

THE CONFEDERATE DELAYING ACTION

AT THE BATTLE OF PORT GIBSON,

1 MAY 1863

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
Military History

by

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## ABSTRACT

THE CONFEDERATE DELAYING ACTION AT THE BATTLE OF PORT GIBSON,  
1 MAY 1863, by MAJ George E. Cone, Jr., IN, 98 pages.

This study is a historical analysis of Confederate Major General John S. Bowen's delaying action during the Battle of Port Gibson. This research looks at how a numerically inferior force can successfully delay a numerically superior force. This American Civil War battle during the Vicksburg Campaign pitted Bowen's diminutive forces against the numerically superior Union forces under Major General Ulysses S. Grant. The resulting delaying action on 1 May 1863 is referred to as the Battle of Port Gibson.

This successful Confederate delaying action has been overlooked in many historical contexts. Most historians emphasize Grant's audacity in conducting an amphibious operation south of Vicksburg, Mississippi. The Confederate perspective is often referred to as a gamble. Yet, against the odds, Bowen masterfully deployed his numerically inferior force to delay a Union force four times larger. Bowen's forces effectively utilized the terrain to buy precious time for the arrival of additional reinforcements from the Vicksburg garrison. Bowen welded his composite division into a formidable fighting force. Confederate battle tactics were characterized by a strong sense of urgency and superb leadership. Bowen yielded to superior Union forces after a protracted day of bitter fighting.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank LTC Kim Juntunen of the Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, for the constant encouragement, guidance, and advise. She spent countless hours reading and editing this thesis. LTC Juntunen always found the time to keep me on track when I needed help.

Dr. Christopher Gabel of the Combat Studies Institute deserves credit for the hours he spent reading and editing this work. Dr. Gabel provided me with the necessary sanity check to keep me on focus when I strayed.

Major Lorri Golya, SG 14B, provided invaluable assistance developing the maps that are contained in this work.

Finally, I thank my wife, Cynthia, for her patience and support in completing this study.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Vicksburg Campaign was one of the major turning points in the American Civil War. The surrender of the Vicksburg garrison on 4 July 1863 ended a two-year effort to capture this strategic town on the Mississippi River. Commencing in 1862, the Union army and navy mounted a series of operations to seize Vicksburg: the key to controlling the river. After unsuccessful efforts in 1862, Union commander Major General Ulysses S. Grant embarked on a ninety-eight day campaign to seize Vicksburg in 1863. Grant commenced this operation with a deep cavalry raid into the interior of Mississippi followed by a demonstration against the river batteries north of Vicksburg. His intent was to disguise his main effort, a turning movement south of Vicksburg in order to secure a landing site for his Army of the Tennessee.

The selection of the landing site on the east side of the Mississippi required two things. Grant needed a road network that extended deep into the interior of Mississippi for the movement of his army. Additionally, the landing site had to accommodate the off loading of equipment and supplies. Based on the road network south of Vicksburg, the best location was at a bend in the river twenty-five miles south at the town of Grand Gulf. The capture of Grand Gulf would severely threaten Confederate Lieutenant General John Pemberton's stronghold at Vicksburg. Opposing this landing was the Confederate garrison of Grand Gulf under the command of Brigadier General John Steven Bowen.

On 29 April 1863 Bowen successfully thwarted Grant's attempt to seize Grand Gulf. The next day, the Union navy transported Grant's army to Bruinsburg landing, five

miles south of Grand Gulf. Landing unopposed, 24,000 Union soldiers began the ten-mile march to Port Gibson, Mississippi. Forced to react to Grant's southern movement, Bowen rushed 5,500 soldiers<sup>1</sup> from Grand Gulf to meet Grant's threat. The battle that ensued on 1 May 1863 is commonly referred to as the Battle of Port Gibson.

Bowen lacked sufficient forces to defeat the Union invaders. Outnumbered four to one, Bowen retained sufficient forces to fight a delaying action west of Port Gibson. He slowed Grant's momentum by utilizing the restricted terrain in a series of successive defensive positions. By trading space for time, Bowen sought to buy time for the arrival of additional Confederate reserves from the Vicksburg garrison.

The purpose of this research project is to examine the Battle of Port Gibson from the Confederate perspective. This thesis focuses on Brigadier General Bowen, and his division's performance during the Battle of Port Gibson. The underlying question is to determine how a numerically inferior force can fight a successful delaying action against a numerically superior force. In order to answer this question, this research will examine the factors that played a critical role in Bowen's delaying action on 1 May 1863. This study will evaluate four elements of Bowen's defense: his reconnaissance before and during the battle; command, control, and communication between his units; the use of terrain for his delaying action; and the use of reserves. This research will explore these four elements by looking at the two major actions of the battle that occurred on the Rodney road and Bruinsburg road.

### Reconnaissance

***Reconnaissance is the precursor to all operations. An effective reconnaissance provides the commander with the disposition, composition, and location of the enemy***

*force. Tactical intelligence was difficult to collect with the limited assets available to Bowen during this battle. An enemy force could disappear if it was not carefully watched. Bowen's tactical intelligence came primarily from three sources. These sources were his pickets, cavalry, and the local population.*

*The picket line provided a "tripwire" against surprise from an enemy force.<sup>2</sup> The picket line deployed forward of the main body as a screen against a surprise attack. They provided immediate information of an enemy attack or a pending enemy action, but they did not provide sufficient early warning to significantly change a commander's scheme of maneuver.*

*Cavalry was the preferable method to provide early warning of an impending attack or movement. The cavalry possessed the combination of mobility, responsiveness, and combat power that was ideal for this mission.<sup>3</sup> They could probe the enemy in small groups, set up ambushes to disrupt an attacking force before the enemy could commit to battle, and locate an enemy's exposed flank. Cavalry had the additional advantage of screening a friendly unit's flank as an economy of force mission. When a cavalry unit conducted a flank screen, it provided the commander with two options. The cavalry force could delay the enemy's ability to concentrate forces and subsequently turn the friendly unit's flank. Additionally, it could provide timely intelligence to the supported unit, which would allow them to interdict a flank attack.*

*The local population was the third source of information on enemy movements. Often, this intelligence was speculative and inaccurate. The reliability of information obtained from the local population depended upon several factors. These included the*



*people's loyalties to one side or the other, their knowledge and or understanding of military equipment and formations, and their willingness to provide intelligence.*

*Information obtained from the local population was used as a secondary source if no other reliable intelligence could be gathered in a timely manner.*

*Bowen relied primarily on dismounted patrols for reconnaissance and security missions. Lieutenant General Pemberton dispatched Lieutenant Colonel Wirt Adams' Port Gibson based cavalry to find Union Brigadier General Benjamin Grierson's cavalry raiders prior to the Battle of Port Gibson.<sup>4</sup> Pickets and skirmishers obtained information about roads, obstacles, and enemy forces in a given location just forward of the main force. Bowen's forces relied upon skirmishers to initiate contact by passive means, such as visual observation, or more aggressive means such as probes, or reconnaissance by fire to obtain information.*

*This research will examine the effectiveness of Bowen's reconnaissance efforts. Specifically, how effective were the pickets in providing early warning? Since Bowen lacked cavalry to make tactical decisions, did the pickets and the civilian populations provide reliable intelligence to Bowen's command?*

#### Command and Control

Command and Control is the ability to control units on the battlefield and communicate orders to superiors and subordinates. Bowen was the Confederate operational commander for the Grand Gulf–Port Gibson area. It was unusual for a brigadier general to receive an independent operational command given the fact that major generals were available in the Vicksburg garrison.<sup>5</sup> With his engineering

background, Bowen was a wise choice for the mission of protecting Vicksburg's southern flank.

Bowen's span of control consisted of the forces under his direct command at Grand Gulf. This hampered him in his defensive preparations. In order to develop a successful defensive plan, Bowen required intelligence of Union movements along the Mississippi River and on the Louisiana side of the river. Confederate units in Louisiana reported to the Department of Louisiana. This information gap caused Bowen to act independently and send forces to the Louisiana side of the river to determine Federal troop movements and strength.

Confederate forces outside Bowen's garrison reported to Bowen but received their instructions from Pemberton. Pemberton transmitted instructions to Bowen by telegraph. Grand Gulf contained the only telegraph in the area connected to Vicksburg and Jackson. Ironically, it was Bowen who relayed Pemberton's orders for Adams' cavalry to find Grierson's Union cavalry raiders on 27 April 1863.

Bowen's success in defending the Grand Gulf-Port Gibson area depended on his obtaining reinforcements in sufficient time to prepare them for battle. This caused Bowen incessant problems. First, the telegraph line between Vicksburg and Grand Gulf was unreliable. A large amount of message traffic transmitted on a given day overstressed this fragile line and caused it to malfunction. Secondly, reinforcements required advance warning to march to Grand Gulf in time for battle. The twenty-five miles between Vicksburg and Grand Gulf was one and one half days march. Finally, Bowen needed time to integrate reinforcements into a coherent fighting force. The late

arrival of reinforcements to Bowen created further command and control difficulties in this composite division.

Bowen's presence on the battlefield was essential to the success of his division. He faced a daunting task. Bowen had to react to Grant's army marching towards Port Gibson. However, he could not abandon the river batteries at Grand Gulf to meet Grant's invasion. Therefore, Bowen decided to divide his command to meet both threats.

The geographical separation of forces coupled with the late arrival of reinforcements created difficulties for Bowen in controlling his forces. Bowen relied upon his commanders to implement his instructions. He provided orders to his subordinates orally or through couriers. When possible, Bowen visited as many units as possible to ascertain the tactical situation.

**This study will examine Bowen's presence on the battlefield. Was Bowen at the decisive points of the battlefield? Did he provide clear and effective orders to his subordinates before, during, and after the battle? Finally, did Bowen understand Grant's intentions and convey orders to his subordinates to thwart Union forces?**

#### Reserve

Reserves are forces retained by the commander. An effective commander normally retains a portion of his forces as a tactical reserve. The most effective way to influence a battle lies in the use of reserves. The commander must commit them where they are needed the most: to fill a gap created in the lines; to attack an exposed enemy flank; or reinforce a unit depleted of ammunition. The commander must assess the time and location to best utilize reserves for the desired effect. For numerically inferior forces, a reserve is essential to retain flexibility and initiative on the battlefield.

The deployment of reserves is difficult. Passing through or around a friendly unit in contact often created confusion. In restricted terrain, units often became intermingled. They also could become excessively bunched attempting to deploy on too narrow a front.<sup>6</sup> This negated the advantage of having a reserve.

Bowen employed reserves during the actions on the Rodney and Bruinsburg roads. How effectively did Bowen utilize his reserves? Did he properly employ his reserves? Finally, did the employment of reserves aid or hinder Bowen's delaying action?

### Use of Terrain

Delaying units use the terrain to slow or hinder the enemy's advance. By using the contours in the ground, a defending force can inflict heavy casualties against an advancing foe and minimize friendly casualties. Numerically inferior forces use restricted terrain to gain parity against a larger force.

A delaying unit has several distinct advantages in restrictive terrain. The enemy has difficulties massing forces for an attack. The effective employment ranges of rifles and artillery are reduced. Thus, a numerically superior adversary cannot effectively employ his qualitative advantages in personnel and weaponry.

This analysis will look at the geographic factors of the Grand Gulf–Port Gibson area. Specifically, this examination will look at the terrain in this region to determine the tactical advantages and or disadvantages it provided for Bowen's delaying action. This analysis will determine how effectively Bowen used the terrain to delay the Union advance. Finally, this study will determine if Bowen learned from his initial actions at Port Gibson and modified his employment of forces.

### Geographic Setting

In order to understand Bowen's delaying action at Port Gibson, it is necessary to understand the terrain west of the town as it appeared in 1863.

The geographic term "loess hills" characterizes the terrain in the Grand Gulf–Port Gibson area (fig. 1). Loess is a special kind of brown silt that is responsible for the region's peculiar characteristics.<sup>7</sup> Water cannot penetrate this material in an undisturbed state and tends to flow rapidly across the surface of the ground. Running water flowing over a disturbed surface will quickly erode the ground. The early inhabitants of the Port Gibson area accelerated the erosion by removing the trees that protected the ridges. The runoff water formed a series of deep ravines that ran in all directions. The ridges between these ravines ranged in width from several feet to a few hundred yards.<sup>8</sup> The ravines tended to be extremely steep, often 150 feet deep or greater. Thus, by 1863, the region consisted of deep ridges and hollows that divided the area. The hollows were covered with tangled scrub known as cane. This cane tended to be impenetrable especially when it was interlocked with cat's claw vines, greenbrier, poison ivy, and honeysuckle.<sup>9</sup>

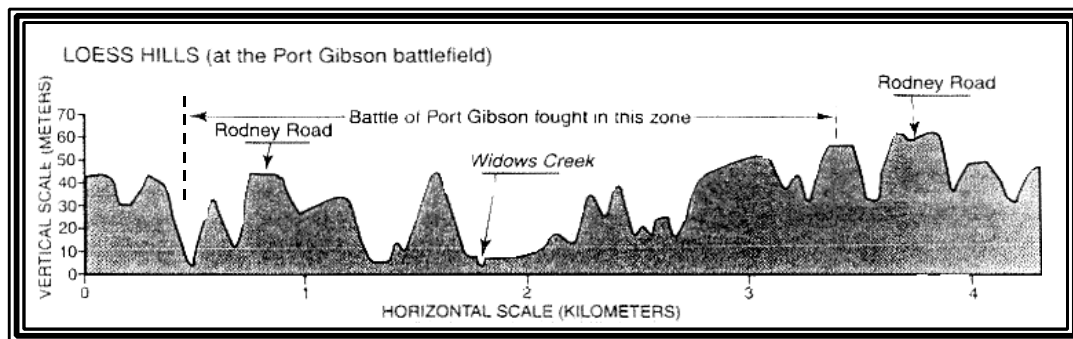


Fig. 1. Reprinted from Warren E. Grabau's *Ninety-Eight Days: A Geographer's View of the Vicksburg Campaign* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 541.

Roads in this region primarily followed the narrow ridgelines and descended into the valleys to cross streams only when necessary. The constant use of these roads by wagons and horses caused large ruts especially, during the rainy season. The roads tended to be difficult to travel upon and typically, were no larger than one wagon width. Over time, the roads became depressed into the hillside forming deep vertical slopes along the edges of the roads. Colonel Robert S. Bevier, the Commander of the Confederate Fifth Missouri Infantry, described the march from Port Gibson west along the Rodney road:

About two miles beyond the town we struck the hills that bristle all along this portion of the Mississippi, and, climbing up and down one rugged acclivity after another, we at length came to a halt in an old cornfield in front of a thick canebrake, and at the foot of a steep, cane-covered hill.<sup>10</sup>

There was only one road that led from the river batteries at Grand Gulf to Port Gibson, and it crossed a bridge at the Bayou Pierre. In this river bottom area, the road was flat and facilitated the movement of troops and material. From Port Gibson the Rodney road proceeded west towards Bruinsburg landing on the Mississippi River. About two miles west of town, the Bruinsburg road intersected with the Rodney road. The Bruinsburg road was the more circuitous route, paralleling the Bayou Pierre and then following the heights above the Mississippi River past Windsor Plantation to Bruinsburg landing along the Mississippi. The Rodney road, the more direct route, crossed Widow Creek before rejoining Bruinsburg road at Bethel Church. A narrow secondary road known as the Shaifer road in the vicinity of Widow Creek further connected the Rodney

and Bruinsburg roads. The Union advance primarily used the Rodney road and the Shaifer roads in their attacks on Bowen's positions on the 1 May 1863 (fig. 2).

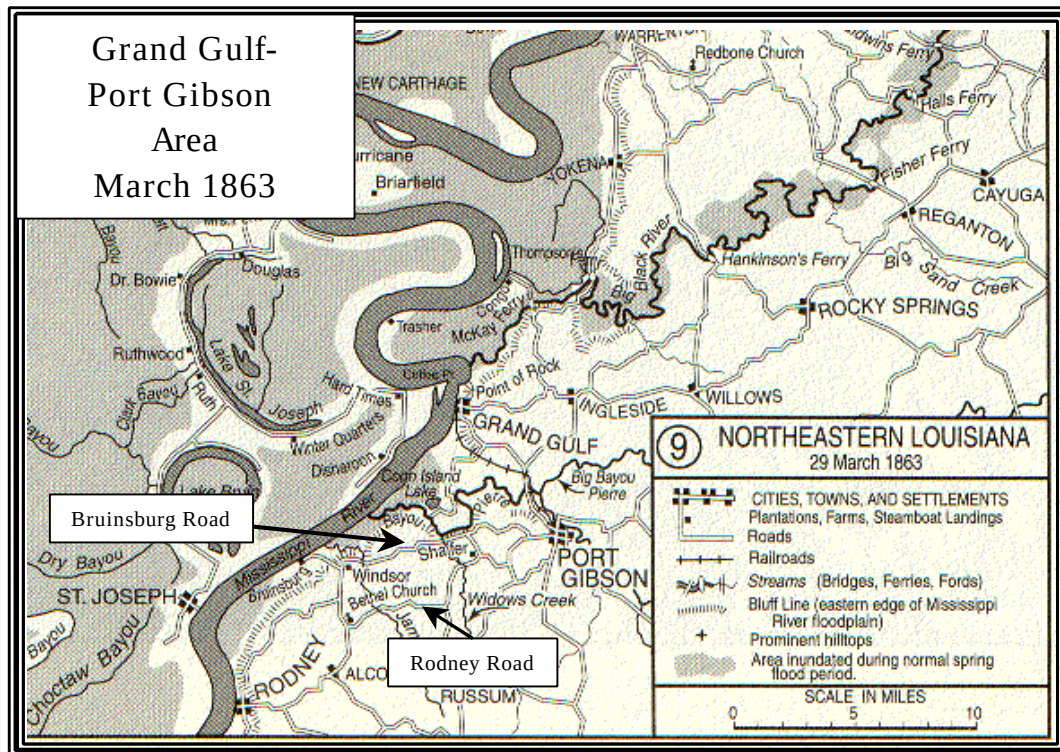


Fig. 2. This map shows the locations of Bruinsburg and Rodney roads in relation to Port Gibson and Grand Gulf. This map was created based on a map used in Warren E. Grabau's *Ninety-Eight Days: A Geographer's View of the Vicksburg Campaign* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 543.

### Resources Available

There are several limitations to the study of the Battle of Port Gibson. The terrain around the battlefield has changed since 1863. The land is not as widely cultivated as it was in 1863, thus making it difficult today to analyze the use of terrain. Warren E. Grabau's recently written work entitled *Ninety-Eight Days: A Geographer's View of the Vicksburg Campaign* provides a detailed description of the terrain as it appeared around the Grand Gulf-Port Gibson area in 1863.

Primary source documents consist of dispatches written by Brigadier General Bowen and his subordinate commanders, Brigadier General Martin E. Green, Brigadier General William E. Baldwin, Colonel Isham W. Garrett, and Colonel Francis M. Cockrell, which are included in *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. General Bowen died shortly after the surrender of Vicksburg in July 1863 limiting his observations to the dispatches he wrote immediately after the battle. Brigadier General Edward Tracy died during the battle. The actions of his brigade are recounted by his second in command, Colonel Garrett.

A wealth of secondary material is available, to include a recent biography of General Bowen by Thomas Tucker, *The Forgotten Stonewall of the West, Major General John Stevens Bowen*. Edwin Bearss wrote a three-volume set on the *Vicksburg Campaign* providing detailed analysis of the disposition, composition, and location of Confederate forces during the battle. Terry Winschel, the National Park Service Historian for Vicksburg, recently published two accounts of the Vicksburg Campaign entitled *Triumph and Defeat: The Vicksburg Campaign* and *Vicksburg: The Fall of the Confederate Gibraltar*.

