

# Confederate Logistics at Vicksburg: A Failure to Balance Momentum, Endurance, and Protection

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

Confederate Logistics at Vicksburg: A Failure to Balance Momentum, Endurance, and Protection, by MAJ Carl S. Miller, 47 pages.

Confederate-held Vicksburg fell to the Union after a forty-seven day siege on July 4, 1863 due to Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton's failure to maintain options. Pemberton's decisions in late 1862 and early 1863 diminished the capability of his force. In May 1863, when Union Major General Ulysses S. Grant crossed the Mississippi River, Pemberton's army could not transition from a static defensive posture to a more mobile form. Pemberton's mistakes centered around his emphasis on terrain rather than the enemy, as well as his failure to adapt as the conditions changed. In these blunders, he ceded control of tempo and the momentum to the enemy. Rather than setting conditions to seize the initiative in the event of a Federal crossing of the Mississippi River, Pemberton chose to disperse his forces to the periphery of his department and hold his territory in its entirety. He sacrificed his ability to mobilize, mass, and maneuver and in return gained a thin line of protection around the boundary of his department. This form of defense taxed his logistics assets, caused supply shortages in food and ammunition, and destroyed his rail and roads all prior to the start of Grant's attack. By the time the Union offensive did come, Pemberton had neither the option to attack nor flee.

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## Introduction

Browse through military history books at Barnes & Noble, go to the military history section of the library, or Google “contemporary wars.” These activities will likely evoke titles related to political stratagem, force-on-force maneuvers, and accounts of death and destruction. The searches will likely not summon books and articles related to how army power projection relies on civilian shipping, the effectiveness of one mode of transport over another, or how the quality of infrastructure influences military capabilities. It is common knowledge that Napoleon’s Russian campaign culminated due to logistics failures, Kaiser Wilhelm II stalled in France when his troops travelled too far from the railroads, and that the US debt is so high today partly because of the exorbitant transportation costs of moving troops, equipment, and supplies to and from Afghanistan and Iraq. Yet, logistics remains an often overlooked subtopic of military history.

This monograph provides a history of Confederate logistics during the American Civil War’s Vicksburg Campaign. The campaign demonstrates many of the pivotal concepts found in US Army doctrine today, namely momentum, endurance, and protection, and how these concepts relate to logistics. The Confederate commander, Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton, emphasized a defensive, or protection, posture at Vicksburg. His selected posture eliminated the possibility of transitioning to the offensive when the need arose. In the summer of 1863, when environmental conditions forced such a transition, the Rebel logistics network proved incapable of responding to requirements and rendered him inept in the face of an approaching enemy army.<sup>1</sup> In effect, the Confederate army was unable to seize, retain, or exploit the initiative.<sup>2</sup>

US Army doctrine suggests that in future wars logisticians will need to supply their supported units in an environment with both conventional and hybrid threats. The enemy will

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<sup>1</sup> US Department of the Army, Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 4-0, *Sustainment* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1.

<sup>2</sup> US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), ix.

target sustainment bases, interdict roads, disrupt information systems, and prevent the use of strategic lines of communication. Additionally, US forces will operate on dispersed axes of advance to avoid vulnerability from weapons of mass destruction.<sup>3</sup> Pemberton encountered problems reminiscent of those listed above. How he dealt, or failed to deal with, his problems can provide concrete insight to underline many of the abstract theories found in today's doctrine.

“No plan survives contact with the enemy,” sagely noted the Prussian hero of the Franco-Prussian War, Helmuth von Moltke.<sup>4</sup> Pemberton ignored several of today's principles of sustainment that acknowledge the truth behind Moltke's idea: anticipation, responsiveness, and improvisation.<sup>5</sup> “Anticipation is the ability to foresee operational requirements and initiate actions that satisfy a response without waiting for an operations order or fragmentary order,” “[r]esponsiveness is the ability to react to changing requirements and respond to meet the needs to maintain support,” and “[i]mprovisation is the ability to adapt sustainment operations to unexpected situations or circumstances affecting a mission.”<sup>6</sup> These principles recognize that war is dynamic and evolves moment-to-moment. As a result of war's dynamic condition, the task of sustainment is to ensure freedom of action, extend operational reach, and prolong the army's endurance to provide the commander with options that enable him to adapt.<sup>7</sup>

A longer operational reach provides a commander with more options, a shorter one with fewer options. “Operational Reach is the distance and duration across which a force can successfully employ military capabilities.”<sup>8</sup> The limit of a unit's operational reach in space or

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<sup>3</sup> FM 3-0, 1-4, 2-62.

<sup>4</sup> Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 143; Daniel J. Hughes, *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1995), 45.

<sup>5</sup> Citino, 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> ADP 4-0, 1.

<sup>8</sup> FM 3-0, 1-22.

time is its culminating point. This is where a commander's offense must transition to the defense. To achieve an extended operational reach, a unit must balance three factors. First, the unit must consider endurance. Endurance is the spatial element of operational reach, the ability to "employ combat power for protected periods...regardless of the distance from [the unit's] base and the austerity of the environment."<sup>9</sup> Next, the unit must consider the temporal aspect of operational reach, its momentum. Momentum is the pace. It is "retaining the initiative and executing high-tempo operations that overwhelm enemy resistance. Commanders control momentum by maintaining focus and pressure. They set a tempo that prevents friendly exhaustion and maintains sustainment."<sup>10</sup> The final element of operational reach is protection, which deals in chance and friction. Protection "anticipate[s] how enemy actions and environmental factors might disrupt operations."<sup>11</sup> When these three factors come into balance, a commander can choose the time and location of the fighting. Neglect of endurance, momentum, or protection can result in culmination, which limits a commander's options.<sup>12</sup>

## Literature Review

Historians have written an exhausting number of books, pamphlets, and articles on the Vicksburg campaign, which is a testament to its strategic importance in the Civil War. Most authors cover the campaign's tactical military operations, the geographic significance of the city, or what the inhabitants of the city and the soldiers went through in the lead up to, and during, the siege. Additionally, many works focus on Grant's operational genius. The few books written from a Confederate perspective emphasize Pemberton's lack of leadership abilities.

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<sup>9</sup> FM 3-0, 1-23.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.; Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Peter Paret and Michael Howard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 115-119.

<sup>12</sup> FM 3-0, 1-23.



For instance, Christopher Gabel argues that Pemberton saw his role as commander as that of a resource manager, rather than as a leader in the field. Consequently, he not only lacked the tactical ability to defend Vicksburg, but he also did not see it as his job to lead the defense.<sup>13</sup> Thomas Cutrer criticizes the command structure in the Confederacy, arguing that President Jefferson Davis created a seam for the Union to exploit by drawing the department boundary on the Mississippi River.<sup>14</sup> Michael Ballard, viewing the campaign from another angle, points out the inhospitality of the inhabitants of Vicksburg toward the Confederate soldiers during the campaign. The xenophobic citizens feared that the soldiers brought evil habits to their culture. Ballard, like Gabel, also portrays Pemberton as an incapable commander with a defensive mindset, who only made decisions to go on the offense when pushed by his subordinate commanders. Ballard denies credit to Pemberton for the masterful attack on the Union base at Holly Springs in December 1862 and blames Pemberton for the blunder at Champion Hill on May 16, 1863.<sup>15</sup> Thomas Robson Hay describes Pemberton as harsh, good at administrative and executive works, and terrible at tactics. He saw Pemberton as intolerant and dictatorial. He further explains that Pemberton would have been a great executive officer, but was a poor commander.<sup>16</sup>

Taking a counterview, John C. Pemberton, descendant of the Civil War general, argued that historians have judged Lieutenant General Pemberton too harshly. He points to the importance of Vicksburg as a logistics hub and makes the argument that Pemberton had to defend the city and remain terrain focused rather than enemy focused. Abandoning the city was not an option available to Pemberton, especially according to his orders from President Davis.

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher R. Gabel, *The Vicksburg Campaign: November 1862-July 1863* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History 2013), 15.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas W. Cutrer, *Theater of a Separate War: The Civil War West of the Mississippi River, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Michael B. Ballard, *Vicksburg: The Campaign that Opened the Mississippi* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 120-127, 309-324.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Robson Hay, "Confederate Leadership at Vicksburg," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 11, no. 4 (March 1925): 543-560.

Furthermore, once General Joseph Johnston ordered Pemberton to flee, he was not resourced to carry out the movement.<sup>17</sup> In Pemberton's judgement, the conditions constrained his relative's ability to defend the city.

What most of these authors have not evaluated is the operational logistics of the Confederacy in the Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana theater. This paper will seek to analyze this untold story. Ample evidence exists in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* in both official supply reports, and in correspondence within the department. This paper will describe how the Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana structured their supply system; the norms of that system; the capacity of their roads, rail, and rivers; and the effects of the Union army's efforts at disruption. The monograph argues that Pemberton made choices early in the campaign that constrained in his options late in the campaign, and thus he was unable to counter moves made by Major General Grant and was forced to surrender.

