One

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² William L. Shea & Terrance J. Winschel, *Vicksburg is the Key: The Struggle for the Mississippi River* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 1-2, 17-18; Warren E. Grabau, *Ninety-Eight Days: A Geographer's View of the Vicksburg Campaign* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 9.

³ Winschel, *Fall of the Confederate Gibraltar*, 14.

⁴ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), vol. XVI, part I, 100. Herein after cited as *OR*.

⁵ Thomas L. Connelly, "Vicksburg: Strategic Point or Propaganda Device?" *Military Affairs* 34, No. 2 (April 1970): 49-53; available from <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0026-3931%28197004%2934%3A2%3C49%3AVSPOPD%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V>; Internet, accessed 18 January 2008.

⁶ *OR* vol. XXXI, part III, 459.

⁷ Shea & Winschel, *Vicksburg is the Key*, 1-32.

⁸ Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 13-38.

⁹ Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy Toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3.

¹⁰ Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, 23-95; Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 13-37.

¹¹ Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, 3.

¹² Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 13-18.

¹³ Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, 96-142; Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 50-56; Michael B. Ballard, *Vicksburg: The Campaign That Opened the Mississippi* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 210-211.

¹⁴ Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 50-56.

¹⁵ Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 1-37; Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*, 3-22.

¹⁶ Ballard, *Vicksburg*, 5-12; "Unionism in Vicksburg," *Atlanta Appeal* date unknown, Robacher (John J.) Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS.

¹⁷ Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 149-169; William C. Davis, *Look Away: A History of the Confederate States of America* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 130-162.

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ABSTRACT

MARCHING THROUGH MISSISSIPPI: SOLDIER AND CIVILIAN INTERACTION DURING THE VICKSBURG CAMPAIGN

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The Vicksburg campaign marked a key transitional phase of Union policy toward white Southern civilians. Initially, Northern military commanders had instituted a conciliatory approach to Southern civilians and property, but by late 1862 the policy had evolved to a pragmatic form of warfare that allowed stricter measures but still attempted to limit the physical and monetary damage inflicted upon civilians. In the Mississippi River Valley in 1863, Major General Ulysses S. Grant's Army of the Tennessee perfected a punitive policy concerning civilians known to historians as "hard war," which authorized the destruction of all Confederate economic and transportation resources. This thesis examines the creation of hard war policy by the lower ranks of the Union army and concludes that the Army of the Tennessee developed hard war first in response to the distinct culture clash between Midwestern soldiers and the Secessionist residents of the Deep South.