This study contains numerous maps to aid with understanding the complexities of the battle. Many of the maps that cover this period are inaccurate, making it difficult to follow the course of the battle. The maps enclosed in this study are depictions of unit positions indicated in the *Official Records of the War of Rebellion*.

In both primary and secondary sources, many of the actions are indicated by the time of day they occurred. Since most soldiers in this period lacked a timepiece, the time an action occurred is in general terms. Thus, the author's account of time often differs



depending on the source. The times in this study will follow the times indicated in *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*.

### Engagement Analysis

Phillip Katcher in his book *Great Gambles of the Civil War* described Bowen's defense as a gamble to defeat Union troops and stall any assault on Vicksburg. Was Bowen committing a tactical gamble or were his actions a tactical necessity? The Union ability to land a sizeable force on the eastern side of the Mississippi would unhinge Pemberton's cordon defense of Mississippi. As Grant later described in his *Memoirs* after landing at Bruinsburg:

*I felt a degree of relief scarcely ever equaled since. Vicksburg was not yet taken it is true, nor were its defenders demoralized by any previous moves. I was now in the enemy's country, with a vast river and the stronghold of Vicksburg between me and my base of supplies. But I was on dry ground on the same side of the river with the enemy. All the campaigns, labors, hardships and exposures from the month of December previous to this time that had been made and endured, were for the accomplishment of this one object.<sup>11</sup>*

Based on Grant's depiction of the significance of the Bruinsburg landing on 30 April 1863, an argument can be made that the Battle of Port Gibson was the turning point in the campaign for Vicksburg. If this argument is valid, was Bowen's defense a tactical gamble or the battle that determined the outcome for the campaign for Vicksburg? This question makes a detailed study of this battle worthy of scrutiny.

There is a great deal that military professionals can learn from the study of a unit conducting a delaying action in relatively unfamiliar terrain against a numerically superior force. The importance of reconnaissance, maintaining communication with subordinate commanders, employment of reserves, and using the terrain for tactical advantage make this battle worthy of examination for today's Army.

In order to ascertain the effectiveness of Bowen's delaying action, this study begins with a brief background of the Confederate defense of Vicksburg focusing initially on the Battle of Grand Gulf. Chapter 2, "Background," describes this battle and the subsequent deployment of Confederate forces to Port Gibson. The intent is to provide an understanding of Brigadier General Bowen and the decisions he had to make regarding the commitment of forces available prior to the Battle of Port Gibson.

The discussion of subsequent tactical engagements follows in chronological order as they occurred on the Rodney and Bruinsburg roads on 1 May 1863 (fig. 3). The terrain and road network isolated the engagements into two separate actions. These actions occurred on the Rodney road from the A. K. Shaifer house to White and Irwin branches and on Bruinsburg road around Andrews Plantation. The engagements along the Rodney and Bruinsburg roads occurred simultaneously; however, for the purpose of this study the actions will be discussed separately. Chapters 3 and 4 depict the "Actions on the Rodney and Bruinsburg road," respectively. Because of the complexity of the movements of Confederate and Union forces during these actions, the initial depictions of the engagement will relate the Confederate perspective followed by the Union perspective.

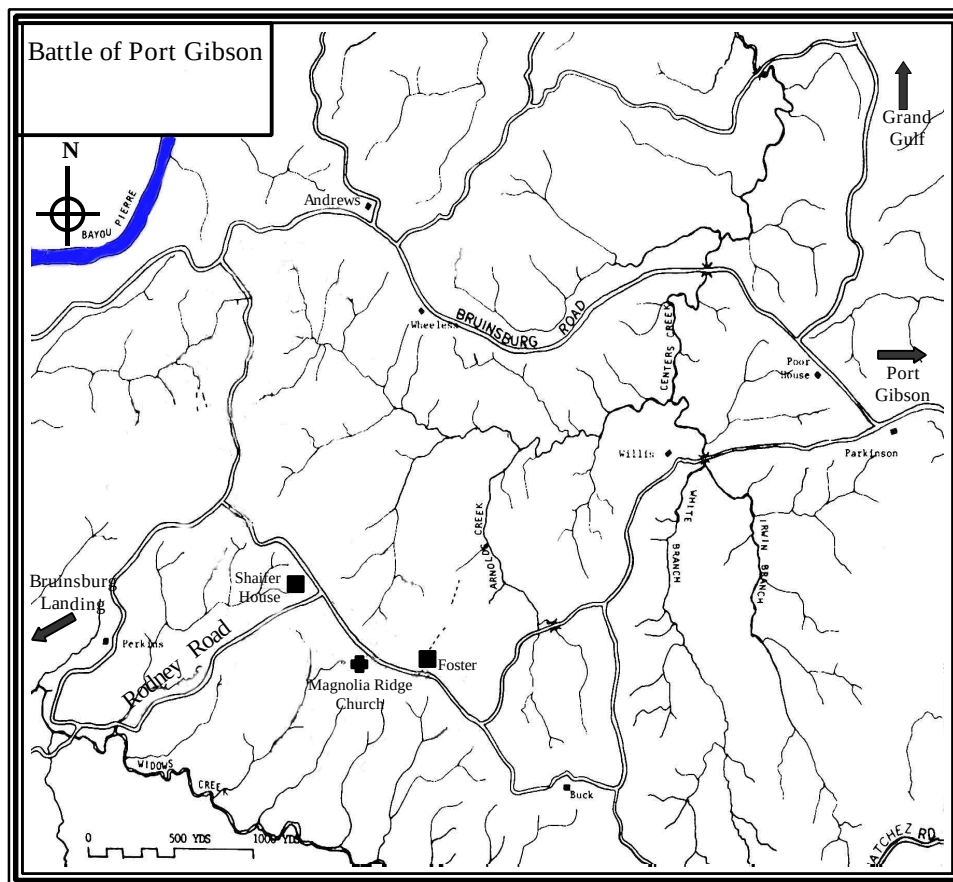


Fig. 3. This map shows the locations of the Bruinsburg and Rodney roads in relationship to Port Gibson. This map was created based on a map used in Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign: Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow*, vol. 2 (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1986), 360, 382, 390, 396.

The final chapter, “Analysis and Conclusion,” summarizes the battle and its relevance to the Vicksburg Campaign. It analyzes Bowen’s effectiveness in using reconnaissance, command and control, reserves, and terrain to his advantage and or disadvantage. Since the Battle of Port Gibson was critical to the outcome of the Vicksburg Campaign, it will illustrate how a numerically inferior force fought a successful delaying action against a numerically superior force.

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<sup>1</sup>Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign: Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow*, vol. 2 (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1986), 407. Bearss contends that Bowen's forces at Grand Gulf-Port Gibson contained 6,800 soldiers and 16 guns contrary to the number of 5,500 that Bowen listed in his official report.

<sup>2</sup>Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 68.

<sup>3</sup>Griffith, 69.

<sup>4</sup>Phillip Thomas Tucker, *The Forgotten Stonewall of the West, Major General John Stevens Bowen* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997), 216.

<sup>5</sup>Tucker, 177.

<sup>6</sup>Griffith, 63.

<sup>7</sup>Warren E. Grabau, *Ninety-Eight Days: A Geographer's View of the Vicksburg Campaign* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 21.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>Richard Wheeler, *The Siege of Vicksburg* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1934), 124.

<sup>11</sup>Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 2 vols. (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1885; reprint, New York: The World Publishing Company, 1952), 480-81.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **BACKGROUND**

The Mississippi River was of major strategic importance for the Union and the Confederacy. The secession of the southern states bordering the Mississippi River threatened the Northern states' commercial navigation of this waterway to the Gulf of Mexico. Union control of the Mississippi would enable the agricultural products of the Midwest to reach foreign markets. The loss of the Mississippi would sever Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas from the Confederacy and deprive the South of large agricultural capabilities and resources. The Union strategy consisted of strangling the Confederacy by blockading the mouth of the Mississippi from foreign trade.

The Confederate strategy was to close the river to Union traffic. Without an effective navy, the Confederates had to rely on fortifying the river with heavy artillery batteries. The combination of bluffs and access to railroads influenced the choice for the placement of river batteries. The Confederates established a defensive line that ran from Columbus, Kentucky, in the north, to Forts Jackson and St. Philip, about seventy-five miles downriver from New Orleans. The toughest position on the Mississippi was at Vicksburg where the river made a large exaggerated turn. Large cliffs dominated the approaches to the town. The loess bluffs offered a natural fortress to repel attacks from Federal naval as well as land forces. The rail lines that connected Vicksburg with Jackson and points east enabled the Confederates to move heavy ordnance to the city. The considerable defenses built around Vicksburg earned it the reputation as the "Gibraltar of the Confederacy."

Commencing in April 1862, the Union army and navy began to reduce the river forts in a series of efforts. The dismantling of these forts occurred from two directions in a series of converging attacks.<sup>1</sup> Attacking south, Brigadier General John Pope opened the Mississippi to Union control north of Memphis, Tennessee, with the capture of Island No. 10 and New Madrid, Missouri, in April 1862 and Memphis in June 1862. Attacking north from the Gulf of Mexico, Admiral David G. Farragut captured Fort Jackson and Fort St. Philip, ninety miles downriver from New Orleans on 25 and 28 April, respectively. After capturing New Orleans, Farragut steamed up the Mississippi.

Vicksburg became the last major defense on the river. After Confederate Brigadier General Martin L. Smith refused to surrender the city, Farragut ordered a naval bombardment. The bombardment from May through July 1862 failed to reduce the city, and dropping water levels forced Farragut to abandon his plans and retreat south to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Farragut's bombardment began the first of several unsuccessful attempts to capture Vicksburg.

On 9 October 1862 Lieutenant General John Pemberton assumed command of the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana with instructions to hold Vicksburg and Port Hudson at all costs. With so much territory to defend around Vicksburg, Pemberton concentrated on fortifying the city and surrounding area. Vicksburg would be manned by a garrison of 30,000 soldiers, mount 172 guns, and pose a major obstacle to Union domination of the Mississippi River.<sup>2</sup>

Major General Grant attempted to seize the city beginning in November 1862, by dividing his forces. A land force attacked south from Grand Junction, Tennessee, following the Mississippi Central Railroad into northern Mississippi.<sup>3</sup> His intent was to

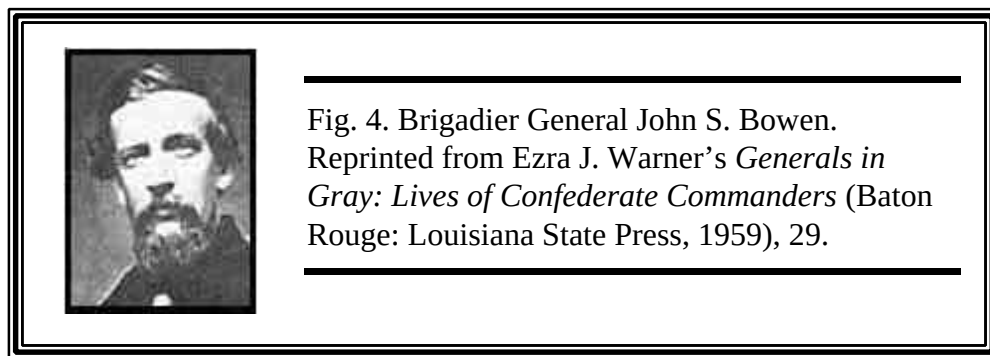
draw Confederate forces away from the city. At the same time, Major General William T. Sherman led an amphibious force down the Yazoo River to seize Vicksburg from the north.

Grant's extended supply and communications lines created vulnerabilities. On 20 December Confederate cavalry commanded by Major General Earl Van Dorn captured and destroyed the Federal advanced supply base at Holly Springs, Mississippi, while Confederate cavalry under Brigadier General Nathan Bedford Forrest destroyed segments of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad, which supplied Grant's forces. The loss of his key logistical nodes forced Grant to withdraw to Memphis in December 1862.<sup>4</sup>

Sherman's expeditionary force met determined resistance at the foothills of Vicksburg. The vaunted Confederate defense of Chickasaw Bayou coupled with Grant's withdrawal forced Sherman to evacuate Chickasaw Bayou. Sherman's forces suffered 1776 casualties.<sup>5</sup>

Early in 1863, Pemberton observed a change in Union tactics. He surmised that with the loss of Holly Springs and the Union's naval superiority, the threat to Vicksburg would come from the river. In response, by the spring of 1863, Pemberton established a series of river batteries along the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers: Haynes, Snyder's and Drumgould's Bluffs to the north, Warrenton and Grand Gulf to the south. The battery at Warrenton was seven miles south of Vicksburg and could easily be reinforced by the Vicksburg garrison. The most southern of the Vicksburg river batteries was at Grand Gulf. On 12 March 1863 General Pemberton ordered Brigadier General John S. Bowen to fortify Grand Gulf and turn the bluffs into a bastion.<sup>6</sup>

Brigadier General Bowen, a native Georgian, entered the United States Military Academy in 1848 and graduated in 1853 (fig.4). Bowen resigned his commission in 1856 after a brief service in the U.S. Army, and relocated to St. Louis to work as an architect. He joined the state militia and in May 1861, with the outbreak of hostilities, raised a regiment of Missourians that entered the service of the Confederacy as the 1st Missouri Regiment with Bowen as its commander.



Bowen had a keen understanding of tactics, especially the offense,<sup>7</sup> and he was prone to taking the initiative in battle. Promoted to brigadier general on 14 March 1862,<sup>8</sup> Bowen was wounded at Shiloh gallantly leading his brigade in battle.

Although only a brigadier general, he had the ability to command and direct soldiers with little or no guidance from his superiors. Bowen demonstrated these abilities fighting a rear guard action defending the Tuscumbia River Bridge during the Battle of Corinth in October 1863. His skillful use of terrain and employment of artillery allowed Major General Earl Van Dorn's army to escape.<sup>9</sup> His Missouri regiments earned a reputation as capable fighters. This action earned Bowen widespread credit. His initiative would be put to the test at Grand Gulf and at Port Gibson.



Upon reaching Grand Gulf, Bowen began to establish an impressive defensive network. Confederate Major Samuel H. Lockett, who had laid out the elaborate Vicksburg's defenses, assisted him. Bowen organized the defense around the two main river batteries, Fort Cobun and Fort Wade.<sup>10</sup> Dug into the base of Point of Rock, forty feet above the water and protected by a parapet forty feet thick, Fort Cobun defended Grand Gulf from the north and west. This fort mounted two 32 pounders, one 8-inch Dahlgren, and a 30-pounder Parrott manned by Company A, 1st Louisiana Heavy Artillery.<sup>11</sup> The lower fort, Fort Wade, was twenty feet above the water and contained a 100-pounder Blakely rifle, one 8-inch Dahlgren, and two-rifled 32 pounders.<sup>12</sup> This fort was manned by men of the Missouri Batteries under the Command of Colonel William Wade, Bowen's chief of artillery. In addition to these forts, Bowen constructed a series of emplacements for his field guns, as well as trenches with rifle pits for his infantry units. Finally, Bowen built a wooden tower atop Point of Rock in order to observe the approach of the Union squadrons.

In addition to the river batteries, Bowen had under his command Colonel Francis M. Cockrell's Missouri Infantry brigade and Brigadier General Martin L. Green's Arkansas Infantry brigade. Bowen held these units in reserve behind the bluffs to thwart a Federal amphibious assault.<sup>13</sup> Although not under his direct command, Lieutenant Colonel Wirt Adams' Mississippi Cavalry, stationed in Port Gibson, patrolled the riverbank from Rodney to Grand Gulf (fig. 5).<sup>14</sup>

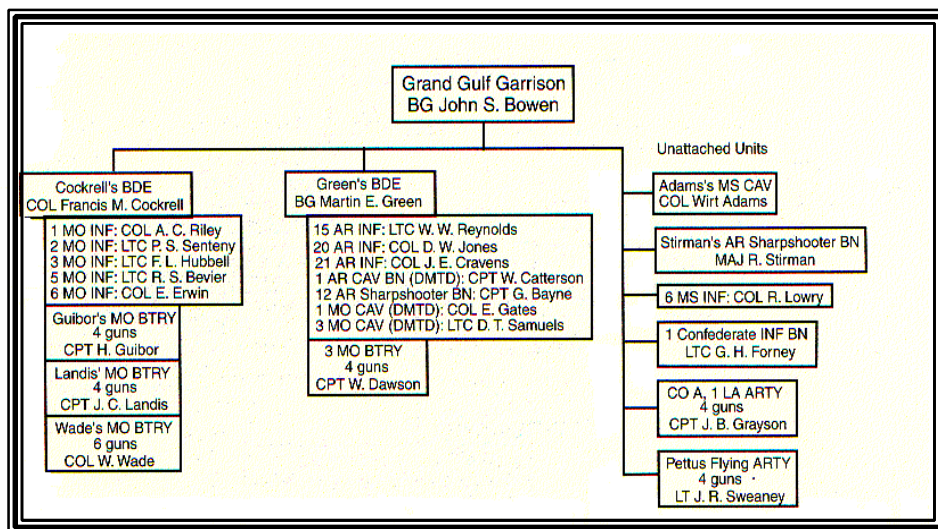


Fig. 5. Bowen's Attached and Unattached Units at Grand Gulf. Reprinted from Warren E. Grabau's *Ninety-Eight Days: A Geographer's View of the Vicksburg Campaign* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 607.

Bowen had observed Grant's movements south of Vicksburg since early April 1863. On 4 April acting on his own initiative and later informing Pemberton, Bowen sent Cockrell across the river with the 1st and 2d Missouri Infantry Regiments and a section of artillery to make contact with the advancing Union forces.<sup>15</sup> On 8 April Cockrell encountered Union forces in Louisiana around Ione Plantation (fig. 6). Bowen provided repeated reports concerning the Union dispositions west of Grand Gulf to Pemberton and asked for reinforcements.