## The Confederate Logistics System

The US Army Field Manual 4-95, Logistics Operations, outlines four current levels of logistics in relation to the levels of war. At the national provider level, one finds the industrial base that connects to the army through the Defense Logistics Agency and Army Materiel Command. If an industrial partner, at the national provider level, produces the goods for a deployed unit, transportation consists of the industrial partner sending the items, by truck or train, to air and seaports within the continental United States. At the port, the goods transfer to the possession of a subcontractor of US Transportation Command, who represents the strategic level. The contracted agent then moves the supplies by plane or ship to the forward theater of operations. Contractors transfer the supplies to operational level soldiers at supply activities or

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<sup>17</sup> John C. Pemberton, *Pemberton: Defender of Vicksburg* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 13-39.

trailer transfer points. Typically, the operational level logistician then moves the goods forward by train or truck until they reach the tactical end user.<sup>18</sup>

The delineation between the levels of logistics in relation to levels of war was somewhat different in Civil War America, more focused on mode of transport than the agency controlling the movement. Coastal shipping and inter-theater railroads represented the strategic lines of communication; river shipping and intra-theater railroads the operational level; and wagons, pack mules, and soldiers on foot the tactical level.<sup>19</sup> In April 1861, at the war's beginning, the North imposed a blockade on southern ports.<sup>20</sup> By 1863, the North had all but eliminated coastal shipping as a strategic mode of transportation for the Confederacy.<sup>21</sup> In fact, from the outset, the Confederacy had less access to all four major modes of transportation: coastal shipping, river shipping, rail, and roads.<sup>22</sup>

The Union started the war with more naval vessels. Superior industry in the North ensured the South would not catch up.<sup>23</sup> The Federal ship advantage set the conditions for a mostly successful blockade and isolated the South from the international world of trade. In the late 1850s, the United States accounted for seventy-seven percent of British cotton imports, ninety percent of French, and ninety-two percent of Russian. By war's end, these numbers had fallen by ninety-seven percent.<sup>24</sup> Some goods from foreign states crossed over into the

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<sup>18</sup> US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 4-95, *Logistics Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 2-1.

<sup>19</sup> Earl J. Hess, *Civil War Logistics: A Study of Military Transportation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), xii-xiii.

<sup>20</sup> John Fabian Witt, *Lincoln's Code: The Laws of War in American History* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 144-159.

<sup>21</sup> Hess, xiii.

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

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>24</sup> Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 243-247.

Confederacy from Mexico or the Caribbean, but movement was costly, and the Union intercepted many Confederate and foreign ships attempting to pass the cordon.<sup>25</sup> By mid-1862, the Union also interrupted Rebel operational shipping on the Mississippi River. The river was a major transportation artery for the South and stretched for more than 2,000 miles with tributaries that penetrated deep into the interior of the country.<sup>26</sup>

By 1850, the United States had around 9,000 miles of railroad track. By 1860, this number had grown to over 30,000 miles. Just before the war, almost a third of the total US railroad miles were in the South.<sup>27</sup> Contrary to popular belief, for a decade before the war, the South was expanding railroad capability faster than the North. The North had a head start in the railroad construction business, but the South felt confident they could compete and win in a rail line construction race to the western territories and California. Slave labor allowed the South to produce railroads at \$15,000 per mile while the North ran a tab of \$30,000-\$35,000 per mile. Additionally, in the 1850s, government stocks and bonds paid for fifty-seven percent of railroad construction in the South compared to just twenty percent in the North.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, when the war began in 1861, the South had only 10,000 miles of track compared to the North's 22,000 miles. Also, whereas Mississippi had .02 miles of railroad per square mile and Louisiana had .01, Pennsylvania, Illinois, New York, Indiana, Delaware, Ohio, and New Jersey boasted .05-.08 miles of railroad per square mile.<sup>29</sup> The density of railroads in the northern states was up to four times higher than that of Mississippi.

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<sup>25</sup> Witt, 152-155.

<sup>26</sup> Hess, 34.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

<sup>28</sup> William G. Thomas, *The Iron Way: Railroads, the Civil War, and the Making of Modern America* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), 22-26.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

Further, despite the South outpacing the North in new railroad miles in the 1850s, the rail iron the South used to lay down the tracks came from northern mines and industry, which was unavailable after the war began. Just to compare, in the 1850s, northern firms produced 222,577 tons of rail iron per year compared to the South's 26,252. Southern railroad companies were also smaller, averaging ownership of only ninety miles of track per company, which meant that goods had to detrain and reload onto different boxcars every ninety miles, as most rail companies refused to allow their boxcars to leave their stretch of track. Shorter ownership lines occurred partly because railroad companies made 26% less profit in the South. Additionally, the North produced the engines that pulled the boxcars. Just prior to the war, nineteen businesses produced railroad engines in the North while only one factory made railroad engines in the South.<sup>30</sup>

A major difference between the North and South once the fighting started was that the South left railroads under the control of private companies while the North did not. In the South, the army had to compete for priority of movement on the open market. The army had to bid a competitive price or wait as a last in priority for movement. The Confederate railroad liaison, William Wadley, and Secretary of War John Seddon, convened several conferences in 1862-63 attempting to set standard prices for railroad movement, but failed. As a result, they had to establish multiple contracts to transfer troops and equipment both for intrastate and interstate moves. Georgia alone had forty-one railroad companies, all setting individual prices for movement, and all with different agents who the army had to negotiate with to use their rail. By April 1863, Wadley and Seddon realized they needed to rectify the deteriorating condition of the southern railroads, which they estimated had created a loss of twenty-five percent of the total mileage. Wadley anticipated that the South would need to produce 49,000 tons of iron each year to keep pace on maintenance. Under wartime conditions, they could only produce 20,000 tons per year.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hess, 68-73.

At the tactical level, wagons pulled cargo from operational communications hubs at railroad depots and river ports to supply the men at forward locations. Field wagons could pull up to 3,000 pounds with six horses. The movement up hills was slow as the horses struggled to haul oversized loads up steep slopes. Most wagons had no brakes, which delayed the movement downhill as well. Wagon masters needed teams of men to slow the wagons on declines, so they would not overrun the horses.<sup>32</sup>

The Confederacy appointed wagon administrators for each department. The wagon administrators would acquire wagons, repair them, and buy mules and horses to pull them. The wagon administrator hired wagon masters from the civilian population. The Confederates paid the civilian wagon masters fifty dollars per month for managing ten wagons and seventy-five dollars per month for managing up to fifty-nine wagons. The roads in the Upper South were macadamized. To produce a macadamized road, workers laid rocks on the ground and wagons and weather pounded the rocks into the road over time. Workers did not need mortar to seal the rocks into place. The Lower South, to include the Vicksburg area, had mostly dirt roads without rocks pounded into them.<sup>33</sup>

## The Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana Logistics System

Today, the US Army logistics system is centralized for global support and capitalizes on a multi-echeloned structure and civil-military partnerships. A supply clerk in the Central Command theater orders materials via computer and an officer at a higher-level headquarters, also within theater, clicks a button to approve the funds. In the continental United States, as mentioned above, this triggers a civilian industrial partner with the sought-out supply item to send the widget through the civilian transportation system to the requesting theater, where they transfer

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<sup>31</sup> Hess, 98-100.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 35-39.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 154-176.

the item to military possession. Operational level, or theater, military personnel then move the supply item the remainder of the way to the end user. Although the civil-military partnership for logistics existed in the Confederate States Army, it was less present. Also, the reach back to a higher echelon to request items not available in theater, or country, was less present during the American Civil War.

The Confederacy had a decentralized logistics system. For most items, the responsibility for requisition and supply remained at the regional (state or theater), or even the local (county or parish), level. This was especially true in Mississippi in May 1862, where food items, horses, wagons, and uniforms were on-hand locally. Stock control, provision, and production occurred within the department. Decentralized supply reduced the distance goods travelled from the point of procurement to the point of need, which reduced time from the moment of requisition to the moment of use.<sup>34</sup> This was particularly important during an era when the top speed of railroad cars in the South was twenty miles per hour, river barges rarely broke ten miles per hour, and wagons averaged a sluggish two miles per hour.<sup>35</sup> The operational environment of the Civil War in the Confederate Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana thrust a decentralized system onto Pemberton. This decentralized supply system worked well enough in peacetime, but as war approached system failed to withstand the pressures of an invading army, resulting in supply shortages, reduced options, growing confusion, and disorder.

The lines of communication in the Confederate South and in the Federally controlled North differed markedly from one another during the Civil War. The large quantity of transportation options available to the North, as compared to that of the South, was due to pre-war regional economic differences and population densities. The North had cities and robust trade. As

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<sup>34</sup> US Department of the Army, Army Doctrinal Publication (ADP) 4-0, *Sustainment* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Rodney C. Lackey, "Notes on Civil War Logistics: Facts & Stories," US Army Transportation School (Fort Lee, VA: Government Printing Press, 2017), 12.

a result, the North also had a mature rail, canal, and road network, boasting over two-thirds of the railway miles in the country before the Civil War.<sup>36</sup> The South had a slave-based plantation aristocracy, with only five percent of the country's railroad engine producing factories. The character of the plantation and ranching communities in the South, with the need for the individual farmer's possession of large swaths of land, prohibited population concentration and resulted in a more dispersed populous. Consequently, the South had far fewer commercial trading centers and a scant number of improved routes between them. With few regional trading hubs, the South did not need more than a few roads and railways to link those hubs to the outside world. Most of the roads in the Lower South were not even macadamized. Additionally, the target markets for cotton, corn, and fodder harvested in antebellum Mississippi were in other states, so the state's internal roads mostly served to carry goods to the rail or river that would move the goods beyond state lines. Thus, when the Confederate and Union armies met at Vicksburg, they found poor roads, swampy areas interspersed with barely navigable rivers, and a rail network without the capacity to last for movement of goods within the state. In fact, when the Mississippi railroads attempted to supply Pemberton's army with over 60,000 troops facing off against Grant competing for the use of those same rail lines, the transportation system unraveled.<sup>37</sup>

Several railroads interspersed the state of Mississippi during the Civil War. Running north and south in the western portion of the state were the Mississippi and Tennessee; the Mississippi Central; and the New Orleans, Jackson and Great Northern Railroads. The three rail companies mentioned above were really a single line of tracks, but owned by several private firms. One company owned the rail south of Jackson, another from Jackson to Memphis, and yet

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<sup>36</sup> Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States AD 990-1992* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 96.

