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To preserve, interpret, manage, and promote significant historic sites in Raymond, Mississippi

THE BATTLE OF RAYMOND

After months of futile attempts to capture "Fortress Vicksburg," the mighty citadel that prevented almost virtual Union control of the Mississippi River, in April 1863 Grant trudged his army through the Louisiana swamplands west of the river with the goal of a river crossing below Vicksburg. Because of Grant's ruses and raids, such as Sherman's well-executed diversion just north of Vicksburg and Grierson's famed cavalry jaunt through Mississippi, Grant's march went virtually unnoticed by the Confederate army commander, Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton. Then Grant, with the help of the Union Navy, deftly transported his army, unopposed, across the murky Mississippi; ascended the 200-foot loess bluffs on the Mississippi side of the river; and tramped inland on April 30. On May 1, Grant's bluecoats defeated a much smaller makeshift Confederate force just west of Port Gibson, Mississippi, and on May 3, the Confederate river bastion at Grand Gulf was flanked and captured, thus providing Grant a base of operations on Mississippi soil just 26 miles south of Vicksburg.

Pemberton's forces fell back towards Vicksburg in a defensive posture, expecting Grant to attack directly north in order to capture the "Gibraltar of the Confederacy." Grant, however, maintained the element of surprise by marching his army northeastward, using the Big Black River to protect his left flank. His preliminary target was a "decisive point" called the Southern Railroad of Mississippi. This railroad connected Vicksburg to Jackson, the state's capital, and from Jackson to points in all directions. Grant's plan was deceptively simple: cut Pemberton off before destroying him.

On May 11, 12,000 thirsty soldiers of MG James McPherson's 17th Corps shuffled through the Mississippi dust towards Raymond with the ultimate objective of striking the railroad at Bolton. Simultaneously, MG John McClernand's 13th Corps was moving toward Edwards and MG William T. Sherman's 15th corps was moving to a point halfway between Edwards and Bolton at Midway Station. All three Union corps were ordered to maneuver to a line roughly six miles south of, and parallel to, the railroad. McPherson, once he arrived at Raymond, was to anchor the right of this line.

Also on May 11, Brigadier General John Gregg's brigade of 3,000 Confederates marched into Raymond from Jackson. Due to faulty intelligence and confused orders, Gregg was led to believe that the 12,000 Federal soldiers approaching Raymond was not a corps, but was in fact only a single brigade of 1,500 men. Gregg, with 3,000 veterans on hand, boldly, but mistakenly, decided to attack.

Gregg set a trap along Fourteenmile Creek using the 7th Texas as bait--an effective trap for a large Confederate brigade of about 3,000 soldiers attacking a smaller Union brigade of about 1,500 men. However, it was a formula for an impending Confederate defeat due to the four-to-one disparity in numbers and 22 Union cannon facing only three Confederate cannon of Bledsoe's Missouri Battery. The Battle of Raymond began at 10:00 a.m. on May 12, 1863, with the Confederates fighting boldly and driving the Federals back. But, as Union brigade after brigade was fed into the fight, the Southerners were eventually overwhelmed and forced to retreat through Raymond toward Jackson. Grant, encamped at Dillon's farm six miles west of the battlefield, changed his plans and sent McPherson to Clinton on May 13. At Clinton the vital Confederate railroad line was finally severed. On May 14, McPherson and Sherman jointly attacked and captured Jackson, only the third capital city to fall into Northern hands. Pemberton was now effectively cut off, and Grant turned westward from Jackson to defeat him at Champion Hill on May 16, and at Big Black Bridge on May 17. Pemberton fell back into Vicksburg where he was surrounded and forced to surrender on July 4, 1863. "The fate of the Confederacy was sealed when Vicksburg fell," wrote Grant.

The Battle of Raymond looms large in history because the change in the operational situation after Raymond resulted in a change of Grant's scheme of maneuver in the Vicksburg Campaign. Thus, the Battle of Raymond stands as a pivotal point in the most brilliant campaign ever fought on American soil.