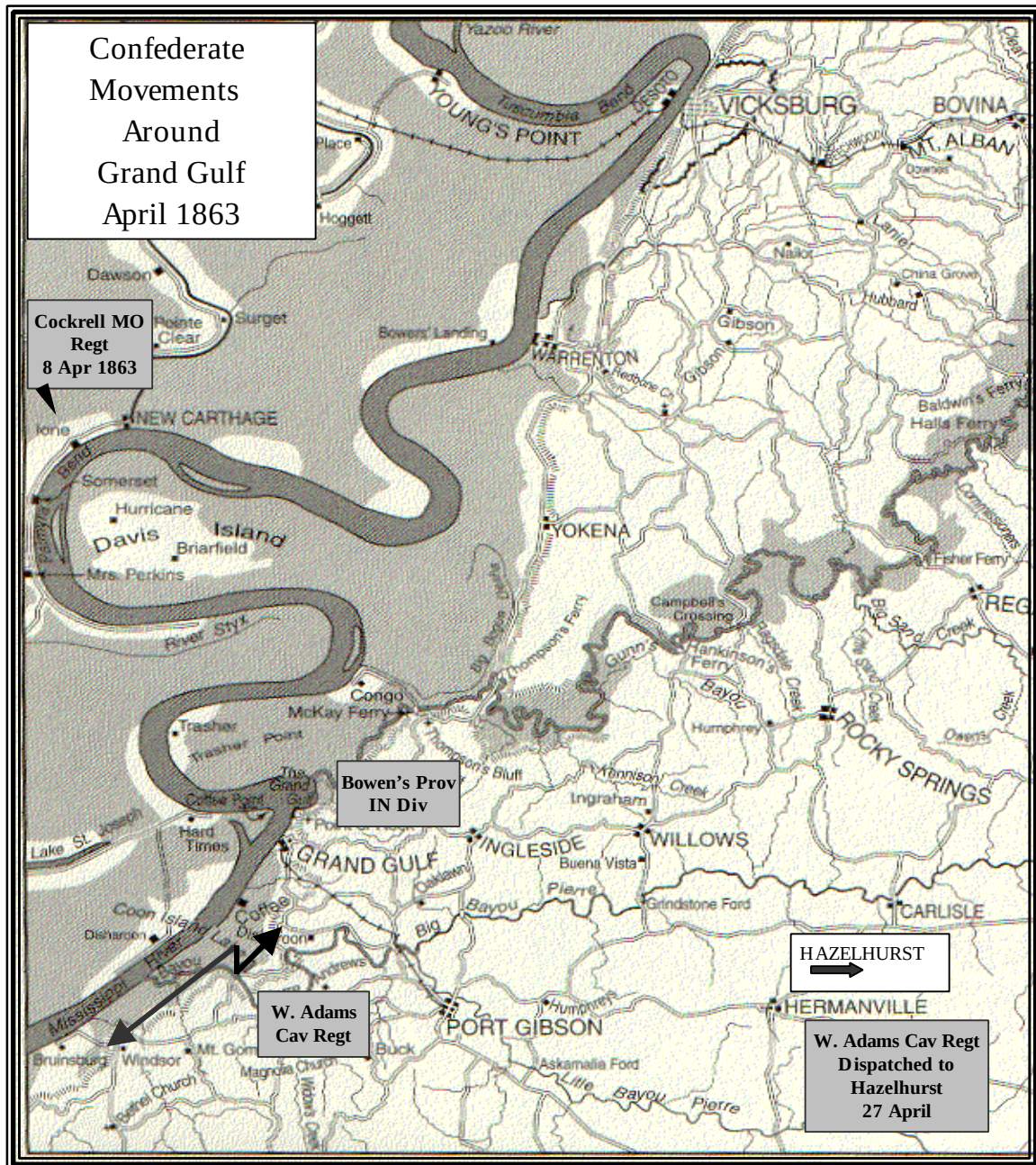


Fig. 6. Reprinted and modified map based on a map from Warren E. Grabau's *Ninety-Eight Days: A Geographer's View of the Vicksburg* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 544.

To divert attention away from Grand Gulf, Grant had planned several military operations north and east of Vicksburg. He ordered Major General Sherman to conduct a

demonstration north of Vicksburg by Snyder's Bluff. This prevented the movement of Confederate reinforcements from Vicksburg to Grand Gulf. In addition, Grant ordered Brigadier General Benjamin Grierson to conduct deep cavalry raids into the heart of Mississippi. Commencing on 17 April Grierson's 1,700 cavalryman created havoc in the interior of Mississippi. The intent was to draw attention away from his intended landing site.

On 27 April the situation appeared critical for Bowen at Grand Gulf. Union Admiral David Porter's squadron had sailed south of Vicksburg and was preparing to strike at Grand Gulf. Bowen sent a desperate dispatch to Pemberton indicating Grant's intent to attack south of Vicksburg:

All of the movements of the enemy during the last twenty-four hours seem to indicate an intention on their part to march their army still lower down in Louisiana, perhaps to Saint Joseph, and then to run their steamers by me and cross to Rodney [Mississippi]. In view of this, and from the fact that Port Gibson is almost essential to this position, I have examined myself and now have the engineers on a reconnaissance selecting a line of battle south of Port Gibson. Were it possible for me, with my extended line and small force, to spare them, I would recommend the sending of a regiment and a section of artillery to Rodney, which would materially delay their crossing and advance.<sup>16</sup>

To further complicate matters for Bowen, Grierson's cavalry raiders captured a train with artillery shells, ammunition, and supplies destined for Grand Gulf at Hazelhurst, in central Mississippi.<sup>17</sup> In response, on 27 April Pemberton dispatched Adams' Port Gibson cavalry to find Grierson's Union cavalry raiders.

On the morning of 29 April Bowen observed the Union ironclad squadron from his tower. He watched a fleet of transports and barges leave Hard Times, Louisiana, and head downstream. Bowen attempted to inform Major General Carter Stevenson, the

senior commander at Vicksburg, of the impending attack. The message was delayed because the telegraph wire did not work.<sup>18</sup>

The Union ironclads began firing on the forts at roughly 7:00 A.M. Fort Wade suffered the brunt of the bombardment. The earthwork protecting the Confederate guns was pounded by five ironclads that eventually knocked the fort out of action. Fort Cobun with its higher river battery fared much better. The high elevation made it difficult for the gunners to depress the guns against the ironclads. Nevertheless, Bowen's batteries repeatedly hit the gunboats *Benton*, *Pittsburg*, and *Tuscumbia* killing 18 and wounding 57.<sup>19</sup> Bowen's daunted defense forced Porter to break off the attack at 1:15 P.M.<sup>20</sup>

After the withdrawal of the Union ironclads, Bowen, then able to communicate by telegraph, reported the following:

After six hours and a half of continued firing, the gunboats have retired. They fired about 3000 shot and shell, temporarily disabling one gun. Our loss is 3 killed and 12 or 15 wounded. Apparently we injured two of their gunboats; damage unknown. Col William Wade, of the artillery, one of the bravest of my command, was killed at his post.

The men behaved like veterans (as they are), and are now hard at work preparing for another attack.<sup>21</sup>

Bowen had won a tremendous victory on 29 April. His actions brought accolades from Pemberton and a recommendation for promotion to major general.<sup>22</sup> By stopping Grant's intended invasion of Grand Gulf, he had bought time for the arrival of reinforcements from Vicksburg. However, Stevenson, in Vicksburg, delayed the dispatch of reinforcements. Sherman's demonstration at Snyder's Bluff convinced Stevenson that this was a prelude for the assault on the defenses of Vicksburg.<sup>23</sup>



Following the failure at Grand Gulf, Grant was forced to find an alternate landing site. He decided to avoid an opposed landing. Based on the advice of a slave he met near Hard Times, Grant turned south to Bruinsburg landing.<sup>24</sup>

Bowen helplessly observed Grant's fleet move south of Grand Gulf late on the evening of 29 April. The redeployment of Adams' seven cavalry companies deprived Bowen of invaluable reconnaissance and screening west and south of Port Gibson.<sup>25</sup> Bowen again urged Pemberton to send reinforcements. Pemberton, realizing the severity of the situation, informed Bowen that reinforcements were enroute; specifically Colonel Edward D. Tracy's brigade from Stevenson's division and Colonel William E. Baldwin's brigade from Major General Martin L. Smith's division.

Understanding the new threat that Grant's movement posed, Bowen, ordered Brigadier General Green to send a force of 500 soldiers to patrol the roads from Port Gibson to Rodney.<sup>26</sup> Bowen's initial thought was to send his entire garrison south to find the Union army. However, because Grant had the ability to move inland along the Big Bayou Pierre with gunboats and steamers, Bowen feared that his forces could be isolated. He decided to divide his force. Green's brigade with the addition of the 6th Missouri Infantry, and the Pettus Flying Artillery, proceeded to Port Gibson at 1:00 A.M. on 30 April. These additions to Green's brigade were part of the unattached units assigned to the Grand Gulf–Port Gibson area. Seizing the initiative, Bowen used them to bolster his delaying action.

Bowen did not want to send Green's brigade too far beyond the support of the Grand Gulf garrison. Green's force deployed to Port Gibson to act as a delaying force west of the town. Cockrell's brigade would remain at Grand Gulf to protect the batteries

in case the movement of the Union fleet was a feint to weaken the defenses of Grand Gulf. Bowen knew that two more brigades, Tracy's and Baldwin's, were on the road from Vicksburg. If these forces arrived in time, Bowen could hold Union forces to a bridgehead south of Port Gibson.

The first of Bowen's reinforcements arrived late on 30 April. Colonel Tracy's Alabama brigade of 1,500 soldiers arrived at Grand Gulf from Warrenton around 4:00 P.M. The Alabamans were exhausted and hungry from the march that had begun at 7:00 P.M. the night prior. Bowen directed Tracy to eat, rest, and then report to Green for instructions on deployments.<sup>27</sup> Brigadier General Baldwin's Mississippi and Louisiana brigade left their encampment north of Vicksburg around 9:00 P.M. on 29 April. Reaching Hankinson's ferry by noon on the 30 April, Baldwin's brigade, exhausted by the twenty-eight mile march, bivouacked along the Big Bayou Pierre the evening of 30 April (fig. 7).<sup>28</sup>

Bowen met with Green the evening of 30 April in Port Gibson. He reconnoitered Green's intended positions on the Rodney road near Magnolia Church on Fosters ridge. Bowen approved these positions and ordered that Tracy's brigade deploy alongside Green's brigade upon arrival. Bowen quickly departed for Grand Gulf in response to a report that four gunboats had been sighted on the Big Bayou Pierre. This report was to prove false. After Bowen departed for Grand Gulf, one of Green's scouts reported that Union soldiers were advancing along the Rodney and Bruinsburg roads. This information also would prove false. The Federals for reasons unknown never used the Bruinsburg Road from the landing site.

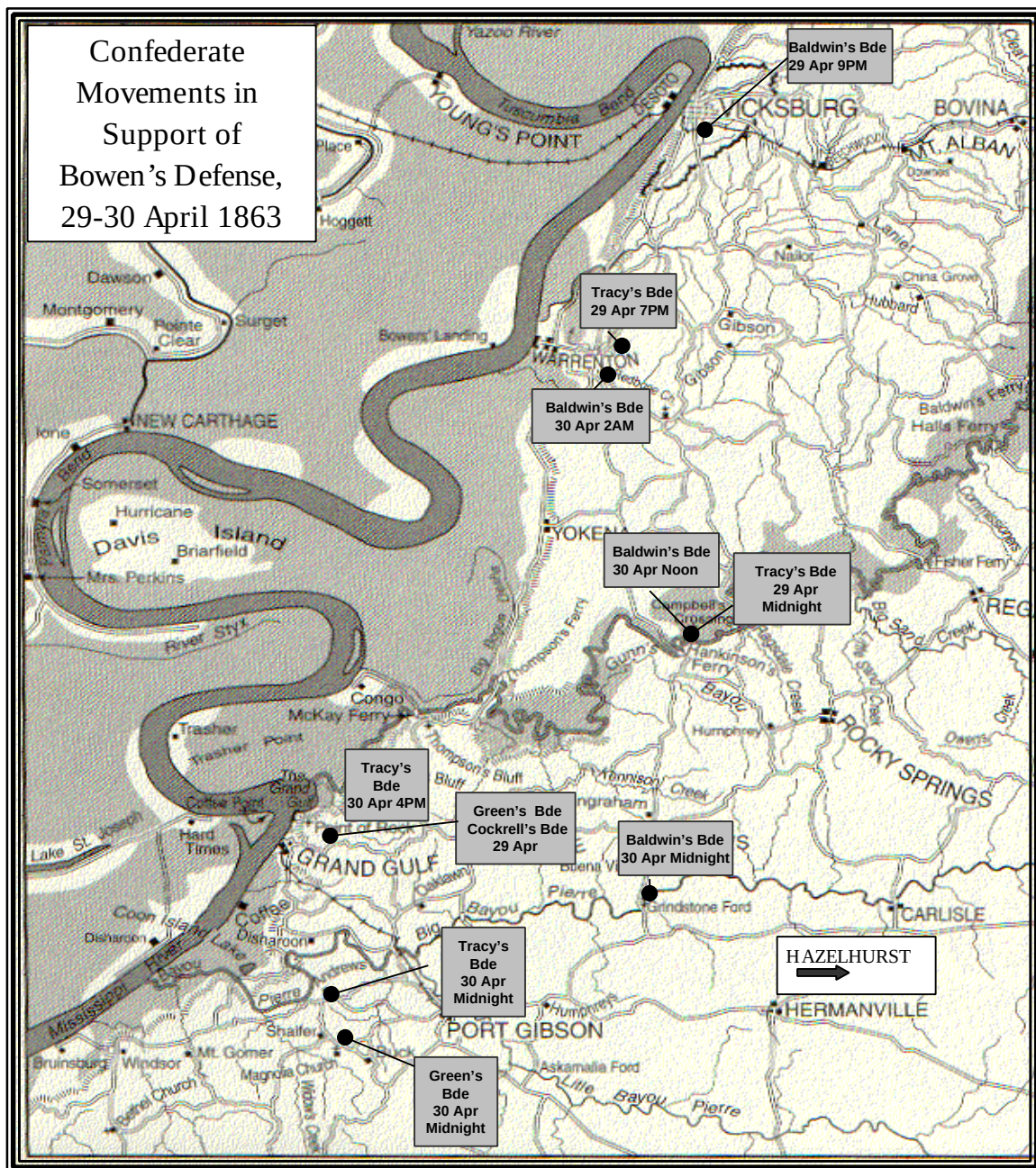


Fig. 7. Reprinted and modified map based on a map from Warren E. Grabau's *Ninety-Eight Days: A Geographer's View of the Vicksburg* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 544.

Fearing the Federal advance along the Bruinsburg Road, Green changed Bowen's previous instructions. He ordered Tracy to occupy the intersection of the Bruinsburg and Shaifer Roads that had previously contained only three companies of pickets from



Green's brigade. In the course of twenty-seven hours, Tracy's men had marched forty miles with little food or rest. Once in position, Tracy's men rested on their arms in exhaustion.<sup>29</sup>

This decision was fortuitous. Bowen's forces guarded the two routes into Vicksburg. Since the Federals did not march along the Bruinsburg road, the most likely unit to make initial contact would be Green's brigade. This allowed Tracy and his men to get a well deserved rest.

By midnight on 30 April the four Confederate brigades that would take part in the Battle of Port Gibson were in the Grand Gulf–Port Gibson area (fig. 8). Green's undersized brigade defending along the Rodney road contained 1,000 soldiers with the attachments. Tracy's brigade from Stevenson's division contained 1,500 soldiers defending along the Bruinsburg Road. Cockrell's brigade, considered by many to be the best brigade within Pemberton's command, was in reserve at Grand Gulf. Baldwin's brigade from Smith's division was bivouacking along the Bayou Pierre at Grindstone Ford following a long march from Vicksburg. Thus, Bowen had about 6,800 men and 16 guns available for the upcoming fight.

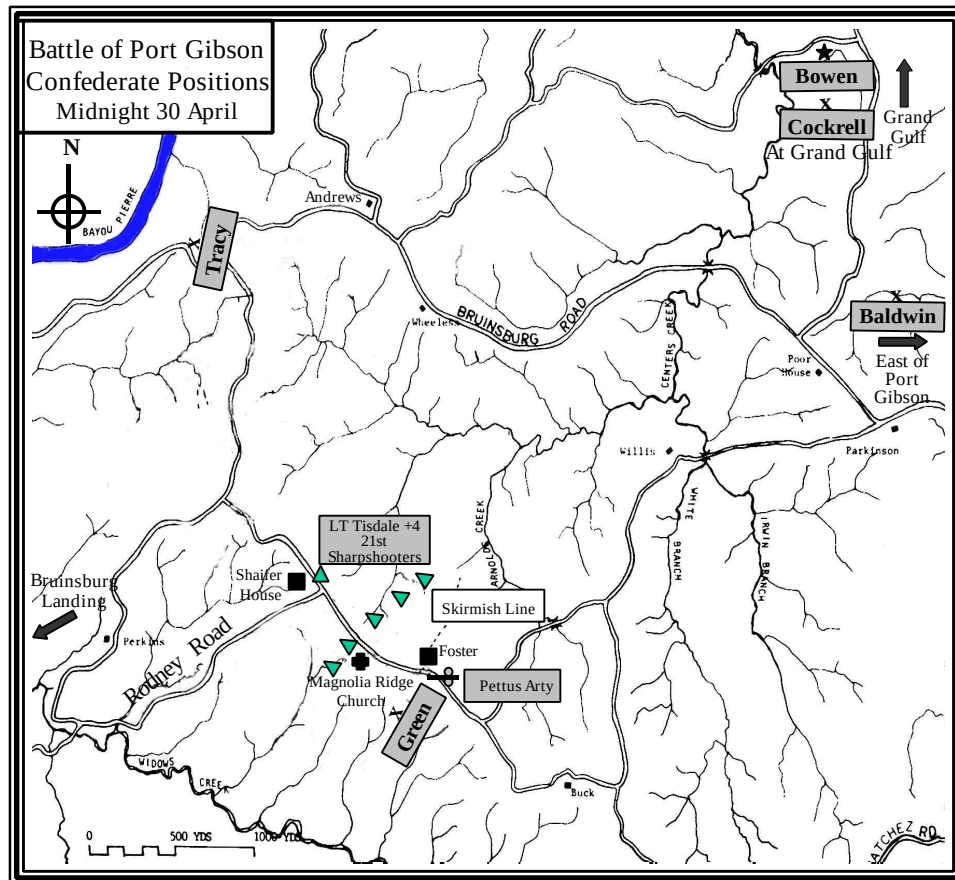


Fig. 8. This map was created based on a map used in Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign: Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow*, vol. 2 (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1986), 360, 382, 390, 396.

Why did Bowen reinforce Green with Tracy's unit? Bowen remarks in his *Official Report* that Tracy's unit was in "jaded condition."<sup>30</sup> Yet, he instructs them to continue to advance to Port Gibson after resting and eating. Why not deploy Cockrell's well-rested brigade instead? The answer in part was that Bowen feared an attack against Grand Gulf. Bowen had repelled the Union navy on 29 April. Grant's demonstrations throughout Mississippi convinced Bowen to maintain a mobile reserve against any eventuality. By maintaining his most trusted unit in reserve, Bowen retained the flexibility of reinforcing Port Gibson or defending against an attack on Grand Gulf.

**Bowen's force was a mixture of different regiments from Missouri, Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi organized into a division. Receiving Tracy and Baldwin's brigades at the commencement of the battle, Bowen integrated them into his force. Tracy and Baldwin received instructions from Bowen upon arrival. A reporting system quickly developed within the division. Commanders had the latitude to refine Bowen's instructions based on the tactical situation. This would prove critically important for the forthcoming battle.**

Earlier on 30 April Union Major General John A. McClernand's XIII Corps disembarked at Bruinsburg Landing. They had to climb a considerable escarpment and were surprised by the lack of opposition. Upon reaching the top of the heights, McClernand rested his soldiers at Windsor Plantation along Bruinsburg road. In the haste of the deployment from Hard Times, his soldiers did not have rations. The regimental commissary officers failed to issue the customary three days rations before the crossing.<sup>31</sup>

Grant urged McClernand to press inland as quickly as possible to prevent the Confederates from destroying the bridges over the Bayou Pierre leading to Vicksburg. McClernand left Windsor Plantation following the Bruinsburg road south to Bethel Church. He took the Rodney road intending to march as rapidly as possible throughout the night.

First Sergeant Charles A. Hobbs of the Ninety-ninth Illinois described the movement that night:

In many places the road seems to end abruptly, but we come to the place we find it turning at right angles, passing through narrow valleys, sometimes through hills, and presenting the best opportunity to the Rebels for defense if they had but known our purpose.<sup>32</sup>

Moving east through Widow Creek in the moonlight, skirmishers from the 21st Iowa moved slowly forward and encountered a house and wagon to their front.<sup>33</sup> This was the A. K. Shaifer House near Magnolia Church.