<sup>37</sup> W. Goodman to J.A. Seddon, February 16, 1863, United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 24(3), *Operations in Mississippi and West Tennessee including those in Arkansas and Louisiana connected with the Siege of Vicksburg, January 20-August 10, 1863* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1889), 627-631. (Hereafter cited as OR).



another north of there. Also running north and south in the eastern portion of the state was the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. The Southern Railroad ran west-to-east across the middle of the state, and connected Vicksburg, Jackson, and Meridian.<sup>38</sup> Most of the supplies that the Confederate Army moved by rail, in the department, moved along these tracks. In February 1863, W. Goodman, President of the Central Mississippi Railroad, estimated that he had only fifty to sixty of his original 500 useable boxcars for transport due to overuse, disrepair, and dispersal along other companies' railroads.<sup>39</sup> Shortage of rolling stock was a common theme, especially as Federal forces neared Jackson and Vicksburg. In fact, by May 1863, when Grant finally captured the lines, the stretch of rail between Jackson and Vicksburg was barely functioning.<sup>40</sup>

Roads offered a poor alternative to rail, especially when considering that goods moved up to five times slower with animal-powered wagons. Rain also flooded out many of the roads from November to mid-May, making them inaccessible.<sup>41</sup> But this form of overland transport was the only option available for many of Pemberton's dispersed outposts. For instance, Port Hudson had no access to rail and was 244 miles away from Vicksburg.<sup>42</sup> After the Federal Navy passed the Port Hudson and Vicksburg batteries in February and April 1863, respectively, the only possibility for supply was via road, which could take up to a week from Jackson.<sup>43</sup> While Port Hudson represented an extreme in terms of logistical problems for Pemberton, his men did construct several outposts in the department that were located several days travel from the nearest railroad track. The outposts positioned furthest from the track suffered the worst as Grant worked to close lines of supply to and from Vicksburg. On the fringe, Port Hudson, Fort Pemberton, and

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<sup>38</sup> Department Map, December 23, 1862, *OR*, ser. 17, vol. 2, p. 611.

<sup>39</sup> W. Goodman to J.A. Seddon, February 16, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 627.

<sup>40</sup> G. L. Gillespie to C. L. Stevenson, March 3, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 651.

<sup>41</sup> Lackey, 12; S. G. French to J. A. Seddon, March 10, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 661.

<sup>42</sup> Ballard, 2.

<sup>43</sup> J. C. Pemberton to S. Cooper, April 17, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 751.

Grand Gulf lacked security due to shortages of ordnance and ammunition in April-May 1863 when Grant began his overland movements east of the Mississippi. To make matters worse, Vicksburg tended to care for its own needs first when shortages emerged in the department, so even before Grant crossed to the east side of the Mississippi River, the peripheral bases suffered from a lack of meat and corn, the barest of necessities.

The Mississippi River and its tributaries provided the best means of travel in the department. The Mississippi offered haulage yearlong, unlike roads. It also offered a route of

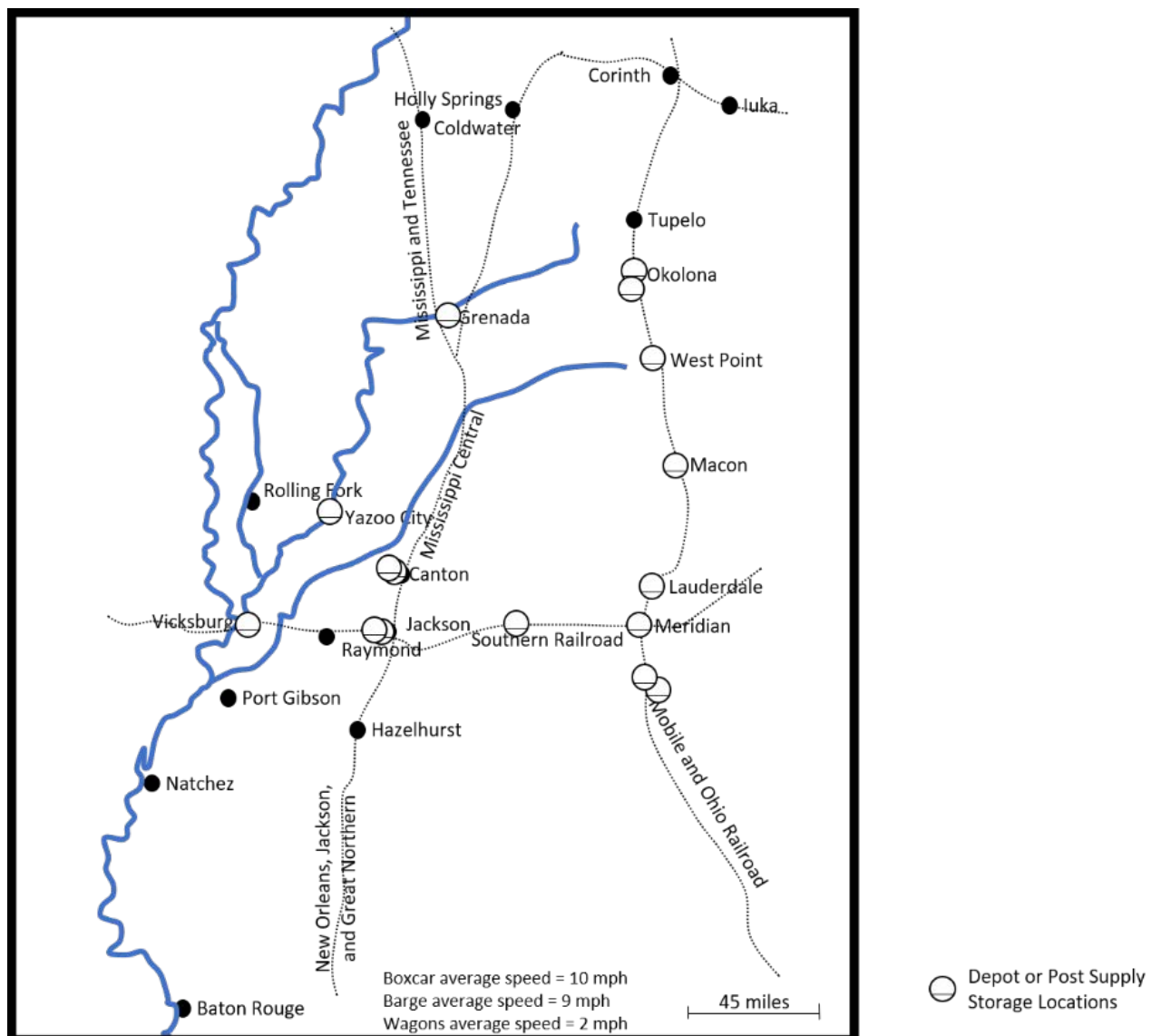


Figure 1. Active Supply Depots in the Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana in February 1863. OR, 24(3), 616-617.

travel not subject to disrepair, unlike rail.<sup>44</sup> Further, a single heavy barge could deliver one day of supplies for 80,000 troops and 36,000 horses. One to two barges per day would sustain an army, whereas the same load would require a convoy of over five hundred wagons, pulled by two to three thousand horses, to do the same.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately for Pemberton, Porter sought from the beginning to seal off the river mode of transport to the Confederate department. By the time Grant closed in on the Confederate works east of Vicksburg, the Confederates in the city had no access to river.<sup>46</sup>

On February 15, 1863, Major RW Memminger, Chief of Quartermaster for the Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana, explained to Lieutenant Colonel JR Waddy, Assistant Adjutant at Jackson, how the department logistics system functioned. The Confederate department had three military-owned and operated factories that made woolen goods at Jackson, Woodville, and Choctaw, but they could not meet the army's requirements in the department. To meet the shortfalls, uniforms and other woolen products had to be purchased from civilians. The military also manufactured wagons, but to meet the needs a commercial supplier, Dixie Works, in Canton, supplied the military with an additional fifty wagons per month. Jackson, the headquarters for the department, authorized depots at Enterprise, Columbus, and Port Hudson to purchase mules and horses at a set rate, but usually the depots could not find enough mules and horses on the local economy to meet their needs. As a result, Memminger purchased horses from outside the theater as well. At the time he wrote, in February 1863, he had just that month purchased 150 from markets in Tennessee.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Christopher R. Gabel, *Staff Ride Handbook for the Vicksburg Campaign, December 1862-July 1863* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2001), 12.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ballard, 200-325.

<sup>47</sup> L. Memminger to J. R. Waddy, February 5, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 616-618.