Around midnight, Green rode forward to see if his pickets were awake. Green conferred with Lieutenant William D. Tisdale of Company B, 12th Arkansas Sharpshooters, and watched Mrs. Shaifer and the women of the house hurriedly load a wagon with furniture. Green tried to reassure them that the Federals would not arrive until morning. Shortly thereafter, musket fire from the skirmishers crashed into the house and the wagon. At 12:30 A.M., 1 May 1863 the Battle for Port Gibson opened.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Terrence J. Winschel, *Triumph and Defeat: The Vicksburg Campaign* (Mason City, Iowa: Savas Publishing Company), 3.

<sup>2</sup>Terrence J. Winschel, *Vicksburg: Fall of the Confederate Gibraltar* (Abilene, Texas: McWhiney Foundation Press, 1999), 22.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>6</sup>Tucker, 176.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>8</sup>Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1959), 30; and Stewart Sifakis, *Who Was Who in the Confederacy*, vol. 2 (New York: Facts on File, 1988), 29.

<sup>9</sup>Tucker, 142-143, 149.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 178.

<sup>11</sup>Bearss, 313.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 307.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 309.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 305.

<sup>15</sup>*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of Rebellion*. ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 493, (hereafter cited as *OR*); and Terrence J. Winschel, *Triumph and Defeat*, 22-24.

<sup>16</sup>*OR* ser. 3, vol. 24, pt. 1, 792; and Winschel, 22-24.

<sup>17</sup>Tucker, 216.

<sup>18</sup>Bears, 311.

<sup>19</sup>Winschel, 58.

<sup>20</sup>Bearss, 313.

<sup>21</sup>*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 575.

<sup>22</sup>*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 576.

<sup>23</sup>*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 576; and Grabau, 153.

<sup>24</sup>Winschel, 30.

<sup>25</sup>Tucker, 216.

<sup>26</sup>*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 672.

<sup>27</sup>Bearss, 348.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 350.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 349.

<sup>30</sup>*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 658.

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<sup>31</sup>Bearss, 319.

<sup>32</sup>Winschel, 58.

<sup>33</sup>*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 628, 631, 672, 674; and Bearss, 353.

<sup>34</sup>*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 628, 631, 672, 674; and Bearss, 353.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ACTIONS ON THE RODNEY ROAD

The fights on the Rodney road occurred between the A. K. Shaifer house and White and Irwin branches on Willow Creek from 12:30 A.M. to 5:30 P.M on 1 May 1863. The actions can essentially be divided into three separate engagements: the night battle by the Shaifer house, the morning battle for Magnolia Church and Foster ridge, and the afternoon fight along White and Irwin branches.

The preliminary fight consisted of a night battle around the Shaifer house. In this engagement, Confederate and Union skirmishers vied for critical terrain for the employment of forces in the upcoming morning action. Lacking cavalry to provide reconnaissance and early warning of approaching units, both Union and Confederate forces relied on pickets and skirmishers to develop the situation in the darkness. The night action also witnessed a series of fierce close range artillery duels.

As the sun rose, the morning fight consisted of a battle for position on the key ridgelines east of the Shaifer house: Magnolia Church and Foster ridge. Retention of this terrain was critical for the Confederate delaying action to prevent Union forces from employing their numerical superiority. Union troops stormed the Magnolia Church ridge early in the morning. Union artillery quickly occupied this ridge suppressing Green's forces on Foster's ridge. A gallant but futile charge led by Bowen against Magnolia Church ridge failed to dislodge the Union artillery. The incessant Union pressure against Green's entire front forced him to withdraw in haste. Green rallied his men to fight once again along Bruinsburg road.

The final action on the Rodney road started about midday between White and Irwin branches. Bowen, employing lessons learned from Green's earlier fight, established a strong defensive line in the low ground using the recently arrived troops of Baldwin's Cockrell's brigade. Initially successful, the Union attempts to bypass Bowen's positions to the south forced him to lead his second charge of the day. Using Cockrell's brigade, the counterattack caused confusion within the Union lines. Late in the afternoon, Bowen abandoned the Rodney road with most of his forces intact.



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Fig. 9. Brigadier General Martin L. Green.  
Reprinted from Ezra J. Warner's *Generals in  
Gray: Lives of Confederate Commanders* (Baton  
Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1959), 116.

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Brigadier General Martin E. Green commanded the Confederate forces along the Rodney Road at the outset of the battle (fig. 9). Green, a native of Virginia, was not a professional soldier. Before the war, he moved to Missouri and established a steam sawmill with his brothers. As the war broke out in 1861, Green organized a cavalry command in Northeastern Missouri. Known as "Green's Missouri Cavalry Regiment," he was elected its colonel.<sup>1</sup> Green fought well at Lexington, Missouri, and Pea Ridge,



Arkansas, under Brigadier General Sterling Price. Promoted to brigadier on 21 July 1862, Green assumed command of an infantry brigade. He earned a reputation as an aggressive officer at the battles of Iuka and Corinth.<sup>2</sup>

Green's command at Port Gibson consisted of approximately 800.<sup>3</sup> His brigade was a mixture of Arkansas and Missouri Regiments. The regiments were the 15th Arkansas, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William W. Reynolds, the 21st Arkansas, under the command of Colonel Jordan E. Cravens, and the 12th Arkansas Sharpshooter Battalion, under the command of Captain Griff Bayne. The 15th Arkansas was the most veteran unit having fought at Wilson's Creek, Pea Ridge, and Corinth. The 21st Arkansas and 12th Arkansas Sharpshooter had previously engaged in combat at Corinth.<sup>4</sup>

Green's reinforcements consisted of the 6th Mississippi, under the command of Colonel Robert Lowrey and the four guns of the Pettus Flying Artillery, commanded by Lieutenant John R. Sweaney. The 6th Mississippi was a veteran unit having fought at Shiloh, and throughout Mississippi. The Pettus Flying Artillery had previously seen action at Baton Rouge and Corinth.<sup>5</sup>

At midnight, 30 April, Green posted his brigade 600 yards east of the Shaifer house along Magnolia and Foster ridges behind a worm fence. Green established his headquarters on Foster ridge and placed the 6th Mississippi on the right, followed to the left by the 12th Arkansas, the 15th Arkansas, and the 21st Arkansas.<sup>6</sup> The Pettus Flying Artillery was placed on the north side of the road by the Foster house. Green posted a four-man outpost under the command of Lieutenant William Tisdale from the 12th Arkansas near the Shaifer house.<sup>7</sup>

#### Night Action

Night engagements in the Civil War were rare, and the soldiers that fought on Magnolia Church ridge did not soon forget this one. Coordination at night was next to impossible and the intermixing of units was inevitable. After the initial exchange of fire at 12:30 A.M., Green pushed a skirmish line from the 12th Arkansas Sharpshooter Battalion towards the Shaifer house (fig. 10). The Union skirmishers from the 21st Iowa probed forward on either side of the Rodney Road past the Shaifer house. On the ridge east of Magnolia Church, Lieutenant John S. Bell of the 12th Arkansas Sharpshooters waited patiently:

We could hear the enemy forming, and it was so still we could hear every command given. Our men had orders not to fire until word was given. Soon we could see their line of skirmishers coming down the road and could hear them say there was no one here, it was only a cavalry scout. When they were within 50 yards the word fire was given.<sup>8</sup>

The Union skirmishers fled and immediately took cover along the ridge awaiting reinforcements. Union and Confederate artillery pieces moved forward, sighted down the Rodney road, and opened fire at point blank range. The trail Union companies of the 21st Iowa deployed in the ravines to the west of Magnolia Church. In the darkness, the men of both sides fired at muzzle flashes. Union artillery sent shot, shell, and canister into suspected Confederate positions.<sup>9</sup> Green had anticipated this and placed the four guns of the Pettus Flying Artillery to sweep the road and adjacent field.<sup>10</sup> The Confederate gunners excelled at aiming at the muzzle flashes with deadly accuracy. Union Colonel

William Stone, the commander of Carr's 2d Brigade, described the Confederate artillery precision in his *Official Report*:

The fire of the rebel batteries, on account of their knowledge of the ground, was quite accurate, and many of our men and horses were disabled by them. The extreme darkness, the screaming and bursting of shells, and the rattle of grape through fences and timber, conspired to render the scene presented by this midnight battle one of the most terrific grandeur.<sup>11</sup>

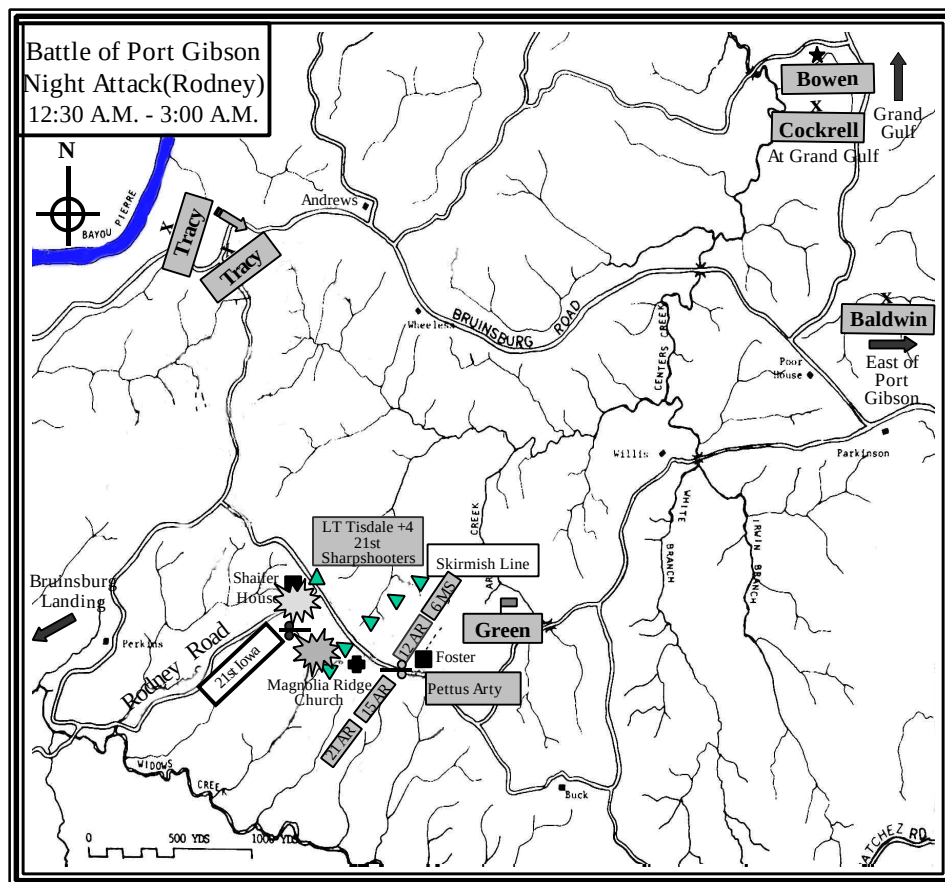


Fig. 10. This map was created based on a map used in Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign: Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow*, vol. 2 (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1986), 360.

The skirmish lasted until around 3:00 A.M. The fighting ceased when Union Brigadier General Eugene Carr decided to wait until morning before continuing the Union deployment.<sup>12</sup> He was concerned that his units, the 21st Iowa, the 23d Iowa, and the 11th Wisconsin, of the 2d Brigade, would be drawn into a trap. Additionally, Carr's units were exhausted after a difficult day's march and the lack of sleep since 3:00 A.M. the preceding morning.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the Confederates held their ground in anticipation of the impending Federal assault at daylight.

The night action caught both sides by surprise. Fortunately, Green was present at the Shafer house ensuring his picket outpost was awake. Lacking cavalry and accurate local population reports, Green relied upon his pickets to detect Union movements. His staunch defense in the early morning hours of 1 May prevented the Federals from bypassing his position to strike Port Gibson.<sup>14</sup> Green's actions halted the Federal advance buying Bowen precious time for his delaying action.

#### Morning Action

As the sun rose, Union commanders saw a maze of thick canebrakes, crisscrossing ravines, steep valleys, and broad, narrow ridges. This made a concentrated attack west of the Shafer house difficult.

Major General McClernand arrived from Windsor Plantation at dawn. As the senior officer on the field, he learned that a road (Shaifer Road) led northwest from the Shaifer house to Bruinsburg Road. A local black man warned McClernand that Confederate troops (Tracy's brigade) were approaching from that direction. McClernand sent Brigadier General Peter Osterhaus' division to meet this threat on the Union left flank (see chapter 4).<sup>15</sup>

Between 5:30 A.M. and 6:30 A.M, with skirmishers in front, the Federals began a slow and deliberate advance pushing Green's skirmishers off of Magnolia Church ridge. Carr's attack, instead of coming across the open terrain north of the Rodney road, was oriented south of the road through the thickets. Green initially assumed that the skirmishers would hold, but Union pressure pushed the Confederates back exposing Green's left flank.

Green saw the massing of Union forces opposite him and realized he could not hold the position with his small force. He and Tracy had only 2,500 men between them facing the Federals, but Tracy's forces were the only reinforcements locally available. Around 7:00 A.M., Green sent a messenger to Tracy requesting assistance. Tracy was reluctant to give up any of his men, but grudgingly sent one regiment, the 23d Alabama, and a battery of artillery after first light.<sup>16</sup> To get from Tracy's to Green's position; the 23d Alabama had to travel by a circuitous route along the Bruinsburg Road towards Port Gibson, to the intersection of the Rodney Road, then east to Magnolia Church. It took this unit roughly ninety minutes to travel the eight miles (fig. 11).<sup>17</sup>

Bowen arrived at Green's headquarters on Foster ridge about 7:30 A.M. Bowen realized he had made a mistake approving Green's main defensive line. Magnolia

Church ridge, about 300 yards to the south, was the dominant terrain which now afforded the Union artillery a distinct advantage.<sup>18</sup> Bowen needed more men. He sent word for Baldwin's brigade to move forward from Grindstone Ford, on Bayou Pierre, and for Cockrell's brigade to come from Grand Gulf.<sup>19</sup>

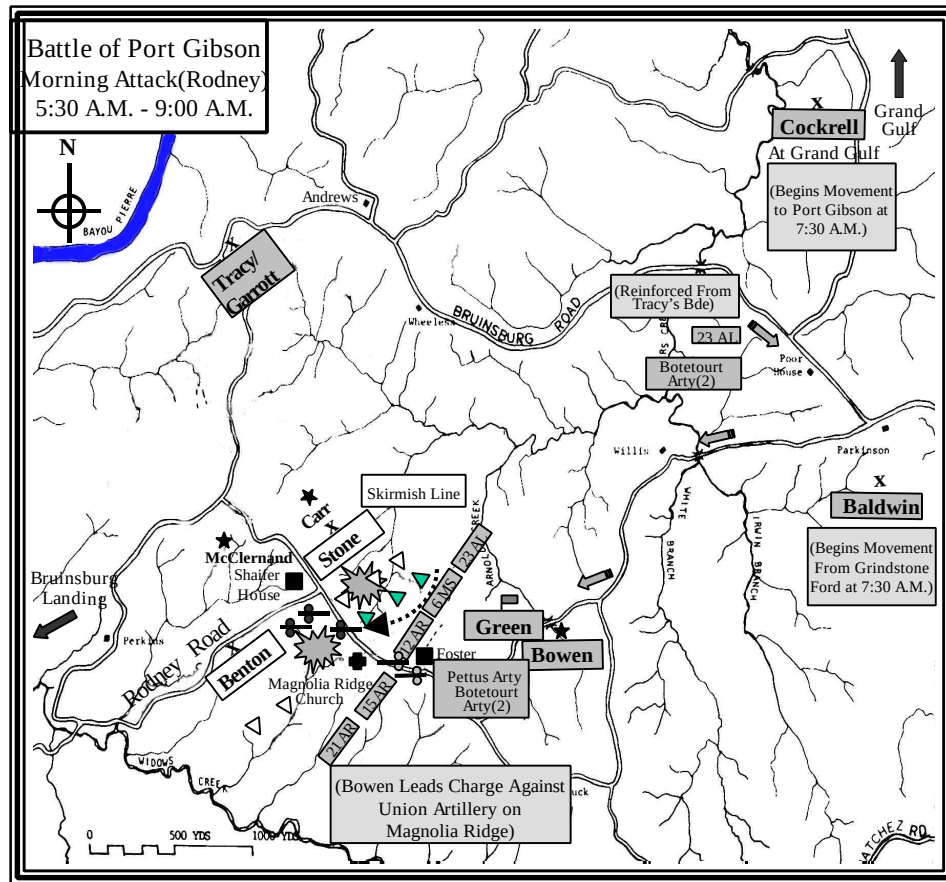


Fig. 11. This map was created based on a map used in Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign: Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow*, vol. 2 (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1986), 360.

The Union artillery began to mass on Magnolia Church ridge and fire shot and canister into Green's troops. Bowen concluded that if the ridge was not retaken his forces would be forced to withdraw. The arrival of Colonel Franklin K. Beck's 23d Alabama and two guns from the Botetourt Artillery at 8:30 A.M. from Tracy's brigade temporarily stabilized Green's line.<sup>20</sup>

At 8:30 A.M., Bowen ordered and led a charge against the Union artillery on Magnolia Church ridge. He directed the 6th Mississippi and the newly arrived 23d Alabama to drive the artillery off the ridge. This would enable the 12th Arkansas Sharpshooters to seize the ridge.<sup>21</sup> This attack was supported by four artillery pieces, two each from the Botetourt and the Pettus Flying Artillery. The arrival of the Botetourt Artillery provided enough ammunition to supply two of the guns of the Pettus Flying Artillery, which had previously expended their ammunition.

The 6th Mississippi surged forward from the open area around the Foster house towards the Union artillery. Supported by the 23d Alabama on the right, the Mississippians got tangled in the ravines in front of the Union artillery. Intense artillery fire and musket fire forced the 6th Mississippi to halt their attack.<sup>22</sup> The 12th Arkansas, on the left, was pinned down by musket fire and unable to advance.<sup>23</sup> The Confederate artillerists moved forward with the 23d Alabama but were cut down by Union sharpshooters near Magnolia Church. After suffering heavy casualties, Bowen ordered his force back to the main defensive line. He left the field to urge Baldwin's brigade forward to avert the envelopment of Green's forces.

At 10:00 A.M., the arrival of Union Brigadier General Alvin P. Hovey's and Brigadier General Andrew J. Smith's divisions allowed McClelland to concentrate his numerically superior force on a narrow front with regiments stacked three and four deep.<sup>24</sup> The overwhelming weight of the Union advance by Carr's and Hovey's divisions routed the Confederate center. The Union divisions captured two cannons from the Virginia Botetourt Artillery, three caissons, three ammunition wagons, and 200 prisoners.<sup>25</sup> Heavily outnumbered and hard pressed on both flanks, the Confederates gave way (fig. 12).

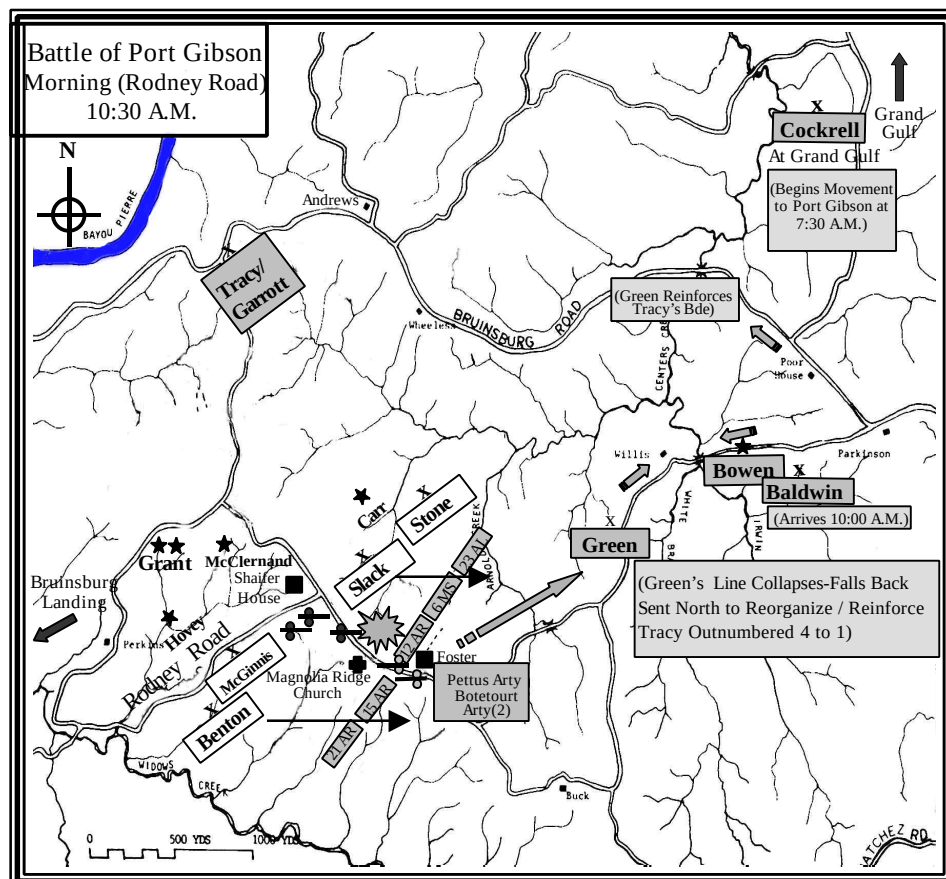




Fig. 12. This map was created based on a map used in Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign: Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow*, vol. 2 (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1986), 360, 382.

The remnants of Green's brigade fell back to the east about a mile and a half. They reformed on the Rodney road and were met by Bowen and Baldwin's brigade. Bowen concluded that a counterattack by Green's brigade without reorganization was hopeless. He sent Green's shattered command to the right wing to bolster the defense of the Bruinsburg road. He figured that during the march Green could reorganize his unit.<sup>26</sup>

Green summarized in his *Official Report* the correlation of forces from the commencement of hostilities until he withdrew from Magnolia Church area.

My force when attacked by the enemy did not exceed 800, and, after being reinforced by the Twenty-third Alabama, did not exceed 1,100, and with this force I maintained my position against a force of the enemy (as subsequent [events] have proven) of at least 7,000 from 12:30 o'clock until about 10:30.<sup>27</sup>

Green delayed a superior force of two divisions for half a day with a force between 800 and 1,100 men. His force suffered 13 killed, 71 wounded, and 76 missing excluding the 6th Mississippi that didn't report its losses.<sup>28</sup> Add to this the capture of 200 soldiers; Green's brigade lost nearly one-half its ranks. Severely outnumbered, he achieved a great success in delaying the Union advance.

Green's defensive line utilized the terrain to great effect with a notable exception. He mistakenly placed his main defensive line east of Magnolia Church ridge. Once the skirmishers were driven off the ridge, his soldiers were exposed to intensive musket and artillery fire.

Green might have held his position had he not had to divert Tracy's brigade to Bruinsburg road. Although the additional 1,500 soldiers would have bolstered his position, the deployment of Tracy's brigade to guard the Bruinsburg road was a wise decision by Green (see chapter 4).

In command of the field, the Federals did not immediately pursue. McClelland, inspected the captured positions with great enthusiasm. The consummate politician, McClelland made congratulatory speeches to the troops.<sup>29</sup> Grant listened briefly to these speeches and suggested he resume the advance to Port Gibson.

#### The White and Irwin Branch Action

As previously mentioned, Green's brigade met Brigadier General William Baldwin's brigade marching from Grindstone Ford, about one and one half miles east of Magnolia Church. Baldwin's brigade relieved Green's force on the Rodney road.

Bowen, posting Baldwin's brigade, anchored his new defensive line in front of a narrow ridge between the White and Irwin branches of Willow Creek. He decided to develop his defense in the creek bottom after observing the action on the broad Magnolia Church ridge. Bowen had learned that a ridge top was not the strongest defensive position in this type of terrain, since his troops were susceptible to artillery and musket fire on the bare hilltops. In the low ground, the underbrush and ravines offered better

concealment and cover for the Confederate defenders. The underbrush minimized the effectiveness of Union superiority in numbers and artillery.<sup>30</sup>

Bowen entrusted this new defensive line to Brigadier General William E. Baldwin (fig. 13). A native South Carolinian, Baldwin moved to Columbus, Mississippi, at an early age and worked in a book and stationary business. He had limited military experience before the war serving in the militia as a lieutenant in the “Columbus Riflemen.”<sup>31</sup>

As the war broke out in 1861, Baldwin became the captain of the Columbus Riflemen. He moved with his unit to guard Pensacola, Florida. In October 1861, Baldwin received command of the newly formed 14th Mississippi Infantry Regiment in Jackson, Mississippi. Promoted to colonel, the regiment was sent to Fort Donelson, Tennessee. Baldwin’s regiment surrendered at Fort Donelson in February 1862. Imprisoned, and later paroled, he was promoted to brigadier general on 19 September 1862.<sup>32</sup> Baldwin had only limited combat experience prior to the action on the Rodney road.



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Fig. 13. Brigadier General William E. Baldwin. Reprinted from Ezra J. Warner’s *Generals in Gray: Lives of Confederate Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1959), 15.

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Bowen placed Baldwin's Mississippi and Louisiana brigade in the low ground between White and Irwin branches. The 31st Louisiana, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Sidney H. Griffin, occupied positions on the northern side of the Rodney road. The 17th Louisiana, under the command of Colonel Robert Richardson, anchored its line just south of the road. The 4th Mississippi, under Lieutenant Colonel Thomas N. Adaire, deployed on the left of the 17th Louisiana. Skirmishers occupied White branch and established a roadblock on the Rodney road.<sup>33</sup>

The 46th Mississippi, under the command of Colonel Claudius W. Sears, guarded Landis' and Guibor's batteries of six guns 600 yards to the rear. Bowen concealed these guns and the two remaining guns of the Pettus Flying Artillery in the woods overlooking Irwin branch. From these positions, the artillery could support the units in the low ground and break up Union formations (fig 14).<sup>34</sup>

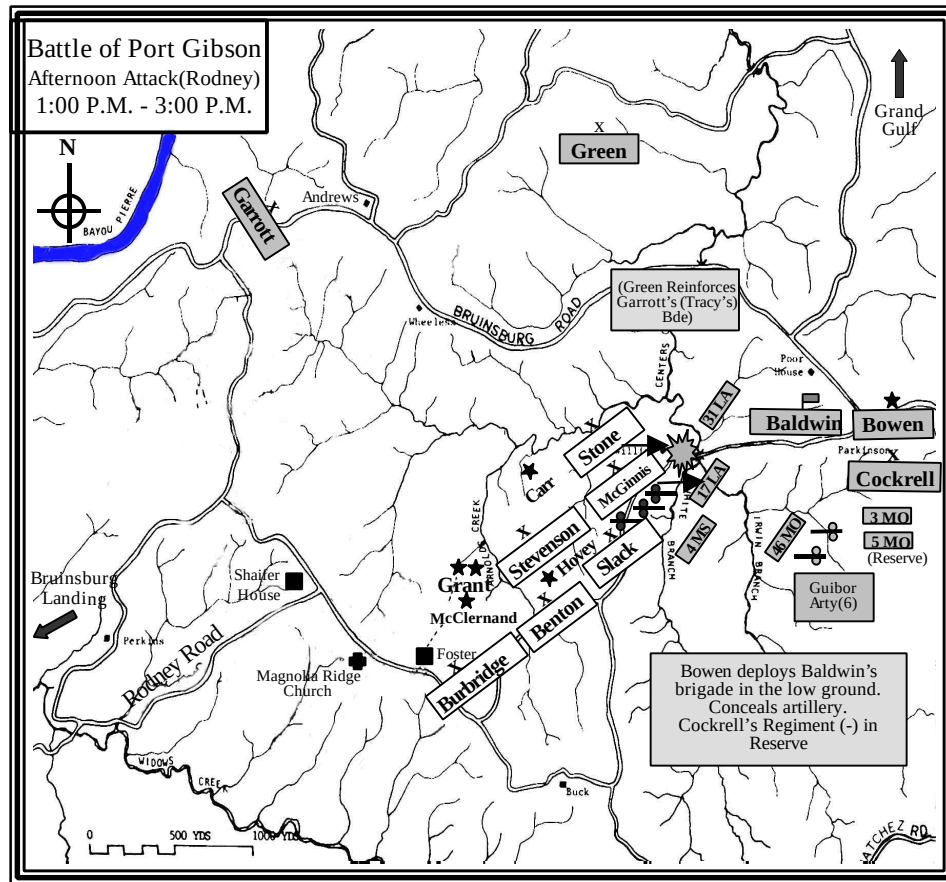


Fig. 14. This map was created based on a map used in Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign: Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow*, vol. 2 (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1986), 382, 390.

The arrival of Colonel Franklin M. Cockrell's brigade from Grand Gulf provided Bowen with a reserve for this impending fight. Cockrell brought with him two of his three regiments. The 3d Missouri, under the command of Colonel William R. Gause, and the 5th Missouri, under the command of Colonel Robert S. Bevier, remained in reserve to protect Baldwin's left flank.<sup>35</sup>

Shortly after noon, McClernand began to advance towards White and Irwin branches. Union forces deployed in battle line and became disoriented in the tangled

ravines. Disorganized in the dense terrain, the lead Union units became easy prey for the concealed Confederate skirmishers and artillery.

Bowen's scheme of maneuver worked for several hours. The battle along this new defensive line developed into a stalemate. The employment of artillery supporting the defensive line in the low ground puzzled McClernand and his commanders. Union skirmishers were raked by artillery fire from the guns concealed in the woods. McClernand and his division commanders paused the attack in order to sort out the Confederate dispositions.<sup>36</sup>

Around 3:00 P.M., Bowen observed the Federals massing from his vantage point overlooking White and Irwin branches. Previously unable to break through the Confederate lines, McClernand had awaited the arrival of units from Bruinsburg landing. At this point, McClernand had at his disposal the divisions of Brigadier Generals A. J. Smith, Hovey, and Carr; as well as John A. Stevenson's brigade of Major General John A. Logan's Division. McClernand massed twenty-one regiments concentrated on an 800-yard front parallel with the Rodney road.<sup>37</sup> He had deployed Hovey's division to his left flank to extend the Confederate lines.

Bowen was more concerned about the extension of Union lines southward than the massing of Union troops along the center of his defensive line. By extending southward, the Federals might find the Natchez road 1,200 yards to their right. This would enable the Federals to flank him and seize Port Gibson.<sup>38</sup>

Bowen moved Cockrell's 3d and 5th Missouri by column into position to strike the extreme right of the Federal line. This was a last desperate measure to halt the Union advance.<sup>39</sup> Fittingly, the attackers were fellow Missourians from Cockrell's command.

A native Missourian, Cockrell was as one of the most aggressive commanders within Pemberton's command (fig. 15). A lawyer before the war, Cockrell allied himself with the South and commanded a militia company at Carthage, Wilson's Creek, and Pea Ridge.<sup>40</sup> Promoted through the grades to colonel because of gallantry, Cockrell had served under Bowen in the 1st Missouri Infantry. He assumed command of Bowen's former brigade.



Fig. 15. Brigadier General Francis M. Cockrell. Reprinted from Ezra J. Warner's *Generals in Gray: Lives of Confederate Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1959), 57.

Bowen hoped to move his attackers secretly into position using Irwin branch for concealment (fig. 16). Hovey saw Cockrell's column and tried to get reinforcements. The Missourians attacked before he reacted, devastating Colonel James L. Slack's brigade. In the confusion of battle, Cockrell's men enjoyed initial success, but it was short lived. The counterattack ground to a halt in the face of massed Union artillery and overwhelming numbers. Union artillery using shell and canister tore into the Missourians. After one hour of vicious fighting, and against superior odds, the Missourians retreated using the ravines for cover.<sup>41</sup> Bowen, accompanying the charge,

commended his soldiers for their bravery stating, “For I did not suspect that any of you would get away, but the charge had to be made, or my little army was lost.”<sup>42</sup>

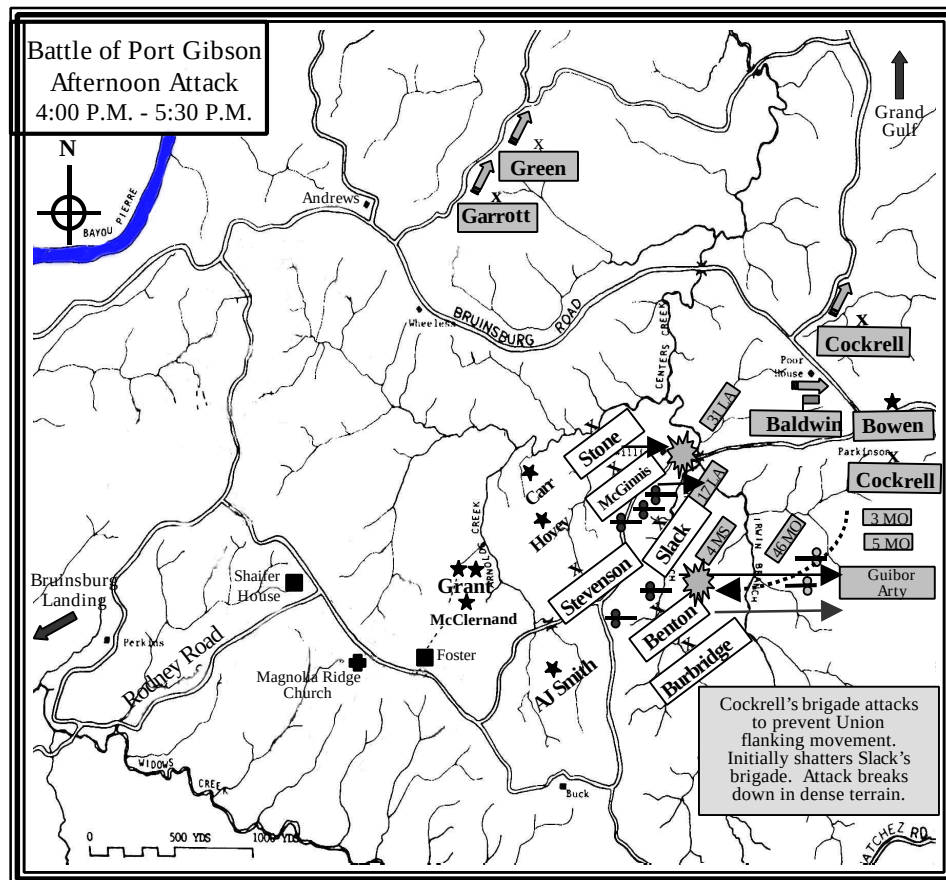


Fig. 16. This map was created based on a map used in Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign: Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow*, vol. 2 (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1986), 390.

Baldwin’s men clung to their positions along Irwin Branch as the Missourians fell back. His right secured, McClernand tried to defeat Baldwin as he had beaten Green with a massed frontal assault. The Confederate position held initially because Cockrell’s attack had drained some of the forces McClernand needed for the assault. McClernand,



with numerical advantage, derived from the arrival of two additional brigades from Logan's division, eventually collapsed the Confederate defense.

At 5:30 P.M., Bowen gave the order to his force to withdraw to towards the Bayou Pierre. Bowen later telegraphed Pemberton with the following message:

I am falling back across Bayou Pierre. I will endeavor to hold that position until reinforcements arrive....Want of ammunition is one of the main causes of our retreat. The men did nobly, holding out the whole day against overwhelming odds.<sup>43</sup>

Baldwin's brigade had fought well in the low ground. His force suffered 12 killed, 48 wounded, and 27 missing.<sup>44</sup> This compared low to the carnage they inflicted on Union forces. Baldwin, with some difficulty, disengaged his command and departed for the Bayou Pierre.

Cockrell's brigade did not fare as well. The daring charge into the Federal line had cost them dearly. They suffered 13 killed, 97 wounded, and 96 missing.<sup>45</sup> The numbered listed as missing is not surprising since the Missourians had to fight their way out of Union lines. With great difficulty, the survivors of the charge filtered off the battlefield rejoining their compatriots withdrawing to the Bayou Pierre.

#### Engagement Analysis

Bowen and his subordinates fought a stubborn delaying action along the Rodney road. Against overwhelming odds, Bowen's forces had time and again withstood the onslaught of superior Federal numbers in personnel and artillery. Bowen reluctantly withdrew at the end of day towards the Bayou Pierre.

Bowen's reconnaissance efforts were limited to the pickets deployed by his units. They proved effective in this terrain. The pickets initiated the action at the Shaifer house. Later in the day, skirmishers kept Union forces at bay between the White and Irwin branches for several hours. This provided Bowen with the time necessary to prepare his last defensive positions on the Rodney road.

Long-range reconnaissance was limited to gaining a vantage point to observe enemy movements. Bowen positioned himself on high ground along Foster ridge and west of Willow creek to detect Union movements. He witnessed Union attempts to outflank his positions and acted accordingly.

Throughout the day, Bowen's forces learned to utilize the terrain to their advantage. Green's initial defensive line on Foster ridge exposed his forces to murderous artillery fire. As the battle progressed, Bowen altered his defensive scheme. He posted Baldwin's brigade in the low ground maintaining his artillery on the adjacent ridges. This concealed his infantry from the effects of artillery. Further, it deceived the Federals assaulting Baldwin's positions.

Bowen appeared on the battlefield at the decisive points in the action. He arrived at Green's command on Magnolia Church ridge prior to the first Union morning assault. Bowen directed and supervised the redeployment of Green's brigade to augment Tracy as well as the deployment of Baldwin's brigade. He remained with Baldwin throughout the later part of the day. In the final assault along the Rodney road, Bowen gallantly led the Missourians into action. By his presence on the battlefield, Bowen inspired his subordinates to fight, even though the situation appeared desperate.

Bowen maintained a reserve to retain flexibility during the fight on White and Irwin branches. He deployed them in an attempt to turn the tide of the battle late in the day. Reserves were also constituted from subordinate units to reinforce other sectors. Tracy detached the 23d Alabama to support Green early in the day. Ironically, Green marched to support Tracy's brigade later in the day.

However, logistically, Bowen lacked a plan to adequately sustain his forces. During the fight on Foster ridge, Green's forces ran out of artillery ammunition. The arrival of the Botetourt Artillery and their ammunition wagons provided additional ammunition to sustain two of Green's artillery pieces. Throughout the day, Confederate units ran out of ammunition or had it captured. The lack of a service support plan hampered Bowen's delaying action.

Bowen's forces engaged three Union divisions along the Rodney road from 12:30 A.M. through 5:30 P.M. Outnumbered by four to one, Bowen masterfully delayed McClernand's advance along the Rodney road buying precious time for the arrival of additional Confederate reinforcements from Vicksburg.

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<sup>1</sup>Warner, 116-117; and Sifakis, 112.

<sup>2</sup>Terrence J. Winschel, *Triumph and Defeat*, 62.

<sup>3</sup>OR, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 674. Green reports in his Official Report that his initial forces on the Rodney road did not exceed 800 soldiers. This does not include the subsequent attachment of the 23d Alabama. This number contradicts most sources that estimate Green's strength at the outset of the battle around 1,000.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph H. Crute, Jr., *Units of the Confederate States of America* (Gaithersburg, Maryland: Olde Soldiers Book, Inc.), 51-52, 54, 49, 169, 192. Note: Crute compiled

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brief unit histories of the 15th and 21st Arkansas Infantry, and the 12th Arkansas Sharpshooter Battalion.