In his letter, Memminger also described the requirements of the three sub-procurement depots at Jackson, Enterprise, and Columbus. He found it necessary to designate multiple sub-procurers so that the military could access multiple civilian markets across the state. Mississippi was less industrialized than other states and no city within the state could provide all that the department required. The Jackson Depot provided the department with 1,000 uniforms, 280 blankets, and 175 tents per week that it purchased from various venders in the counties surrounding Jackson. Additionally, the Jackson Depot made contracts with civilian entities for the procurement of cooking utensils. The Enterprise Depot found an additional twenty-five wagons per month for the department from small business suppliers, purchasing shoes and uniforms from independent contractors who could produce 400 pairs and 250 suits per month. The Columbus Depot could scrounge up 700 uniforms and 250 tents per week in the local area. Most of the purchasing from the department for manufactured goods occurred at these three depots.<sup>48</sup>

The individual outposts resourced fodder and corn locally and had the authority to purchase these items. The regional plan to procure and transport fodder and corn only supplemented what each base could provide itself, which reduced strains on the rail network. The Mississippi Delta, as well as the region east of it, produced much of the corn and fodder that filled department shortages. Memminger dedicated several wagons specifically for the movement of these goods, adjusting the wagons as needed. In general, 100 wagons moved fodder and corn from Snyder's Bluff to the Vicksburg Depot on a continuous basis. From Vicksburg, the corn and fodder could supply outlying areas. A company grade officer purchased the goods for Vicksburg. He was the local purchasing agent and received his funds from the department headquarters at Jackson. Many local outposts had purchasing agents with funds from Jackson for this purpose.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> L. Memminger to J. R. Waddy, February 5, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 616-618.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

As an additional measure to conserve military transportation assets, Memminger contracted for civilian riverboats to move goods on the Yazoo River from the Mississippi Delta region. He established a civil-military contract with a “Mr. McFarland” to pick up corn, cotton, and fodder, which were delivered to Snyder’s Bluff. McFarland served as a single point of contact for the transport shipments in the area. As a result, Vicksburg Depot could make purchases from citizen-owned farms, and then notify this contractor of the stores he needed to move. He would then identify a local agent with a transport ship in the area to move the supplies to Snyder’s Bluff.<sup>50</sup>

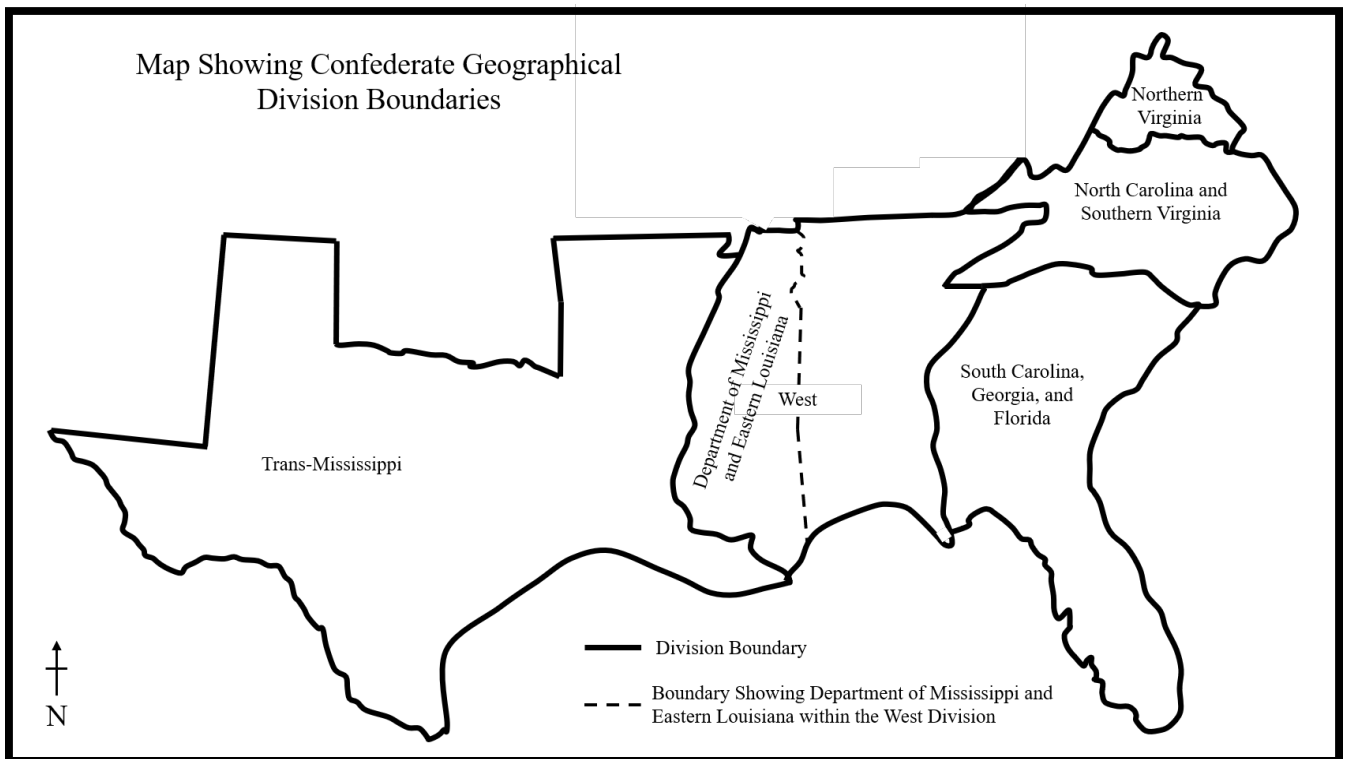


Figure 2. Map Showing Confederate Geographical Division Boundaries. Source: Author.

Ammunition, heavy guns, and rifles were among the only items that originated outside of the state. As the Federals closed in on Vicksburg, Jefferson Davis assisted Pemberton by sending heavy guns from other departments.<sup>51</sup> Quartermaster officers would send reports up to Richmond

<sup>50</sup> L. Memminger to J. R. Waddy, February 5, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 616-618.

continuously throughout the campaign seeking ammunition, caps, and additional artillery. As Grant besieged Vicksburg, Pemberton had to resort to men smuggling percussion caps into the fort due to failures to fill this shortfall before the siege began.<sup>52</sup>

Due to the decentralized resourcing and storage of supplies in the Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana, Pemberton had less of a single-point geographical supply base than Grant. Grant received his theater supplies from Cairo, Illinois. Those supplies went to a single location at Milliken's Bend, Louisiana (after December 1862). Pemberton's supplies originated from numerous points around the state and department. The army purchased those supplies and stored them at local depots for use by troops. In February 1863, there were sixteen Rebel supply depots in Mississippi.<sup>53</sup> As the campaign moved forward, Pemberton chose to position troops at numerous locations and points across the state. The dispersion of troops was a deliberate choice to protect the perimeter of his defensive posture. He made this deliberate choice at the expense of his ability to mass and transition to the offensive.

To review, the Union had a single theater logistics gravitational center while the Confederacy had multiple. Grant recognized that many of the Rebel peripheral resource centers and depots stood out of range of Confederate protection. Grant could raid Pemberton's mini-supply hubs at minimal manning costs and destabilize entire regions of the state. Multiple logistics centers also meant that the Confederate logistics platforms, wagons, and boxcars were unable to concentrate at any single location. They were constantly moving supplies at their sixteen local depots. In May 1863, the dispersal of logistics platforms constrained Pemberton's options as the Federal Army approached Vicksburg. Due to lack of logistics support, Pemberton was unable

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<sup>51</sup> Ballard, 115.

<sup>52</sup> Pemberton, 184.

<sup>53</sup> Active Supply Depots in the Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana in February 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 616-617.

to transition to the offense, concentrate his army, maneuver, and control the tempo of the upcoming battle.<sup>54</sup>

The furthest peripheral base, and biggest headache for supply in the department, was Port Hudson. The 244-miles distance between it and Vicksburg, only passable by road, made supplying this location a drain on Confederate assets. Adding to the Confederacy's dilemma, many of the streams crossing the overland route from Vicksburg to Port Hudson crested each spring, washing out bridges and roads. Beyond the shortages of reliable bridges, many of the non-macadamized roads were swampy, which slowed the movement of already sluggish horse-pulled carts. The rough terrain, even when dry, slowed wagon travel to a crawl. Convoys from Vicksburg to Port Hudson took over a week in good condition, and the horses pulling the wagons needed to carry food for themselves to eat during the two-week round trip. Each horse consumed twenty-seven pounds of fodder per day, each wagon had four to six horses, and each wagon could carry, at maximum, 3,000 pounds. As a result, about half of each wagon's load consisted of food to feed the animals lugging the load.<sup>55</sup>

## Overview of the Campaign

US President Abraham Lincoln told his civilian and military leaders, "...Vicksburg is the key. The war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket."<sup>56</sup> Both he and Confederate States of America President Jefferson Davis believed this, and both dedicated enormous means to capturing or retaining the city. Since April of 1861, the Mississippi River stood prominently in Union war plans when then General Chief of the Army Winfield Scott proposed the Anaconda Plan. Scott suggested a naval blockade of the South from Virginia to Texas, as well as amphibious landings down the Mississippi River to penetrate the Rebel interior.

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<sup>54</sup> FM 3-0, 1-23.

<sup>55</sup> Lackey, 63-67.

<sup>56</sup> Gabel, *The Vicksburg Campaign*, 15; Edwin C. Bearss, *Rebel: Victory at Vicksburg* (Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1989), 7.

This plan would deny the South use of the vital Mississippi River logistics highway, divide the self-proclaimed country into two parts, and isolate the Confederate States of America from international trade. Lincoln modified Scott's proposal to make it more aggressive, but kept the blockade and river scheme as lines of effort in his strategy.<sup>57</sup>

Recognizing the Mississippi River as key terrain, Jefferson Davis emplaced defensive fortifications along the waterway to protect it from Union seizure. At the time, this engineering effort ran parallel to Davis's strategy of forming a defensive perimeter around the South. It would decrease his capacity to mass troops at a single point for offensive maneuver but increase his capacity to cover more terrain in a protective posture. He constructed and manned numerous garrisons along the Mississippi and Tennessee Rivers, which reassured southern residents of his will to defend them and to maintain the territorial integrity of the new nation.<sup>58</sup>

Initially, the Federals were slow to attack Davis's defensive works in the Western Theater. Union commanders in the theater blamed their lingering pace on lack of troops, training, and logistics. The war had begun in April 1861. Seven months later, in November 1861, Lincoln, fed up with Western Theater excuses, appointed Major General Henry W. Halleck to command the Department of Missouri.<sup>59</sup> Three months after that, in February 1862, Halleck took the offensive.<sup>60</sup> By this time, Jefferson Davis had almost a year to strengthen river fortifications.

Major General Ulysses S. Grant, of Halleck's command, opened the war in the Western Theater with a joint amphibious venture of his 17,000 troops and US Navy Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote's thirteen steam transports, four ironclads, and two timberclads. Based out of Paducah, Kentucky, Grant sailed up the Tennessee River to attack Fort Henry from the rear. On February 6,

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<sup>57</sup> Charles R. Bowery Jr., *The Civil War in the Western Theater 1862* (Washington, DC: United States Army, 2014), 9.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>59</sup> Hess, xii.