<sup>5</sup>Crute, 169, 192. Note: Crute compiled brief unit histories of the 6th Mississippi Infantry, and the Pettus Flying Artillery.

<sup>6</sup>Bearss, 349; and Winschel, 62.

<sup>7</sup>Bearss, 349.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>9</sup>Grabau, 163.

<sup>10</sup>Bearss, 355.

<sup>11</sup>*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 629.

<sup>12</sup>Bearss, 356.

<sup>13</sup>*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 620.

<sup>14</sup>Bearss, 353.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>16</sup>Grabau, 163.

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

<sup>18</sup>Grabau, 163; and Winschel, 69.

<sup>19</sup>Grabau, 164.

<sup>20</sup>Winschel, 69; and Bearss, 376.

<sup>21</sup>Winschel, 69-70.

<sup>22</sup>Bearss, 378.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 379.

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- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., 381.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., 383.
- <sup>27</sup>OR, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 674.
- <sup>28</sup>Bearss, 406.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., 386.
- <sup>30</sup>Bearss, 384; and Winschel, 79.
- <sup>31</sup>Warner, 15.
- <sup>32</sup>Warner, 16; Winschel 61; Sifakis, 14; and Crute, 175. Note: Unit history of the 14th Mississippi.
- <sup>33</sup>Winschel, 79; and Crute, 156, 151, 189. Note: Histories of the 31st Louisiana, 17th Louisiana, and 46th Mississippi.
- <sup>34</sup>Bearss, 386.
- <sup>35</sup>Winschel, 79.
- <sup>36</sup>Bearss, 387.
- <sup>37</sup>Bearss, 389; and Winschel, 80-81.
- <sup>38</sup>Winschel, 81.
- <sup>39</sup>Bearss, 391.
- <sup>40</sup>Warner, 57; Winschel 78; and Sifakis, 59.
- <sup>41</sup>Bearss, 393.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup>OR, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 660; and Winschel, 85.
- <sup>44</sup>Bearss, 407.
- <sup>45</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE ACTIONS ON THE BRUINSBURG ROAD

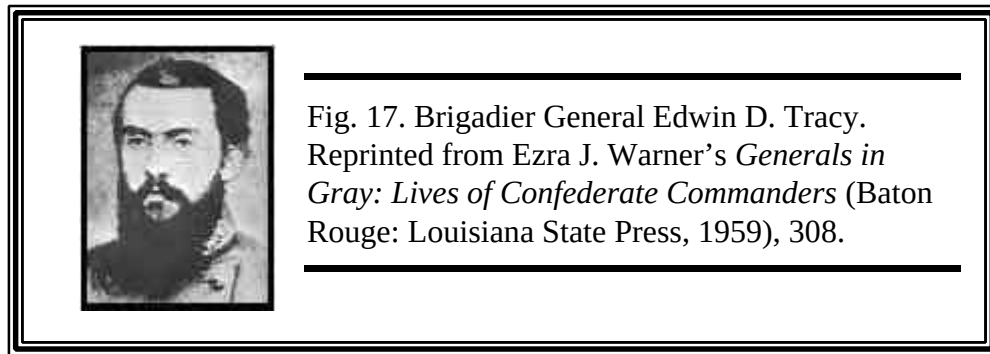
The fights on the Bruinsburg road occurred primarily at two locations: the intersection with the Shaifer road, and near the Andrews house from 7:00 A.M to 5:00 P.M on 1 May 1863. These positions on the right shoulder of Bowen's delaying action were essential to retaining control of the most direct road to the Bayou Pierre. If the Confederate defenders on the Bruinsburg road could not hold, Bowen's forces on the Rodney road would be cut off from Grand Gulf.

These actions commenced with a skirmish south of the intersection of the Bruinsburg and Shaifer roads followed by fierce long-range artillery duels. This began a protracted day of mounting pressure from Union forces. Skirmishers and unrelenting artillery fire weakened the Confederate lines. The continuous buildup of fresh forces allowed Union commanders to overextend the Rebel lines and threaten to outflank them. Following a gallant, but foolhardy charge late in the afternoon to turn the tide of the battle, the Confederate defenders withdrew towards the Bayou Pierre.

Brigadier General Edward D. Tracy commanded the Confederate forces along the Bruinsburg road at the outset of the battle (fig. 17). Tracy, a native Georgian, moved to Alabama and practiced law. An advocate of secession, Tracy supported John Breckenridge for president in 1860.<sup>1</sup>

As the war broke out in 1861, he organized a company and was elected its captain. Tracy fought at Manassas and later had a horse shot from under him while serving as a lieutenant colonel of the 19th Alabama at Shiloh.<sup>2</sup> Promoted to brigadier on 16 August

1862, Tracy assumed command of an infantry brigade composed of Alabama regiments. Brave but cautious, Tracy's brigade reported to Vicksburg in December 1862.<sup>3</sup>



Tracy's brigade consisted of approximately 1,500 soldiers.<sup>4</sup> His command consisted of five Alabama regiments: the 20th Alabama, under Colonel Isham Garrott; the 23d Alabama, under Colonel Franklin K. Beck; the 30th Alabama, under Colonel Charles M. Shelley; the 31st Alabama, under Colonel Daniel R. Hundley; and the 46th Alabama, under Colonel Martin L. Woods.<sup>5</sup> The only non-Alabama unit in this brigade was the Botetourt Artillery with its six guns. This battery was the only Virginia unit in Mississippi.<sup>6</sup>

As previously mentioned, Tracy's brigade had conducted a twenty-seven mile forced march from Warrenton the evening of 29 April to support Bowen. Battery sergeant James L. Burks of the Botetourt Artillery recalled the difficulties of this march.

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

The guns and caissons had to be pulled out by hand, having to take the ammunition chest off before they could be moved at all. We finished ferrying our battery over about daylight on the morning of the 30th and then moved on towards Grand Gulf without stopping to feed the horses.<sup>7</sup>

After a short rest four miles north of Grand Gulf, Tracy received instructions from Bowen to report to Green at Port Gibson. Green instructed him to occupy the position manned by his detached company guarding the Bruinsburg road. Tracy arrived in position late on 30 April.

Tracy's unit occupied a prominent ridge at the intersection of the Bruinsburg and the Shaifer road, 2,000 yards north of the Shaifer house (fig 18).<sup>8</sup> This area offered ideal terrain for its defenders. A maze of ridges, roughly of equal height, ran in all directions. The ridge tops were under cultivation making observation from the hilltops excellent. Steep ravines filled with vines and canebrake separated these ridges. Cross-country movement through the canebrake was treacherous. These ravines made off-road movement by a small force difficult and impossible for a large one.<sup>9</sup>

Tracy posted his brigade from left to right with the 23d, 31st, 30th, and 20th Alabama on line. The Botetourt Artillery with four cannons occupied the center of the line. The 46th Alabama, two cannons of the Botetourt Artillery, and the brigade's



ordnance trains, were still enroute from Vicksburg having left after Tracy's main body.<sup>10</sup> Based on the perceived threat, Tracy's unit faced to the west along the most likely enemy avenue approach, Bruinsburg road. Occupying late at night, the Alabamans fell immediately asleep from exhaustion.

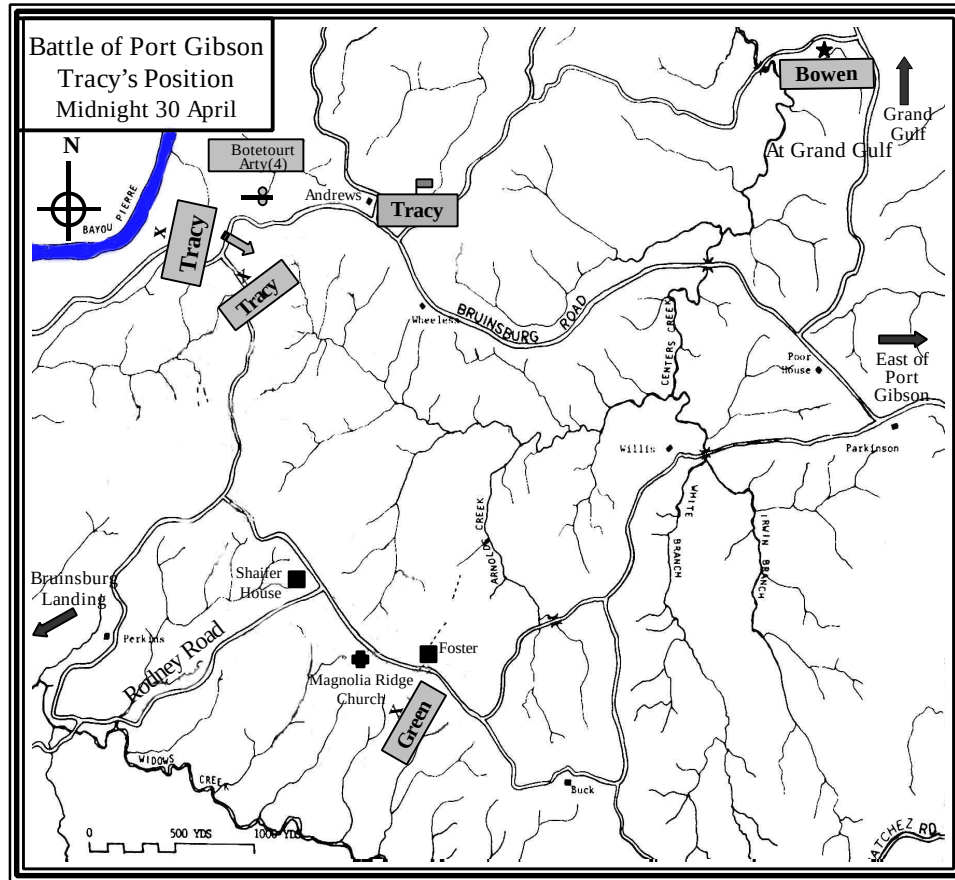


Fig. 18. This map was created based on a map used in Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign: Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow*, vol. 2 (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1986), 360.

The night artillery exchange near the Shafer house caught Tracy's weary soldiers by surprise. Reacting to the sounds of the guns, Tracy reoriented the brigade. In the

darkness, the brigade faced to the south.<sup>11</sup> Although the Alabamians would not see action that night, the night skirmish by the Shaifer house alerted them to the impending Federal onslaught at daylight.

Around 5:30 A.M., McClelland spotted Rebels (Tracy's brigade) on the ridge to the north of his position (Shaifer house). Concerned that the Confederates could strike into the rear of Carr's division, McClelland ordered Carr to deploy a force to delay a potential Confederate attack along the Shaifer road.<sup>12</sup> Carr ordered Major Potter and four companies of the 33d Illinois to handle this threat.

At 7:00 A.M., a staff officer appeared from Green's command requesting that Tracy send one infantry regiment and a section of artillery to reinforce Green's position urging:

That if the left is not sustained the right would be cut off from all chance of retreat and stating to General Tracy that it was General Green's opinion that he could not sustain his position on the left fifteen minutes unless re-enforced.<sup>13</sup>

Tracy reluctantly agreed since he was not yet engaged with the enemy. He dispatched the 23d Alabama and a section of two guns of the Botetourt Artillery.

With the daylight, Tracy, at his headquarters near the Andrews house, saw the battle developing on the Rodney road to the south. He discovered that the Shaifer road led directly into the rear of the Union battle line.<sup>14</sup> Looking to get into the action, Tracy had to gauge his response. The departure of the 23d Alabama left a gap in the lines. Tracy repositioned the 30th Alabama to fill the gap. Additionally, the 30th Alabama protected the remaining two cannons of the Botetourt Artillery. Tracy sent the 31st Alabama forward as skirmishers.

Colonel Hundley's 31st Alabama moved south of the brigade's defensive line paralleling the Shaifer road. About 500 yards south, Hundley ran into Potter's skirmishers of the 33d Illinois moving northward. Hundley quickly positioned his men on a nearby ridge.<sup>15</sup> Shortly after 7:00 A.M., Hundley's skirmishers engaged Potter's troops. Thus began the fight for the Bruinsburg road

#### Constant Pressure

After a brief and uneventful clash, the arrival of the lead elements of Union Brigadier General Peter Osterhaus' division intensified the fight (fig.19). With the support of the 7th Michigan Artillery, the Federals bombarded Tracy's position for the next 45 minutes.<sup>16</sup> Hundley's skirmishers withdrew under pressure and reoccupied the defensive line to the right of the 30th. The arrival of the 46th Alabama with 160 soldiers and the remaining two cannons of the Botetourt Artillery about 8:00 A.M. from Vicksburg strengthened Tracy's line.<sup>17</sup> Stubborn resistance from Tracy's Alabamans, coupled with the rugged terrain, caused confusion among the attacking Federal units. Union regiments lost their sense of direction in the maze of ravines and had to reorganize.<sup>18</sup>

Osterhaus ordered an all-out attack around 8:15 A.M. Tracy's main defensive line engaged the advancing Federals with musket and artillery fire.<sup>19</sup> The smoke of battle and the confusing maze of ravines caused Union regimental lines to disintegrate. The combination of determined defense by Tracy's soldiers and the steep-sided ravines halted the Union advance after gaining 400 yards.<sup>20</sup>

Pushing slowly forward, Union sharpshooters used this restrictive terrain to their advantage. Infiltrating through the canebrake and vines in the ravines, Federal sharpshooters succeeded in penetrating the Confederate lines. They engaged the gunners

of the Botetourt Artillery with deadly accuracy. Tracy made the mistake of going forward to check on his artillery. A union sharpshooter shot him in the throat. He fell into the arms of Colonel Shelley of the 30th Alabama.<sup>21</sup> He was dead before they carried him off the ridge.

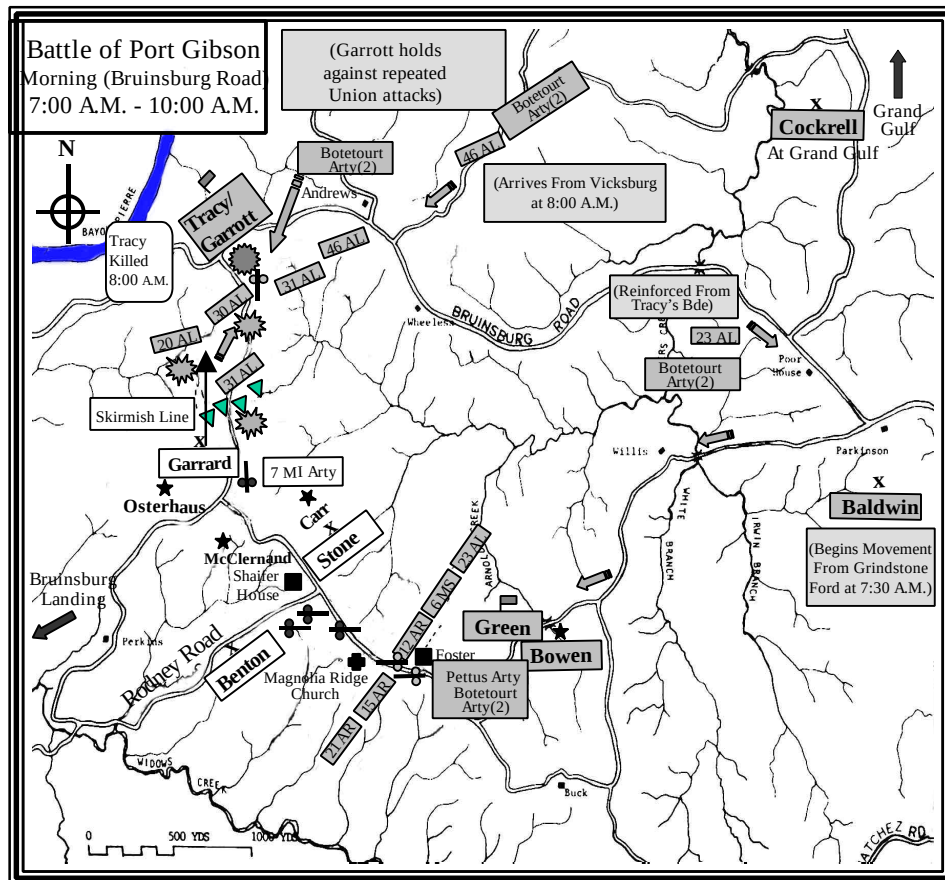


Fig. 19. This map was created based on a map used in Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign: Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow*, vol. 2 (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1986), 360.

Colonel Garrott assumed command of the brigade after Tracy's demise. He was unaware of the Confederate battle scheme since Tracy had not briefed his subordinates.<sup>22</sup> Garrott dispatched a staff officer to Green to ascertain the overall Confederate maneuver plan.

At 10:00 A.M., Garrott reluctantly fell back in the face of the sheer volume of fire from Union skirmishers and artillery. The Botetourt Artillery had lost its four guns; two guns to artillery and musket fire, and the other two could not be limbered because the horses had been shot.<sup>23</sup> Forced to abandon the road intersection, Garrott reformed the brigade 300 yards to the east along a farm road near the Andrews house.

The right flank of his new defensive line rested on the Bayou Pierre. The terrain between the Bruinsburg road and the bayou was too steep to establish a battle line. Garrott constricted his new defensive line to present a stronger front extensively employing skirmishers for depth of fires.<sup>24</sup>

By 11:00 A.M., the situation became critical for the Alabamans. Two units, the 30th Alabama and the 20th Alabama reported shortages of ammunition.<sup>25</sup> Without the brigade's ordnance trains, it was a matter of time before the Alabamans ran out of ammunition. To make matters worse, Garrott lacked artillery support since it was previously captured or rendered inoperable. Finally, the staff officer returned from Green's command with the instructions to "hold at all hazards."<sup>26</sup>

Osterhaus advanced and engaged Garrott's new position. Once again, the ravines disorganized the Federal attempts to flank the Alabamans. Employing skirmishers, Federal units continued to extend Garrott's skirmish line in an attempt to envelop the Alabamans. Fortunately, the steep ravines made this extremely difficult for the Federals.

Around noon, Osterhaus suspended the infantry assaults (fig. 20). He continued the gradual and steady pressure along Garrott's front using skirmishers and artillery fire, but awaited the arrival of reinforcements from Major General John Logan's division to renew the assault. This would take a few hours since Logan's units were offloading at Bruinsburg landing.

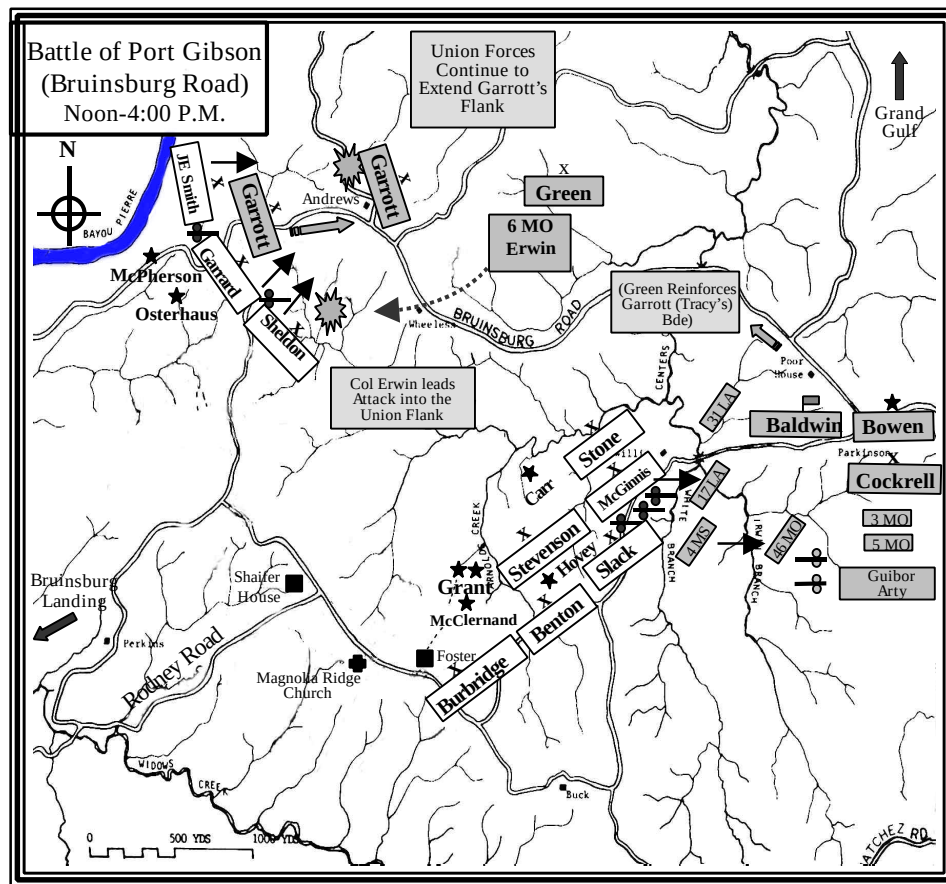


Fig. 20. This map was created based on a map used in Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign: Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow*, vol. 2 (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1986), 382, 390.

By midafternoon, Garrott's casualties mounted from the bitter fighting.

Reinforcements were needed to bolster his enclave. At 1:20 P.M., Bowen wired Pemberton, at his headquarters in Jackson, summarizing the battle to date:

We have been engaged in furious battle ever since daylight; losses very heavy. General Tracy is killed. The Virginia battery was captured by the enemy, but is retaken. We are out of ammunition for canon and small-arms, the ordnance trains of the reinforcements not being here. They outnumber us trebly. There are three divisions against us. My whole force is engaged except three regiments on Big Black, Bayou Pierre, and Grand Gulf. The men act nobly, but the odds are overpowering.<sup>27</sup>

Pemberton wired back that reinforcements, two brigades from Major General William W. Loring's division, had left Jackson, in support. With the great distance to travel, they would not arrive in time to help Bowen.

Around 2:30 P.M., Garrott received reinforcements: the remnants of Green's command along with Colonel Eugene Erwin's 6th Missouri from Cockrell's brigade. The weary survivor's of Green's brigade had little fight left in them, especially their commander. Rather than reinforce Garrott's exposed right flank and assume command of the fight on the Bruinsburg road, Green assumed a position on the unengaged flank where he placed his unit as well as Erwin's regiment. Without consulting Garrott, he occupied this new position. Accordingly, Garrott fixed his attention to the right flank where the Federals exerted the greatest pressure.<sup>28</sup>

The previous fight on the Rodney road had taken a lot out of Green. Deploying to Port Gibson from Grand Gulf at 1:00 A.M. on 30 April, Green had busily prepared the delaying action for Bowen. After fighting the night battle at 12:30 A.M. and the subsequent battle on the Rodney road, Green had had little rest in past 36 hours. He was expended after the fight on the Rodney road.

Union reinforcements arrived around 2:00 P.M.: John E. Smith's brigade of Logan's division. Posted on the left flank of Osterhaus' division, Osterhaus believed he had sufficient forces to renew the attack to dislodge Garrott's soldiers. In actuality, he outnumbered the Alabamans with odds of at least three to one and twelve to none in artillery.<sup>29</sup> With additional forces, Osterhaus threatened Garrott's weak flank on the Bayou Pierre.

On Garrott's left flank, Colonel Erwin was anxious to get his 6th Missouri Infantry into battle. The Missourians had seen limited action at Port Gibson. Departing Grand Gulf with Cockrell at 10:00 A.M., only a few of his skirmishers had engaged Federal soldiers forward of their position. Hearing the heavy firing on the right flank (Garrott), he determined that without prompt action, Garrott's position would be lost.<sup>30</sup> Without consulting Green, Erwin decided to attack to relieve the Alabamans.<sup>31</sup> Because of the close proximity of Union skirmishers, Erwin ordered his men to fix bayonets. Around 3:30 P.M., with bayonets fixed, and exclaiming the "Rebel Yell," the 400 men of the 6th Missouri assaulted the surprised Federal skirmish line. Surging one-quarter of a mile forward, the Missourians recaptured two of the previously abandoned canons of the Botetourt Artillery.<sup>32</sup> After assaulting west into the next series of ravines, Erwin realized that neither Green's troops nor Garrott's soldiers had followed his example and



advanced.<sup>33</sup> Erwin had attacked in vain. Federal sharpshooters maneuvered around the isolated regiment and pinned them down. Erwin was forced to seek cover in the bottom of the ravines.

Around 5:00 P.M., a staff officer from Bowen's command told Green to hold his position until near sunset.<sup>34</sup> Green went to confer with Garrott. He finally took overall command ordering the hard-pressed Alabamans to retire.

Osterhaus attempted to press the retreat; however, Green had pulled his command out of line behind Garrott's forces. The only unit not accounted for was Erwin's 6th Missouri. They were overlooked in the retreat and left on the battlefield. Erwin staged a feint attack against the sharpshooters that trapped his regiment. It worked; it tricked the sharpshooters on the intervening ridge. Erwin extricated his unit to an adjoining ravine that allowed them to escape back to the Bayou Pierre. Osterhaus did not pursue, thus allowing the men of Tracy's and Green's brigade to escape to the safety of the Bayou Pierre (fig. 21).

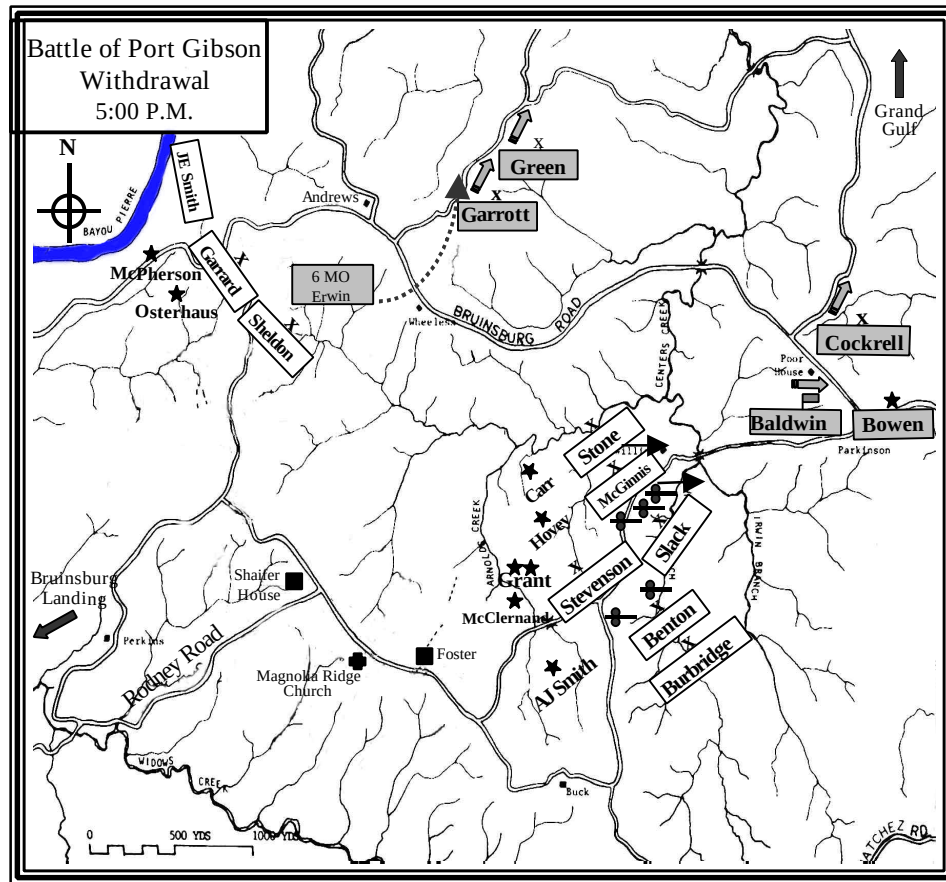


Fig. 21. This map was created based on a map used in Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign: Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow*, vol. 2 (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1986), 396.

Not everyone withdrew from the battle. The fights on the Bruinsburg road had been costly to the Alabamans. In Garrott's *Official Report*, he listed his losses as 18 killed, 112 wounded, and 142 missing.<sup>35</sup> This did not include the 23d Alabama that fought with Green throughout most of the day. Additionally, they left their commander, Brigadier General Tracy behind, the first Confederate general to die in the defense of Vicksburg.

The Virginians also lost all six cannons of the Botetourt Artillery. They had fought bravely by their guns time and again exposing themselves to enemy fire to bring their cannons into action.

The 6th Missouri paid a heavy price for its afternoon charge. Colonel Erwin lists in his *Official Report* that his losses in dead, wounded, and missing was 82.<sup>36</sup> With a regiment that numbered 400 men at the start of the fight, the Missourians suffered a casualty rate of 20 percent in that desperate charge.

#### Engagement Analysis

Tracy's brigade managed to hold its positions throughout the day against overwhelming odds. According to Colonel Garrott's *Official Report*, he claims that his 1,400 men engaged between 12,000 to 15,000 Union soldiers.<sup>37</sup> This number appears high. A more realistic estimate based on the three Union brigades that fought on the Bruinsburg road would be about 6,200 soldiers. Nevertheless, the Alabamans and Missourians fought valiantly outnumbered four to one.

The Confederates that fought on the Bruinsburg road effectively delayed Union forces throughout the day. The establishment of their defensive positions using the ridge tops for observation and employing their skirmishers in the ravines worked effectively. Time and again, this broke up Union assaults. The Alabamans grudgingly conceded the ground attesting to their fortitude and skillful selection of positions. On numerous occasions, the Federal advances ground to a halt because of the Confederates' skillful use of terrain.

Many individual units displayed great feats of heroism. The Botetourt Artillery continued to fire even though Federal sharpshooters inflicted severe casualties on the cannoneers. The 20th and 30th Alabama regiments held their positions even though their ammunition was depleted. The charge by the 6th Missouri against vastly superior forces,

though foolhardy, demonstrated the resolve of the soldiers defending the Bruinsburg road.

Tracy's men, after their late night occupation, effectively employed reconnaissance assets to gain the advantage against Union skirmishers. Tracy sent skirmishers out after first light forward of his position. This act provided his force early warning of the impending Union assault. It bought time for the arrival and positioning of the 46th Alabama and the two canons of the Botetourt Artillery prior to the first Federal advance at 8:00 A.M.

After the death of Tracy, command and control at the brigade level suffered. Tracy had not briefed his subordinates on Bowen's defense forward of Port Gibson. Garrott had to send a staff officer to find Green to ask him the intent for the defense of Port Gibson.

Garrott proved to be an effective leader. He fought the brigade adeptly throughout the day, and he kept Bowen informed of the condition of his unit.

The arrival of Green and his failure to assume command of the Confederate right wing really did not matter. Though Green was senior to Garrott, Green did not know the tactical situation on the Bruinsburg road. Rather than turn command over to the weary Green, it was more prudent for Garrott to remain in command. With only 600 additional men, Green's force was not large enough to change the battle that late in the day.

The only glaring deficiency in the Bruinsburg actions was the lack of logistical support. Two regiments, the 20th and 30th Alabama reported severe ammunition shortages. The arrival of reinforcements did not improve this situation. The brigade's ordnance wagons never arrived from Vicksburg. According to Bowen's *Official Report*,

several Confederate units ran out of ammunition during the day's fight. This was due in large part to the last minute arrivals of the reinforcing brigades. By organizing the battle as independent brigade fights, risk was assumed in sustaining the actions. This problem plagued Bowen throughout the day.

The Alabamians successfully delayed the Federals along the Bruinsburg road. Timely reinforcements prevented the collapse of the northern shoulder. Outnumbered four to one, the defenders of Bruinsburg road prevented the Federals from gaining the vital crossing sites on the Bayou Pierre on 1 May.

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<sup>1</sup>Warner, 308-309.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Winschel, 60.

<sup>4</sup>*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 661. Bowen indicates in his *OR* that Tracy's brigade nominally had 2200 soldiers but actually had only 1,500 men.

<sup>5</sup>Winschel, 60; and Crute, 17-18, 19-20, 22-23, 29-30. Note: Brief unit histories of the 20th Alabama, the 23d Alabama, 30th Alabama, 31st Alabama, and the 46th Alabama.

<sup>6</sup>Winschel, 60.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Grabau, 162.

<sup>9</sup>Bearss, 357.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 364.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 357.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 359.

<sup>13</sup>OR, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt..1, 678; and Bearss, 358.

<sup>14</sup>Grabau, 164.

<sup>15</sup>Bearss, 359.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 361.

<sup>17</sup>OR, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 680.

<sup>18</sup>Bearss, 362.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid, 364.

<sup>22</sup>OR, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 679.

<sup>23</sup>Bearss, 365.

<sup>24</sup>Winschel, 76.

<sup>25</sup>OR, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 680.

<sup>26</sup>OR, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 679.

<sup>27</sup>Winschel, 77; and OR, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 679.

<sup>28</sup>Bearss, 370.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 366.

<sup>30</sup>OR, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 670.

<sup>31</sup>Bearss, 370.

<sup>32</sup>Winschel, 77; and OR, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 661.

<sup>33</sup>Bearss, 371.

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<sup>34</sup>*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 673.

<sup>35</sup>*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 682.

<sup>36</sup>*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 671.

<sup>37</sup>*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 682.

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## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

#### Summary

The Battle of Port Gibson was a masterful delaying action directed by Bowen and executed by his subordinate commanders. On the tactical level, Bowen seized the initiative from Grant. Landing unopposed at the Bruinsburg landing on 30 April, Grant had secured his prize: a landing site with a road network that extended deep into the interior of Mississippi. However, Bowen had anticipated such a landing south of Grand Gulf. Acting decisively, Bowen committed his numerically inferior forces quickly to delay Grant's advance towards Grand Gulf. Placing units along the key avenues of approach, Bowen's forces fought stubbornly to prevent Grant from moving inland. He slowed Grant's momentum by utilizing the restricted terrain in a series of successive defensive positions. Outnumbered four to one, Bowen delayed Grant's army for eighteen hours inflicting over 800 casualties.<sup>1</sup>

Much of the credit for this delaying action has been bestowed upon General Bowen. Bowen made many difficult decisions on 30 April and 1 May that directly contributed to his success at Port Gibson. The most difficult decision he had to make was where to defend. Lacking mounted cavalry to provide a mobile reconnaissance, Bowen had two choices. He could have strengthened the Grand Gulf garrison and awaited the arrival of Grant's forces. The other option was to split his force. He chose the latter. In so doing, he acted quickly by sending Green west of Port Gibson to find defensible ground for the impending battle. Prudently, he maintained a large reserve. By keeping



Baldwin and Cockrell at Grindstone Ford and Grand Gulf respectively, he could react quickly to Grant's movements.

Bowen's subordinate commanders also deserve recognition for their efforts at Port Gibson. Green, Tracy, and later Garrott, fought the initial engagements as independent units. These first two brigades initially halted the Federal advance buying time for Bowen to employ his reserves. It was their actions that provided Bowen the flexibility to commit his reserves.

Bowen's division paid a heavy price for its delaying action. According to Bowen's *Official Report*, his losses were 68 killed, 380 wounded, and 384 missing for a total of 832.<sup>2</sup> With a starting strength of 5,164 men, his casualty rate for this one-day battle was 17 percent. That figure includes the loss of many of his key leaders, most notably Brigadier General Edwin D. Tracy.

**Unfortunately for Bowen and his men, the sacrifices they made would be wasted by Pemberton's strategic failures. Pemberton committed insufficient reinforcements, a brigade from Loring's division, too late to change the outcome of the battle. Pemberton's failure to adequately reinforce Bowen had dire consequences. Grant reinforced his forces on the east bank of the Mississippi and pressed inland. Winning a series of victories in May: Raymond, Jackson, and Champion Hill, Grant had isolated Vicksburg by 22 May. Trapped in the defensive works of Vicksburg, the Confederates resisted with determination but succumbed to the weeks of artillery bombardment, infantry assaults, and dwindling rations. On 4 July 1863, Pemberton surrendered the garrison to Grant, thus ending the Vicksburg Campaign.**

**The siege of Vicksburg took its toll of the Confederate defenders of Port Gibson. Bowen became seriously ill in the appalling conditions within the confines of the Vicksburg garrison. Captured and paroled on 4 July, Bowen died near Raymond, Mississippi, on 13 July 1863 from the effects of illness and the jostling of the ambulance.<sup>3</sup>**

**Green and Garrott died during the siege of Vicksburg. A sharpshooter killed Green while inspecting his defensive perimeter on 27 June.<sup>4</sup> Garrott relinquished command of Tracy's brigade to Brigadier General Stephen D. Lee shortly after the Battle of Port Gibson. Like Green, Garrott fell victim to a sharpshooter while checking the skirmish line on 17 June.<sup>5</sup>**

Baldwin and Cockrell survived the siege of Vicksburg. Baldwin surrendered at Vicksburg for the second time in the war. Once again paroled, Baldwin died in a riding accident near Dog River, Alabama, on 19 February 1864.<sup>6</sup> Cockrell, captured during the siege, was exchanged on 12 September. Once again in command of his Missouri brigade, Cockrell fought in the defense of Atlanta in 1864 and was wounded three times during the Battle of Franklin, Tennessee. On 12 April 1865, Cockrell surrendered at Mobile, Alabama. After the war, he entered politics, and in 1874 Missouri elected him to the U.S. Senate, where he served until 1905.<sup>7</sup>

### Analysis

The Battle of Port Gibson provides an historical model of how a numerically inferior force can fight an effective delaying action. There is a great deal that military professionals can learn from the study of this American Civil War battle. Although the lethality of weapons systems is greater today than during the 1860s, many of the

principles that provided Bowen with success are still true today. The importance of reconnaissance, maintaining communication with subordinate commanders, employment of reserves, and using the terrain for tactical advantage make this battle worthy of examination for today's Army.