<sup>60</sup> Bowery, 11-16.



1862, the Union seized Fort Henry. From February through June 1862, Halleck and the Department of Missouri secured control of Fort Donelson, New Madrid, Shiloh, Island Number 10, Fort Pillow, Corinth, and Memphis. The string of successes unlocked a passage on the Mississippi River down to Vicksburg, Mississippi. Ownership of the river this far south offered the Union a means to extend its operational reach from a strategic base in Cairo, Illinois, to operational bases in Tennessee and Mississippi. This shortened the distance stockpiles had to travel from the forward depots to the warfighters penetrating the South's lines, which facilitated endurance and momentum for the Union Army as it began assaults toward Vicksburg.<sup>61</sup>

At the time Halleck was penetrating southward on the Mississippi River, Major General Martin L. Smith commanded a mere 3,600 Confederate troops in Vicksburg. Defenses at Haynes and Snyder's Bluffs consisted of meagre troop presences for scouting purposes. Below Vicksburg, Port Hudson lacked the firepower to prevent the passage of US flotillas north on the Mississippi.<sup>62</sup> But up to this point, the area was peaceful, so the Confederates had no need for heavy guns or large garrisons. With this small of a force, the rail, roads, and surrounding farms proved more than adequate for support. But in the spring and summer of 1862, Memphis, New Orleans, and Baton Rouge came under attack to the south, and the defensive fortifications along the Mississippi and Tennessee Rivers came under attack to the north. This induced Jefferson Davis to identify Vicksburg as a decisive point in the west. If other strong points on the Mississippi capitulated, Vicksburg would be the last bastion of defense. If Vicksburg fell, Davis might be incapable of reuniting his Western and Trans-Mississippi Military Divisions. As a result, in May 1862, Major General Smith began a yearlong project to entrench, enhance fortifications, and increase troop levels in the theater that soon would become the Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana. Within the first month, Smith increased the artillery lining the

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<sup>61</sup> Bowery, 13-16.

<sup>62</sup> William L. Shea and Terrence J. Winschel, *Vicksburg is the Key: The Struggle for the Mississippi River* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 18-21.

river along Vicksburg's west to eighteen heavy guns. By Autumn 1862, Vicksburg became the second most fortified city in the Confederacy, second only to Richmond.<sup>63</sup> Fortifying Vicksburg signified a shift in Jefferson Davis's strategy from a terrain-focused model of securing the entire perimeter, to a strategy of massing troops to meet Union armies with equitable-sized forces. Davis's conception of what he thought possible in the war had evolved. Originally, he wanted to maintain control over the entire South. Now it appeared he would sacrifice, at least temporarily, Kentucky and portions of Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi. To regain these areas, or even to hold the terrain currently in his possession, he would have to focus on defeating the enemy's army. The new strategy would allow the enemy to temporarily occupy terrain in order to enable the Confederates to mass at other points, build strength, and counterattack.

On May 26, 1862, Union Admiral David Farragut's naval forces justified Confederate troop increases in Mississippi when they arrived below Vicksburg and shelled the town. Due to the bluffs towering 200-feet above the river, Farragut's navy artillery did little damage. But Farragut's aggression confirmed Confederate suspicions about Union intentions to take the city. In June, Lieutenant General Joseph Johnston, Commander of the Confederate West Division, sent Major General John C. Breckenridge's division to reinforce Vicksburg. Breckenridge's numbers increased the garrison strength to 15,000 troops, an almost four-fold expansion.<sup>64</sup>

Railroad failure, during the Breckenridge division movement, served as an early indicator that the Mississippi lines of communication were a limited resource. The troop transfer temporarily strained the Mississippi Central and Southern Railroads beyond their capacity.<sup>65</sup> These two lines intersected at Jackson. They belonged to separate private companies that did not share boxcars, locomotives, or workers. Delays occurred when Breckenridge's troops and

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<sup>63</sup> David Martin, *The Vicksburg Campaign: April 1862-July 1863* (Conshohocken, PA: Combined Books, Inc., 1994), 38.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>65</sup> Bearss, 166-167.

equipment had to detrain at Jackson and re-board cars of the Southern Railroad for further conveyance to Vicksburg.<sup>66</sup> The transfer blocked the train lines for days. The railroad network in Mississippi could only handle two brigades of troops at a time, with transport of other goods made to wait or go by road.<sup>67</sup>

Another logistics vulnerability was the ferry between the Western and the Trans-Mississippi Divisions. The Vicksburg, Shreveport, and Texas Railroad did not bridge the Mississippi River. In fact, no bridge in the state, for man, horse, or train, stretched across the Mississippi. Goods and stores would arrive, moving east, on a train from Louisiana and Texas, be offloaded, put on wagons, and hauled to the river. From there men on shore would place those goods on barges and ferry them across to Vicksburg. Workers would then place the goods on boxcars of the Southern Railroad for further movement, or store them at the Vicksburg Depot for later use.<sup>68</sup> In June 1862, US Navy Admiral Charles Davis arrived above Vicksburg and Admirals Farragut and Porter below. Without needing to fire a shot, their presence on the river closed the Rebel movement between the Trans-Mississippi Division and the state of Mississippi. Without a navy, the Confederate Army could do nothing to stop Union river interdiction.<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, during the summer of 1862, the Confederates attempted several times to contest the Federal command of the river between Port Hudson and Vicksburg.<sup>70</sup> In July, Rebel Captain Isaac N. Brown took the shoddily-built *CSS Arkansas*, an ironclad ram, down the Yazoo and into the Mississippi River. Brown encountered Farragut's flotilla and proceeded to ram the *USS Carondelet*, sinking it. Brown also managed to damage the *Hartford*, *Iroquois*, and *Benton*

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<sup>66</sup> Shea and Winschel 18-23.

<sup>67</sup> Bearss, 167.

<sup>68</sup> Shea and Winschel, 18.

<sup>69</sup> Martin, 44.

<sup>70</sup> Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 488.

before being damaged itself by the *USS Lancaster*. The *Arkansas* was subsequently forced into port under the protection of the defenses at Vicksburg, where it underwent repairs. Following this, during a short three-week period, the *CSS Arkansas* managed to remain a single-ship fleet-in-being that preoccupied Federal forces. But on August 6, 1862, Rebel sailors set the Confederate ironclad ablaze after the engines ceased to function and the *USS Essex* threatened to capture the vessel.<sup>71</sup> In August 1862, despite retaking control of the river from the *CSS Arkansas*, the US Navy ceded a portion of the Mississippi back to the Confederates. Federal departure from the waterway between Port Hudson and Vicksburg was not due to pressure placed upon them by the Confederacy, but realization that they could not take Vicksburg so long as the rail lines east of Vicksburg remained open. The Federal Navy could not affect this. Closing the Mississippi railroads would be an army job.<sup>72</sup>

In November 1862, after a three-month hiatus in major fighting, Grant and the Union Army assumed the lead in the Mississippi fight. In his first maneuver, Grant launched an attempt to outflank Lieutenant General Pemberton.<sup>73</sup> His army lunged at Vicksburg's northeastern flank from an attack positions near Memphis. Grant's supply base was located at Holly Springs, 200 miles north of the objective and on the same side of the river. He intended to isolate the Hill City by interdicting its lines of communication eastward. As Farragut made clear months before, Vicksburg would stand so long as the railroad from Jackson remained open. As a result, Grant planned a two-pronged assault. He personally led the main effort, a turning movement, oriented toward Jackson and the Southern Railroad. Major General William Tecumseh Sherman led the

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<sup>71</sup> Martin, 53-60.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>73</sup> Shea and Winschel, 1-6.

supporting effort, which proceeded south on the Mississippi River and then east on the Yazoo. Sherman's objectives were to seize Snyder's Bluff and establish a lodgment.<sup>74</sup>

Pemberton conducted a static defense, which ceded the initiative to Grant and Sherman. He also appealed to his higher headquarters for assistance from other armies. On November 18, 1862, he telegraphed Secretary of War George W. Randolph, exclaiming that "[l]arge numbers of troops are reported to have left Helena by transports, and artillery and cavalry [are] moving down river by land...[s]hould not General Bragg move directly to threaten the rear of [the] large force in front of us? I should be re-enforced at once."<sup>75</sup> In December 1862, rather than join in the battle, Bragg sent a brigade to Pemberton. The brigade from Bragg's army temporarily halted at Jackson, but flowed into Vicksburg on trains just as Sherman arrived at Chickasaw Bayou.

By the time of Grant's overland attack, the Confederate fortifications in western Mississippi stretched, strong point to strong point, from Yazoo City to Grand Gulf for eighty miles. The defensive works also covered a depth inland to guard railroads along the Tallahatchie and Yalobusha Rivers, and then further south to Port Hudson for protection of the Red River. On October 9, 1863, Pemberton arrived in theater and immediately set to work manning the new fortifications, which required a dispersal of forces. In this first defensive operation, Vicksburg's protective works northeast of the city slowed Grant's penetration.<sup>76</sup>

In the battle, Pemberton had pushed his defensive line to a "position on the Yalabusha [sic]" of "about 21,000 effectives" and he retained the "brigade sent by Bragg...at Jackson."<sup>77</sup> While Pemberton's defense slowed Grant, the cavalries of Major General Earl Van Dorn and Lieutenant General Nathan Bedford Forrest caused Grant to retract back to his starting position.

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<sup>74</sup> Shea and Winschel, 36-45.

<sup>75</sup> J.C. Pemberton to G.W. Randolph, November 18, 1862, *OR*, ser. 17, vol.1, p. 751.

<sup>76</sup> Ballard, 83-160.

<sup>77</sup> J. C. Pemberton to C. S. Army, December 4, 1862, 1863, *OR*, ser. 17, vol. 1, p. 779.

As the Union approached, Van Dorn proposed driving a cavalry raid around Grant's main army to destroy his supply hub at Holly Springs to regain initiative. On December 5, 1862, Pemberton directed Van Dorn "to start at an early hour in the morning, so as to arrive this side of the river tomorrow evening. A cavalry regiment under a good officer, must be sent as quickly as possible."<sup>78</sup> Van Dorn's successful raid forced Grant to retreat. It also made nil the purpose of Sherman's attempt to secure the bluffs. If Grant could not reach Vicksburg, Sherman's lodgment at Snyder's Bluff would be too difficult to retain. The failed overland attack towards Vicksburg was the first contact between Grant's and Pemberton's armies, and served as a learning experience for Grant, and a model of future behavior for Pemberton. First, Grant learned that he needed to better protect his supply base. Second, he discovered that Mississippi farms provided ample forage that would enable an army to temporarily sever his connection to his supply base. Pemberton's pattern in this first battle created a stencil to shape his future behavior. His pattern of decisions to follow consisted of establishing a defensive protection line, appealing for help from other armies, and attempting to strike the enemy's lines of communication.

In the months after the overland campaign, Pemberton increased and dispersed troops throughout the department to enhance his protective line. However, this approach also taxed the elasticity of available transportation assets and his ability to supply forces. Mississippi lacked sufficient numbers of horses for both cavalry and supply to support a defensive strategy covering the whole department. Purchasing horses and wagons proved increasingly difficult in the department as troops flowed in to fill the new defensive works. Throughout the campaign, Pemberton called upon Mississippi Governor John Pettus to assist him in strengthening his cavalry. Later in the campaign, he demanded that "I [Pemberton] have the honor to call upon you to exercise the right vested in you by the Legislature of Mississippi...to seize or impress the requisite number of animals—587...as these are quite as much needed by the Government."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> J. C. Pemberton to E. V. Dorn, December 5, 1862, 1863, *OR*, ser. 17, vol. 1, p. 785.

Days later, he informed Pettus that “[t]he deficiency of cavalry in the northern portion of the State requires that a portion of the State troops in that section should be mounted and equipped. I therefore urgently request that you do this impressment as early as possible.”<sup>80</sup> Pettus made efforts to fill Pemberton’s needs, but never reached the requisite support to fill the needs of the terrain-focused strategy. At one point, Pemberton even complained of “the great difficulty in organizing brigades from [Mississippi] because of the important positions being so far apart.”<sup>81</sup> This was an acknowledgement that his means (number of horses) could not support his ways (protection and terrain-focused defense), to meet his ends (hold Vicksburg).

In January 1863, Grant, learning from the supply debacle at Holly Springs, created an operational supply base at Milliken’s Bend. Milliken’s Bend was further down river, close to Vicksburg, and inaccessible to the Confederates. From Milliken’s Bend, Grant could safely probe Confederate lines and locate vulnerabilities in Pemberton’s defenses with minimal fear of counterattack. Success in Grant’s campaign would require him to probe, because he could not attack Vicksburg from the front due to both the river serving as a barrier and to the city standing atop high bluffs across the river. Even if Grant could land troops in front of Vicksburg, those troops would have to scale 200-foot hills while being fired upon before reaching strong manmade defenses.<sup>82</sup> It would also be difficult to find another landing place because of the geography of the area. The west side of the river consisted mostly of swamps, with similar terrain on the east side north of Vicksburg. South of Vicksburg, the immediate shore on the east side of the river included steep ridges, with few areas adequate for offloading troops and supplies.

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<sup>79</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. J. Pettus, April 25, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 786.

<sup>80</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. J. Pettus, April 27, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 794.

<sup>81</sup> J. C. Pemberton to S. Cooper, April 15, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 743.

<sup>82</sup> Martin, 46.

The same month as Grant's arrival at Milliken's Bend, Grant rekindled a project, begun the previous year, to complete a canal across DeSoto Point. Desoto Point was a one and a half mile salient at a curve in the Mississippi River opposite Vicksburg. If successful, the canal would enable Grant to bypass Pemberton's land-based batteries and attack the city from the south.<sup>83</sup> However, by March 1863, after much hope, publicity, and an intensive effort from his soldiers, Grant declared the project a failure and abandoned the work.

In February 1863, in another probe for vulnerability, Grant launched a reconnaissance mission to locate a route to bypass Vicksburg's strong front along the river. The joint army-navy Lake Providence Expedition, would bypass the Vicksburg Batteries by traveling along the Tensas, Black, and Red Rivers. The passage snaked down the Louisiana side of the Mississippi River to an opening sixty miles below Vicksburg. It was the first of numerous attempts to get around Vicksburg by exploring the abundant regional bayous. The expedition failed due to narrow passages, brush, and obstructions in the creeks.<sup>84</sup>

In another attempt, Grant's Yazoo River Expedition slipped through the Yazoo River in northern Mississippi at an opening opposite Helena, Arkansas. The men on this expedition opened the Yazoo Dike to raise the water levels to allow ironclads and transports passage through the shallow creeks without scraping their bottoms. In Grant's mind, this would help the ships avoid the choke points, brush, and obstructions found in the Lake Providence failure. On February 3, the troops cut the dike. By February 9, the rising water levels alerted Confederate soldiers to the Union presence, with Confederate Captain Isaac Brown proclaiming to Pemberton, "The enemy have cut the Yazoo Pass levee; contemplate, perhaps, assailing us down the Yazoo. If we had two heavy guns from Mobile...we might control the navigation...Our Pass obstructions will only delay the enemy."<sup>85</sup> Pemberton responded, "There is no probability of getting heavy

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<sup>83</sup> Martin, 83.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 87.



guns from Mobile. Nor do I think the movement probable.”<sup>86</sup> Despite Pemberton’s refusal to assist in requesting heavy guns, the Confederates successfully clogged the route with logs. Additionally, members of Major General William W. Loring’s Division nearly succeeded in capturing or sinking several Union vessels at canalized points as they harassed Union flanks. Grant abandoned the Yazoo River Expedition after Loring defeated the attacking forces on March 11, 14, and 16, 1863 at the newly constructed Fort Pemberton. The Union halted the bayou expeditions after this, and settled into the idea that they would have to endure the batteries on the Mississippi River.<sup>87</sup>

As the Union conducted the bayou expeditions, they also sent cavalry raids south from Memphis and Corinth led by Brigadier General Benjamin Grierson. Grierson targeted Confederate resource centers, which, due to the Confederate regional logistics system, were on the front lines and unprotected. Grierson rode into northern Mississippi destroying rail, forcing the Confederate perimeter southward, and disrupting operations at Rebel farms and depots. On March 6, Confederate Brigadier General Daniel Ruggles informed Lieutenant Colonel JR Waddy, at Jackson, that “much anxiety exists among planters throughout Northeastern Mississippi on the question of protection of the planting interests generally. At present the protection is inadequate...the labor and expense incurred in sowing their crop will be lost.”<sup>88</sup> This would be detrimental for the Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana because the region was the most agriculturally productive area in the department. Moreover, Ruggles reported his cavalry were “miserably armed, deficient in number, with not even ammunition sufficient for a skirmish.”<sup>89</sup> He could not contest the region from Grierson’s raids. As a result, this region that

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<sup>85</sup> I. N. Brown to J. C. Pemberton, February 9, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 620.

<sup>86</sup> J. C. Pemberton to I. N. Brown, February 9, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p., 620.

<sup>87</sup> Martin, 89-92.

<sup>88</sup> D. Ruggles to J. R. Waddy, March 6, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p., 654-655.

could produce enough grain for Pemberton's entire army produced close to nothing for the Confederacy. For the remainder of the month, and into mid-April, Ruggles continued to remind Pemberton that he could not execute his protection duties due to shortages of ammunition and horses.<sup>90</sup>

Pemberton found himself in a quandary. He needed more troops and horses in more places on his perimeter to protect the terrain from the active invaders, but the troop increases, and dispersion, overloaded the transportation network. Signs abounded since June 1862 that the logistics infrastructure was overburdened. Despite this, the June 1862 four-fold troop surge that brought the department's strength to 15,000 was followed by further increases. As troops increased, commanders pushed them to the periphery to secure more ground. In December 1862, Major General Carter L. Stevenson transferred from Tennessee to reinforce Pemberton with 10,000 more troops. By February 1863, if one includes troops at Port Hudson, Pemberton had an army of 51,866 effectives. And by April that number increased to 61,495.<sup>91</sup>

Starting in January 1863, Confederate soldiers often went days without meat or corn in their rations. During one shortage, Major TB Reed, Commissary Officer at Vicksburg, noted that, "there are only about 3,000 Government cattle in the department."<sup>92</sup> The following day Pemberton complained to Major Theodore Johnston, his Commissary Officer at Jackson, that "[t]here must be rations kept here all the time[s] for 25,000 men. The men have no meat at all today."<sup>93</sup> Reed, not knowing the Jackson Depot also ran out of meat, then requested beef from Theodore Johnston. He grumbled that there was "[n]ot one beef here...Send us some by any

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<sup>89</sup> D. Ruggles to J. R. Waddy, March 6, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p., 654-655.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> J. C. Pemberton, abstract from return of the Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana, December 31, 1862, *OR*, ser. 17, vol. 1, p. 814; J. C. Pemberton, "Abstract from Return of the Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana," March 31, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 702.

<sup>92</sup> T. B. Reed to C. L. Stevenson, January 26, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p., 607.

<sup>93</sup> J. C. Pemberton to T. Johnston, January 27, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p., 607.

means, as troops are suffering.”<sup>94</sup> Since cattle generally came from the Trans-Mississippi Department, they moved west to east, the opposite direction of other supplies. Around this time, a renewed presence of Union ships occasionally sailed between Vicksburg and Port Hudson which made it difficult for cattle to cross the waterway. The cattle that could cross grazed and fed at Edwards Depot between the cities of Vicksburg and Jackson until shipped forward for consumption.