### Reconnaissance

*Bowen had only two assets available to him to gather intelligence on the advancing Federal forces, pickets and the local population. Initially, the pickets did not provide the necessary advanced warning. Green's pickets were surprised at close range at 12:30 A.M. Henceforth, the pickets and skirmishers performed superbly. Hundley's 31st Alabama regiment engaged the 33d Illinois 500 yards forward of Tracy's defensive line. They bought Tracy time to integrate two additional units, the 46th Alabama, and a section of the Botetourt Artillery, into his defensive line before the first Federal attack. During the fight on White and Irwin branches, the pickets caused the Federals to deploy prematurely. This gave Baldwin additional time to prepare his defensive line.*

*The local population provided information to the Confederate defenders. The information; however, was not entirely accurate. Initially, the local inhabitants incorrectly informed Green that the Federals were advancing along the Bruinsburg road. This caused Green to redirect Tracy's unit to cover the Bruinsburg road. Fortuitously, this placed Tracy in a position to block the shortest route to the Bayou Pierre.*

*The intelligence gathered by the local population reached Bowen and subsequently Pemberton. According to Bowen's Official Report, he wired Pemberton late on April 30th that, "Three thousand Federals were at Bethel Church, 10 miles from Port*

*Gibson, at 3 p.m., advancing. They are still landing at Bruinsburg.”<sup>8</sup> Although the size of the force was inaccurate, the location and activity of the Union forces was correct. With this intelligence, Bowen had sufficient information at his disposal to formulate the delaying action executed on 1 May 1863.*

### **Command and Control**

*Bowen’s subordinate commanders used initiative in the absence of orders. Upon receiving the “false” information concerning the Federal movement along Bruinsburg road, Green changed Bowen’s plan to deal with this potential threat. As stated previously, this placed Tracy’s brigade in an advantageous position to delay the Union advance at the intersection of the Bruinsburg and Shaifer roads. Tracy saw an opportunity to attack into the Federal rear. He subsequently deployed his skirmishers forward to develop the situation. Garrott, after the death of Tracy, took charge of the brigade. He sent a courier to Green to ascertain the overall plan for the delaying action at Port Gibson. Without waiting for further guidance, he continued to fight the brigade effectively the remainder of the day.*

*Bowen had a knack for being at the decisive actions of the day. He arrived at Green’s position prior to the initial daylight attack by the A. K. Shaifer house, and Bowen subsequently directed Baldwin into position along White and Irwin branches.*

*Bowen had a keen understanding of Grant’s intentions. Since his division fought as separate brigades, he ensured that the brigade commander’s understood the significance of their mission relative to the other positions.*

### **Reserve**

*Bowen was adept at the employment of a reserve. Initially, he had two of his four brigades constituted as a reserve. As the battle progressed, Bowen redirected forces on the battlefield to provide subordinate commanders with an uncommitted force. The commitment of Baldwin's brigade to take over the fight on the Rodney road allowed Green's force to reorganize.*

*Bowen kept Cockrell's brigade as a reserve during the White and Irwin branch fight. Once again, the use of the reserve provided Bowen with the ability to react to Union movements on his flank.*

### *Use of Terrain*

*The Confederate defenders at Port Gibson learned to use the terrain to their tactical advantage. The steep ravines with heavy undergrowth made off-road movement of forces difficult at best. Therefore, Union forces relied on maintaining formations near the roads.*

*Initially, Green's soldiers, exposed on Foster's ridge, came under heavy artillery fire. This caused significant casualties. Bowen learned from this engagement that the best location for his defenders was in the low ground that offered concealment from the Union artillery.*

*Tracy's soldiers effectively utilized the ravines to break up Union formations with musket fire, and for a limited time, with artillery support. This allowed the Alabamans to resist for several hours against numerically superior forces.*

*The fight on White and Irwin branches provides the best example of the effective use of terrain. Employing skirmishers in the low ground, Bowen's forces prevented*

***Union regiments from determining their location. Using artillery support hidden in the woods to the rear, Confederate artillerymen broke up attacking Union formations.***

### Conclusion

Bowen's defense of Port Gibson provides military professionals with a framework of how to conduct a successful delaying action against overwhelming odds. He made quick, quality decisions that laid the groundwork for the success of the delaying action. Bowen's initial guidance to his subordinate brigade commanders allowed them to execute within his intent. His decision-making is worthy of emulation by today's military leaders.

Ironically, Pemberton squandered Bowen's efforts. Providing insufficient reinforcements, Pemberton failed to recognize Grant's main attack. By allowing Grant to firmly establish his army on the eastern bank of the Mississippi River, Pemberton surrendered any hope of defeating Union forces. Grant thereafter retained the initiative forcing Pemberton to react to his movements within the interior of Mississippi. Thus, it was a matter of time before the inevitable defeat of Confederate forces defending Vicksburg. Therefore, the Battle of Port Gibson was the battle that determined the outcome for the campaign for Vicksburg.

The Battle of Port Gibson provides timeless lessons for military professionals. By effectively using reconnaissance, maintaining communication with subordinate commanders, employment of reserves, and using the terrain for tactical advantage, Bowen demonstrated how a numerically inferior unit could fight a successful delaying action against superior forces. This makes the Battle of Port Gibson worthy of further study by today's military professionals.

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen E. Ambrose and Colonel Wilbur S. Nye eds., *Struggle for Vicksburg: The Battles and Sieges that Decided the Civil War* (Harrisburg, PA: Eastern Acorn Press, 1992), 17.

<sup>2</sup>OR, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 664.

<sup>3</sup>Tucker, 312-313.

<sup>4</sup>Sifakis, 113.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 101-102.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>8</sup>OR, ser. 1, vol. 24, pt. 1, 658.

## APPENDIX

### ORDER OF BATTLE BATTLE OF PORT GIBSON, 1 MAY 1863 CONFEDERATE FORCES

Commander: BG John S. Bowen

Bowen's Division

|                                      |                           | <b>Casualties</b>   |                |                |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>GREEN'S BRIGADE</b>               | <b>BG Martin L. Green</b> | <b>Killed</b>       | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
| 15th Arkansas Infantry               | LTC William W. Reynolds   | 8                   | 37             | 37             |
| 21st Arkansas Infantry               | COL Jordan E. Cravens     | 4                   | 11             | 32             |
| 12th Arkansas Sharpshooter Battalion | CPT Griff Bayne           | 1                   | 3              | 17             |
| 6th Mississippi Infantry             | COL Robert Lowry          | No Report Submitted |                |                |
| Pettus Flying Artillery              | LT John R. Sweeney        | 0                   | 20             | 0              |
| <b>Total</b>                         |                           | <b>13</b>           | <b>71</b>      | <b>76</b>      |

Bowen's Division

|                           |                                | <b>Casualties</b>   |                |                |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>COCKRELL'S BRIGADE</b> | <b>COL Francis M. COCKRELL</b> | <b>Killed</b>       | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
| 3d Missouri Infantry      | COL William R. Gause           | No Report Submitted |                |                |
| 5th Missouri Infantry     | LTC Robert S. Bevier           |                     |                |                |
| 6th Missouri Infantry     | COL Eugene Erwin               | 4                   | 32             | 46             |
| Guibor's Missouri Battery | LT W. Corkery                  | No Report Submitted |                |                |
| Landis' Missouri Battery  | CPT J.C. Landis                |                     |                |                |
| <b>Total</b>              |                                | <b>13</b>           | <b>97</b>      | <b>96</b>      |

Attached from MG Stevenson's Division

|                        |                                                       | <b>Casualties</b>        |                |                |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>TRACY'S BRIGADE</b> | <b>BG Edward D. Tracy (killed), COL Isham Garrott</b> | <b>Killed</b>            | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
| 20th Alabama Infantry  | COL Isham Garrott                                     | No Separate Unit Reports |                |                |
| 23d Alabama Infantry   | COL Franklin K. Beck                                  |                          |                |                |
| 30th Alabama Infantry  | COL Charles. M. Shelley                               |                          |                |                |
| 31st Alabama Infantry  | COL Daniel R. Hundley                                 |                          |                |                |
| 46th Alabama           | COL Martin L. Woods                                   |                          |                |                |



|                              |                 |                              |
|------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| Infantry                     |                 |                              |
| Botetourt Virginia Artillery | CPT J.W.Johnson |                              |
| <b>Total</b>                 |                 | <b>118      112      142</b> |

Attached from MG Smith's Division

|                           |                              | <b>Casualties</b> |                |                                     |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>BALDWIN'S BRIGADE</b>  | <b>BG William F. Baldwin</b> | <b>Killed</b>     | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b>                      |
| 17th Louisiana Infantry   | COL Robert Richardson        |                   | No             | Separat<br>e<br>Unit<br><br>Reports |
| 31st Louisiana Infantry   | LTC Sidney H. Griffin        |                   |                |                                     |
| 4th Mississippi Infantry  | LTC Thomas N. Adaire         |                   |                |                                     |
| 46th Mississippi Infantry | COL Claudius W.Sears         |                   |                |                                     |
| Landis' Missouri Battery  | CPT J.C. Landis              |                   |                |                                     |
| <b>Total</b>              |                              | <b>12</b>         | <b>48</b>      | <b>27</b>                           |

Casualties

**BOWEN'S Official Report**

|              |            |           |            |            |
|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| <b>Total</b> | <b>832</b> | <b>68</b> | <b>380</b> | <b>384</b> |
|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|

**ORDER OF BATTLE  
BATTLE OF PORT GIBSON, 1 MAY 1863  
UNION FORCES**

Commander: Army of the Tennessee, MG Ulysses S. Grant

Commander: XIII Army Corps, MG John A. McClernand

|                         |                                 | <b>Casualties</b> |                |                |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>1st Brigade</b>      | <b>BG Theophilus T. Garrard</b> | <b>Killed</b>     | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
| 118th Illinois Infantry | COL J.G. Fonda                  | 1                 | 16             | 0              |
| 49th Indiana Infantry   | COL J. Keigwin                  | 1                 | 15             | 1              |
| 69th Indiana Infantry   | COL T.W. Bennett                | 14                | 45             | 0              |
| 7th Kentucky Infantry   | MAJ H.W. Adams                  | 0                 | 8              | 0              |
| 120th Ohio Infantry     | COL M.M. Spiegel                | 2                 | 18             | 2              |
| <b>Total</b>            |                                 | <b>18</b>         | <b>102</b>     | <b>3</b>       |

Casualties

| <b>2d Brigade</b>     | <b>COL Lionel A. Sheldon</b> | <b>Killed</b> | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| 54th Indiana Infantry | COL F. Mansfield             | 0             | 0              | 0              |
| 22d Kentucky Infantry | MAJ W.J. Worthington         | 0             | 3              | 0              |
| 16th Ohio Infantry    | CPT E.W. Botsford            | 1             | 8              | 0              |

|                     |                 |           |           |          |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| 42d Ohio Infantry   | LTC D.A. Pardee | 12        | 47        | 0        |
| 114th Ohio Infantry | LTC J.H. Kelley | 2         | 8         | 0        |
| <b>Total</b>        |                 | <b>15</b> | <b>66</b> | <b>0</b> |

#### Casualties

| <b>Artillery</b>                                |                    | Killed   | Wounded  | Missing  |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| 7th Battery, Michigan Light Artillery (6 guns)  | CPT C.H. Lansphere | 3        | 3        | 0        |
| 1st Battery, Wisconsin Light Artillery (6 guns) | LT C.B. Kimball    | 0        | 4        | 0        |
| <b>Total</b>                                    |                    | <b>3</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>0</b> |

|                       |              |           |            |          |
|-----------------------|--------------|-----------|------------|----------|
| <b>Ninth Division</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>36</b> | <b>175</b> | <b>3</b> |
|-----------------------|--------------|-----------|------------|----------|

#### Tenth Division BG Andrew J. Smith Casualties

| <b>1st Brigade BG Stephen G. Burbridge</b> |                  | Killed   | Wounded  | Missing  |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| 16th Indiana Infantry                      | COL T.J. Lucas   | 0        | 2        | 0        |
| 67th Indiana Infantry                      | LTC T.E. Buehler | 0        | 2        | 0        |
| 83d Ohio Infantry                          | COL F.M. Moore   | 0        | 3        | 0        |
| 23d Wisconsin Infantry                     | COL J.J. Guppy   | 0        | 1        | 0        |
| <b>Total</b>                               |                  | <b>0</b> | <b>8</b> | <b>0</b> |

#### Casualties

| <b>2d Brigade COL William J. Landram</b> |                     | Killed   | Wounded   | Missing  |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| 77th Illinois Infantry                   | COL D.P. Grier      | 0        | 0         | 0        |
| 97th Illinois Infantry                   | COL F.S. Rutherford | 0        | 6         | 2        |
| 108th Illinois Infantry                  | LTC C. Turner       | 0        | 1         | 5        |
| 130th Illinois Infantry                  | COL N. Niles        | 0        | 1         | 1        |
| 19th Kentucky Infantry                   | LTC J. Cowan        | 2        | 13        | 0        |
| 48th Ohio Infantry                       | LTC J.R. Parker     | 0        | 0         | 0        |
| <b>Total</b>                             |                     | <b>2</b> | <b>21</b> | <b>8</b> |

#### Casualties

| <b>Artillery</b>                            |                 | Killed | Wounded | Missing |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------|---------|---------|
| 17th Battery, Ohio Light Artillery (6 guns) | CPT A.A. Blount | 0      | 0       | 0       |

|              |          |          |          |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>Total</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|

**Tenth Division**

|              |          |           |          |
|--------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| <b>Total</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>29</b> | <b>8</b> |
|--------------|----------|-----------|----------|

Twelfth Division

BG Alvin P. Hovey

**Casualties**

| <b>1st Brigade</b>      | <b>BG George F. McGinnis</b> | <b>Killed</b> | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| 11th Indiana Infantry   | COL D. Macauley              | 1             | 23             | 1              |
| 24th Indiana Infantry   | COL W.T. Spicely             | 5             | 18             | 0              |
| 34th Indiana Infantry   | COL R.A. Cameron             | 6             | 45             | 0              |
| 46th Indiana Infantry   | COL T.H. Bringham            | 8             | 36             | 0              |
| 29th Wisconsin Infantry | COL C.R. Gill                | 10            | 65             | 0              |
| <b>Total</b>            |                              | <b>30</b>     | <b>187</b>     | <b>1</b>       |

**Casualties**

| <b>2d Brigade</b>     | <b>COL James L. Slack</b> | <b>Killed</b> | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| 47th Indiana Infantry | COL J.A. McLaughlin       | 5             | 20             | 1              |
| 24th Iowa Infantry    | COL E.C. Byam             | 1             | 5              | 0              |
| 28th Iowa Infantry    | LTC J. Connell            | 3             | 14             | 3              |
| 56th Iowa Infantry    | LTC W.H. Raynor           | 6             | 23             | 7              |
| <b>Total</b>          |                           | <b>15</b>     | <b>62</b>      | <b>11</b>      |

**Casualties**

| <b>Artillery</b>                                 |                    | <b>Killed</b> | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| Company A, 2d Illinois Light Artillery (4 guns)  | LT F.B. Fenton     | 1             | 0              | 0              |
| Company A, 1st Missouri Light Artillery (6 guns) | CPT G.W. Schofield | 0             | 0              | 0              |
| 2d Battery, Ohio Light Artillery (6 guns)        | LT A. Beach        | 0             | 3              | 0              |
| 16th Battery, Ohio Light Artillery (6 guns)      | CPT J.A. Mitchell  | 0             | 0              | 0              |
| <b>Total</b>                                     |                    | <b>1</b>      | <b>3</b>       | <b>0</b>       |
| <b>Twelfth Division</b>                          | <b>Total</b>       | <b>46</b>     | <b>252</b>     | <b>12</b>      |

Fourteenth Division

BG Eugene A. Carr

**Casualties**

| <b>1st Brigade</b>     | <b>BG William P. Benton</b> | <b>Killed</b> | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| 33d Illinois Infantry  | COL C.E. Lippincott         | 0             | 13             | 0              |
| 99th Illinois Infantry | COL G.W.K. Bailey           | 4             | 19             | 0              |
| 8th Indiana Infantry   | COL D. Shunk                | 4             | 38             | 0              |
| 18th Indiana Infantry  | COL H. D. Washburn          | 19            | 64             | 0              |
| <b>Total</b>           |                             | <b>27</b>     | <b>134</b>     | <b>0</b>       |

|                         |                             | <b>Casualties</b> |                |                |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>2d Brigade</b>       | <b>COL William M. Stone</b> | <b>Killed</b>     | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
| 21st Iowa Infantry      | COL S. Merrill              | 0                 | 17             | 0              |
| 22d Iowa Infantry       | MAJ J.B. Atherton           | 2                 | 21             | 0              |
| 23d Iowa Infantry       | LTC S.L. Glasgow            | 9                 | 26             | 0              |
| 11th Wisconsin Infantry | LTC C.A. Wood               | 2                 | 23             | 0              |
| <b>Total</b>            |                             | <b>13</b>         | <b>87</b>      | <b>0</b>       |

|                                               |                    | <b>Casualties</b> |                |                |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>Artillery</b>                              |                    | <b>Killed</b>     | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
| 1st Battery, Indiana Light Artillery (6 guns) | CPT M. Klauss      | 1                 | 0              | 0              |
| 1st Battery, Iowa Light Artillery (6 guns)    | CPT H.H. Griffiths | 0                 | 1              | 0              |
| <b>Total</b>                                  |                    | <b>1</b>          | <b>1</b>       | <b>0</b>       |

|                            |              | <b>Casualties</b> |            |          |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------------------|------------|----------|
| <b>Fourteenth Division</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>41</b>         | <b>222</b> | <b>0</b> |

|                        |              | <b>Casualties</b> |            |           |
|------------------------|--------------|-------------------|------------|-----------|
| <b>XIII Army Corps</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>125</b>        | <b>678</b> | <b>23</b> |

Commander: XVII Army Corps, MG James B. McPherson

|                         |                         | <b>Casualties</b> |                |                |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Third Division          | MG John A. Logan        |                   |                |                |
| <b>1st Brigade</b>      | <b>BG John E. Smith</b> | <b>Killed</b>     | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
| 20th Illinois Infantry  | LTC E. Richards         | 0                 | 2              | 0              |
| 31st Illinois Infantry  | COL E.S. McCook         | 1                 | 0              | 0              |
| 45th Illinois Infantry  | COL J.A. Maltby         | 0                 | 0              | 0              |
| 124th Illinois Infantry | COL T.J. Sloan          | 0                 | 2              | 0              |
| 23d Indiana Infantry    | LTC W.P. Davis          | 4                 | 23             | 0              |
| <b>Total</b>            |                         | <b>5</b>          | <b>27</b>      | <b>0</b>       |

|                        |                           | <b>Casualties</b> |                |                |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>2d Brigade</b>      | <b>BG Elias S. Dennis</b> | <b>Killed</b>     | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
| 30th Illinois Infantry | LTC W. Shedd              |                   |                |                |

|                    |                   |          |          |          |
|--------------------|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| 68th Ohio Infantry | COL R.K. Scott    |          |          |          |
| 78th Ohio Infantry | LTC Z.M. Chandler |          |          |          |
| <b>Total</b>       |                   | <b>0</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>0</b> |

#### Casualties

| <b>3d Brigade</b>      | <b>BG John D. Stevenson</b> | <b>Killed</b> | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| 8th Illinois Infantry  | COL J.P. Frost              | 0             | 3              | 0              |
| 81st Illinois Infantry | COL J.J. Dollins            | 0             | 1              | 2              |
| 7th Missouri Infantry  | MAJ E. Wakefield            | 1             | 4              | 0              |
| 32d Ohio Infantry      | COL B.F. Potts              | 0             | 0              | 0              |
| <b>Total</b>           |                             | <b>1</b>      | <b>8</b>       | <b>2</b>       |

#### Casualties

| <b>Artillery</b>                               |                | <b>Killed</b> | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| 8th Battery, Michigan Light Artillery (6 guns) | CPT S.DeGoyler | 0             | 2              | 0              |
| <b>Total</b>                                   |                | <b>0</b>      | <b>2</b>       | <b>0</b>       |

#### Casualties

| <b>Cavalry</b>                 |                   | <b>Killed</b> | <b>Wounded</b> | <b>Missing</b> |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| Company A, 2d Illinois Cavalry | CPT J.R. Hotaling | 0             | 1              | 0              |
| <b>Total</b>                   |                   | <b>0</b>      | <b>1</b>       | <b>0</b>       |

#### Casualties

|                       |              |          |           |          |
|-----------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| <b>Third Division</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>41</b> | <b>2</b> |
|-----------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|----------|

#### Casualties

|                        |              |          |           |          |
|------------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| <b>XVII Army Corps</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>41</b> | <b>2</b> |
|------------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|----------|

#### Casualties

|                              |                  |            |            |           |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| <b>Army of the Tennessee</b> | <b>Total 875</b> | <b>131</b> | <b>719</b> | <b>25</b> |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------|------------|-----------|

Source: Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign: Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow*, vol. 2 (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1986), 402-407.

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