On February 2, Reed, frustrated with the slow transport of supplies from Jackson, told Theodore Johnston to “[s]end corn forward more rapidly. It is much needed here now.”<sup>95</sup> The next day, Mr. W.H. Johnson, a government contractor, reported that for three weeks he had “repeatedly urged [Naval Captain W.M. Jones] to furnish transportation” to pick up 30,000 bushels of corn that were “at risk of exposure to rains, in a damaging condition.” When the boats finally arrived, the corn had rotted, so the boats returned empty.<sup>96</sup> Incidents like this were common in Mississippi. Two weeks later, Seddon remarked that, “the complaints of the conduct of quartermasters in the department of Lieutenant-General Pemberton have been incessant. Imputations upon their integrity have come again and again to the Department.”<sup>97</sup>

Pemberton did not consider dropping the terrain-focused strategy despite the fractured infrastructure system. As troop levels increased, he recognized symptoms of the dispersion problem, and thought the symptoms were the cause. One symptom he sought to remedy was that the civilian rail system made the military compete with the civilian market in price and priority for movement. In response, he tried to influence the rules of transportation for more favorable

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<sup>94</sup> T.B. Reed to T. Johnston, January 27, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 607.

<sup>95</sup> T. B. Reed to T. Johnston, February 2, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 614.

<sup>96</sup> W. H. Johnson to M. L. Smith, February 3, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 615; T. B. Reed to T. Johnston, February 12, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 624.

<sup>97</sup> J. A. Seddon to J. E. Johnston, February 14, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 625.

conditions for the Confederate Army.<sup>98</sup> On February 14, 1863, Pemberton republished a decree, first issued in December 1862, “disallowing any railroad to transport forage beyond the limits of the department, or private parties within it, until that belonging to Government was transported. Every pound” of supply in the department is “required for the army.”<sup>99</sup> The decree was “to secure against” the “competition of speculators, especially on the Mobile and Ohio Railroad, as well as to ensure transportation.”<sup>100</sup> Due to the decree, Pemberton’s troops and the local population became the primary customers for the civilian farmers in the state. By restricting trade, Pemberton attempted to depress prices and lower transportation requirements on rail.<sup>101</sup>

Another symptom of the troop dispersion problem and lack of supplies was organizational infighting and threats to relieve quartermasters. There is clear evidence of this in an incident between officers at Jackson and Vicksburg. Jackson served as the main depot for Pemberton’s department. Supplies generally flowed from east to west between the two cities. Jackson, as the headquarters, doled out funds for local procurement. In March 1863, Major George L. Gillespie, Officer of Commissary of Subsistence at Vicksburg, reported that Major Theodore Johnston, his counterpart at Jackson, failed to provide Vicksburg with funds needed to purchase provisions. This complaint came about when Major General Stevenson opened an inquiry on whether to relieve Gillespie due to the deplorable conditions of stocks at Vicksburg. Gillespie placed the blame on Theodore Johnston by reporting that he made several requests for funds and supplies from Jackson Depot but received nothing.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Bearss, 169, 177.

<sup>99</sup> J. A. Seddon to J. E. Johnston, February 14, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p., 625.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> G. L. Gillespie to C. L. Stevenson, March 3, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p., 651.

Johnston told Gillespie to request provisions from the Trans-Mississippi Department.<sup>103</sup> As Johnston saw it, the department had supplied the troops beyond its capacity, so Gillespie should reach out to other departments. Of course, cross Mississippi River supply movements were difficult and dangerous, due to the intermittent Federal presence on the Mississippi River, but what else could Johnston or Gillespie do?<sup>104</sup> The supplies and wagons available in the area ran short of demand. On March 4, 1863, Pemberton intervened by directing Stevenson to “make [his] quartermasters and commissaries exert themselves on the Yazoo and Sunflower. What is being done in Sunflower and Deer Creek? I am using every exertion to get corn by railroad. The road was only put in order yesterday. Use your peas and rice.”<sup>105</sup> Peas and rice could be ground as a substitute for flour.

Also in March 1863, the official correspondence within the department demonstrated frustration with the Mississippi transportation network. On March 8, Loring, at Fort Pemberton, reported to Lieutenant General Pemberton that he was low on ammunition and “I have not received or heard from...General Stevenson” who needed “to send [it] at once; it ought to be hurried forward as rapidly as possible.”<sup>106</sup> Loring was looking for his commander, Pemberton, to resolve the issue. Stevenson responded that he did not have the boats so “it cannot be done.”<sup>107</sup> Pemberton supported Stevenson by denigrating Loring’s mission at Fort Pemberton, stating: “Vicksburg and Snyder’s Mill are more important than any other points. Boats must not be detained which are intended to supply them, neither can troops or ammunition be furnished you without them.”<sup>108</sup> By March, despite being on the defense, the Confederates had culminated

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<sup>103</sup> G. L. Gillespie to C. L. Stevenson, March 3, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p., 651.

<sup>104</sup> J. C. Pemberton to B. S. Ewell, March 25, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 688-689.

<sup>105</sup> J. C. Pemberton to C. L. Stevenson, March 4, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 653.

<sup>106</sup> L. Tilghman to J. C. Pemberton, March 8, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 657.

<sup>107</sup> J. C. Pemberton to W. W. Loring, March 9, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 657.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

logistically. To maintain their dispersed posture away from rail and river, wagons had to transport supplies as if supporting an army on offensive maneuver.

By March 14, 1863, food shortages became so prevalent in the Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana that Pemberton directed his pleas of helplessness to Lieutenant General Joseph Johnston in Tennessee, stating:

Nothing prevents large accumulations [in Vicksburg] of corn but the wretched condition of the Southern Railroad, which after every rain is so seriously injured as to delay transportation for several days; hence I have found it necessary at times to require rolling stock of other roads to run their freight through to Vicksburg over the Southern road, not knowing that to-morrow I shall be able to put in a train . . . the condition of the country from heavy rains has made it impracticable to drive [cattle] . . . Meat is, I presume, as scarce in this department as in others. The beef obtained in the fall and winter from Texas will not feed on corn, and there being little or no pasturage, the animals become thin and unfit for issue. There is not sufficient beef in the department . . .<sup>109</sup>

Fearing punishment due to chronic supply shortages, quartermaster officers in the department blamed the private railroads. Mr. W. Goodman, President of the Mississippi Central Railroad, attempted to vindicate his business against the claims, arguing that the delays in rail movement were due to overuse of the trains. He had no workers for repairs of track or engine due to the army recruiting his former employees as soldiers. He further complained that in a recent trip from Canton to Grenada, not more than ninety miles, his train slipped off the track four times because he lacked laborers to make repairs. Incidents such as these caused up to six-hour delays. Not only this, but soldiers in the department stole his reserves of the firewood placed along routes. Stolen firewood led conductors to periodically halt the train to cut wood before proceeding.<sup>110</sup>

In April 1863, on the west side of the river, one of Grant's probes paid dividends. His long-shot plan to send Major General John McClernand to construct roads and march south succeeded. McClernand established a base and launching point opposite the Confederate battery

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<sup>109</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. E. Johnston, March 14, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 669.

<sup>110</sup> W. Goodman to J. A. Seddon, February 16, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 627-628.

at Grand Gulf. His men completed a rough supply route begun the month before, and could now draw supplies overland from Milliken's Bend. Rear Admiral Porter could also at this point send transports and ironclads to McClernand to assist him in crossing the Mississippi River.<sup>111</sup> Porter could not send the ships prior to the establishment of a base because once the ships passed the batteries moving downstream, they would not be able to travel back upstream against the current. The slow movement, while being fired upon from the elevated Vicksburg batteries, would be disastrous. The ships needed an overland supply of coal to ensure survivability, and McClernand provided it. On April 16, Porter successfully passed the Vicksburg Batteries on the Mississippi River. This changed the dynamics of the campaign.<sup>112</sup>

At first, Pemberton failed to recognize the significance of Porter's ships moving south of Vicksburg. Up until May 1863, despite his logistic troubles, Pemberton's forces had succeeded at repelling every Union invasion attempt. Due to these tactical successes, he assumed Grant had given up and was sending troops to support other theaters. On April 5, Pemberton told Joseph Johnston that "Seventeen car-loads of troops...have passed from Memphis...[and] large quantities of commissary stores [are] being carried up river."<sup>113</sup> The next day, he reported to Seddon that the "enemy re-embarked during the preceding night" from the Yazoo region and "was in rapid retreat." He also noted that Grant had conducted "[n]o work on [the] canal for two weeks."<sup>114</sup> Moreover, Pemberton received reports that Grant sent troops toward Memphis to reinforce Rosecrans.<sup>115</sup> With this in mind, Pemberton promised to "forward troops to [Bragg] as fast as transportation can be furnished – about 8,000 men. I am satisfied Rosecrans will be re-

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<sup>111</sup> Ballard, 197-199.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 197-202.

<sup>113</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. E. Johnston, April 5, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 714.

<sup>114</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. A. Seddon, April 6, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 717.

<sup>115</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. Davis, April 7, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 719.

enforced from Grant's army."<sup>116</sup> Pemberton began the transfer of 4,500 men from his southernmost general at Port Hudson, Major General Franklin Gardner, and 3,500 more from one of his northernmost fortifications at Grenada.

Grant had conditioned Pemberton to expect the Union main effort to originate from the bayous in the north. In April 1863, the Union had been attacking from the Yazoo region for months and had previously attempted a run at Vicksburg from the north overland. In Pemberton's mind, the enemy was oriented in the space to his west and north. He also concluded that Porter's ships that passed through the Vicksburg gauntlet were a feint. In April 1863, it seemed to Pemberton that his biggest dilemma was Federal cavalry raids.

Union Brigadier General Benjamin Grierson's multiple-prong ransacking of Mississippi communications and depots from Memphis and Corinth to Enterprise, Panola, and Osyka consumed Pemberton's thoughts.<sup>117</sup> To Pemberton, this was the main threat. On March 20, he appealed to Major General Simon Bolivar Buckner, in Mobile, Alabama, to "send me one or two regiments of cavalry."<sup>118</sup> On March 21, he told Joseph Johnston that it was an "absolute necessity that one or two cavalry regiments be sent to the northeastern counties of this State, to protect the planters in putting in their crops."<sup>119</sup> The same day, Pemberton asked if Joseph Johnston had "separated the cavalry with General Van Dorn from my command entirely? If so, it very much diminishes my ability to defend the northern portion of the State."<sup>120</sup> Then on March 24, he attempted to convince Buckner that sending cavalry was "for our mutual good...to enable

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<sup>116</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. E. Johnston, April 12, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 738.

<sup>117</sup> D. Ruggles to J. R. Waddy, March 6, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 654-655; S. Cooper to J.C. Pemberton, April 20, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 767-768.

<sup>118</sup> J. C. Pemberton to S. B. Buckner, March 20, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 679.

<sup>119</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. E. Johnston, March 21, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 681.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*



planters to save crops.”<sup>121</sup> Colonel Benjamin S. Ewell temporarily reassured Pemberton by promising “General Van Dorn is not permanently detached from your department.”<sup>122</sup> Two weeks later, on April 3, Ewell rolled back that statement by informing Pemberton that “General Van Dorn’s cavalry is much more needed in [Tennessee] than in...Mississippi.”<sup>123</sup> Desperate and frustrated, Pemberton then pestered Governor Pettus all of April by “urgently request[ing] that [Pettus] do this impressment” of horses “as early as possible.”<sup>124</sup>

By April 13, the Federal cavalry opened a path for the Union to advance toward Holly Springs and threatened the possibility of seizing depots in the area. Confederate Brigadier General James R. Chalmers requested that Pemberton advance “an army or a considerable portion of one” toward “the Tallahatchie” to create an entrenched outpost “at Cold Water Depot,” which, if held for two more months, would enable the Confederacy to “save the abundant crop” from the Federals.<sup>125</sup> On the same day, Pemberton informed Joseph Johnston that “[rail]cars cannot run above Okolona. I am now establishing depots of corn at Enterprise and Meridian” further to the south to avoid the Federal threat.<sup>126</sup> On April 17, Pemberton informed Joseph Johnston that he “d[id] not think it safe to locate depots above Macon on the road” due to a lack of cavalry to protect it.<sup>127</sup> Federal cavalry had pushed south from Corinth forcing the depots above Macon to flee the area. Pemberton concluded that the Union Army was encroaching into Mississippi out of necessity, stating, the “Army of Middle Tennessee might be forced to take such position as to

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<sup>121</sup> J. C. Pemberton to S. B. Buckner, March 24, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 687.

<sup>122</sup> B. S. Ewell to J. C. Pemberton, March 22, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 684.

<sup>123</sup> B. S. Ewell to J. C. Pemberton, April 3, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 712.

<sup>124</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. J. Pettus, April 27, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 794.

<sup>125</sup> J. R. Chalmers to R. W. Memminger, April 13, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 740.

<sup>126</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. E. Johnston, April 13, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 739.

<sup>127</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. E. Johnston, April 17, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 752-753.

require supplies to be drawn from Northeastern Mississippi...to be fed from the same district” as the Confederate soldiers.<sup>128</sup>

Until May 1, 1863, Pemberton ignored Brigadier General John Bowen’s reports about Grant’s actions opposite the river from Grand Gulf. He also disregarded warnings from the citizens of Louisiana about Federal thieves between Milliken’s Bend and Hard Times.<sup>129</sup> On April 2, he reported to Jefferson Davis that he saw the force gathering at Hard Times as a “demonstration.”<sup>130</sup> He was skeptical of Bowen’s reports. Undeterred, Bowen continued to send daily reports throughout April detailing Federal actions. Pemberton persisted in doing nothing to assist Bowen.<sup>131</sup>

Falling into the presented Federal narrative, Stevenson maintained that Union troops at Grand Gulf represented a feint, and he advised Pemberton that once troops moved south the Union would attack Vicksburg from the north. Stevenson was concerned about losing troops to protect other areas in the department. Simultaneous with the upcoming river crossing, Sherman was conducting a demonstration at Snyder’s Bluff.<sup>132</sup> As late as April 28, Stevenson continued to balk at orders from Pemberton to send 5,000 troops to reinforce Bowen.<sup>133</sup> In a compromise, Pemberton directed Stevenson to keep the 5,000 men at Vicksburg, but have them ready to move to Grand Gulf in case of need. The next day, on April 29, when the Union ironclads fired on Grand Gulf, Pemberton ordered Stevenson to “send on the column I directed as soon as possible” with a promise that he would replace the troops with stock from Jackson.<sup>134</sup> In response to

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<sup>128</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. E. Johnston, April 17, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 752-753.

<sup>129</sup> Ballard, 203.

<sup>130</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. Davis, April 2, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 709.

<sup>131</sup> Ballard, 204-207.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>133</sup> C. L. Stevenson to J. C. Pemberton, April 28, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 800.

Pemberton's order, Stevenson reminded Pemberton that "[t]he [Union] transports are at the mouth of Chickasaw Bayou to-night; have not yet landed. We are ready for them."<sup>135</sup> But despite his concerns, Stevenson did attempt to transfer the troops. However, his wagons were two days travel away at Jackson, so he sent men without supply wagons. Due to low supply, "[t]he re-enforcements" Stevenson sent "from [Vicksburg] to General Bowen" had a quantity of ammunition that "did not . . . exceed 80 rounds per man. Constant engagements will soon exhaust that quantity."<sup>136</sup> He only had about nine rounds per man for the remainder of his troops at Vicksburg, where he should have had "200 rounds per man."<sup>137</sup>

On April 29, the planned Union assault across the river failed when Bowen's artillery convinced the Federals that they needed to find a less contested landing area. Grant looked downstream. A slave encountered by Union forces informed Grant about Bruinsburg, a city with a road that led to Port Gibson. On April 30, a day behind schedule, Federal troops made their way across the river by shuttles from navy transports, while the US Navy ironclads distracted the Confederates at Grand Gulf. Upon landing, Grant and McClellan goaded troops forward to Port Gibson. Pemberton described that,

[a] furious battle has been going on since daylight just below Port Gibson. General Bowen reports General [E. D.] Tracy killed. The Virginia Battery was captured by [the] enemy . . . Bowen says he is outnumbered trebly; he has about 8,000. Enemy can cross all his army from Hard Times to Bruinsburg, below Pierre Bayou. Large re-enforcements should be sent me from other departments. Enemy's movement threatens Jackson, and, if successful, cuts off Vicksburg and Port Hudson from the east. Am hurrying all re-enforcements I possibly can to Bowen. Enemy's success in passing our batteries has completely changed character of defense.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ballard, 213-217; J. C. Pemberton to C. L. Stevenson, April 29, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 804.

<sup>135</sup> C. L. Stevenson to J. C. Pemberton, April 29, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 804.

<sup>136</sup> C. L. Stevenson to J. C. Taylor, May 2, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 819.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. Davis, May 1, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 807.

On May 1, the Federals claimed a victory at Port Gibson. Pemberton reported “General Bowen has...fallen back behind Bayou Pierre. He considered it indispensable for his safety. He will endeavor to hold it until re-enforcements arrive. I am now cut off from telegraphic communication with Grand Gulf and Port Gibson.”<sup>139</sup> Over the course of two days, Grant would ferry 22,000 men across the Mississippi River, the largest American amphibious crossing to date.<sup>140</sup>

On the same day as the landing at Bruinsburg, Sherman fired on the Yazoo Bluffs. Stevenson reported “[t]he enemy have been shelling Snyder’s at long range most of the day. Forney thinks that five regiments have landed at Blake’s lower quarters.”<sup>141</sup> However, Sherman fell short of selling the attack to Pemberton who, by the beginning of May, started to realize that the main effort was in the south. On May 1, he reported there was “[n]o further demonstration from force of enemy in Chickasaw Bayou.”<sup>142</sup> Sherman had pulled back.

To advance and confront the approaching Federals, Pemberton would need to mobilize his provisions to march along with his army. However, his wagons were, by now, spread hundreds of miles apart across the department. As a result, he attempted to consolidate and mobilize without the operational reach to support it, so all he could throw at Grant were piecemeal forces. In his earlier choices, he had sacrificed endurance and momentum to strengthen his protection of the terrain. In doing this, he failed to anticipate the need to be able to logistically conduct offensive tactics. His logistics network was rigid and incapable of improvisation as the conditions evolved.<sup>143</sup> At this point, his army physically could not transition to the offensive. Pemberton had no options. He could neither attack nor flee.

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<sup>139</sup> Ballard, 218-224; J. C. Pemberton to J. Davis, May 1, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 808.

<sup>140</sup> Ballard, 205-206, 224.

<sup>141</sup> C. L. Stevenson to J. C. Pemberton, April 30, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 806.

<sup>142</sup> Ballard, 213-217; J. C. Pemberton to S. Cooper, May 1, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 808.

Pemberton's troops made several disjointed stands to prevent Grant from moving north, but were unable to pull together a sustainable force before Jackson fell.<sup>144</sup> On May 15, the Union wrecked the capital, rendering it useless to the Confederacy. Joseph Johnston, with a small army of 6,000 located at the city, disengaged and fell back knowing that he would be no match for Grant's superior force. Following Johnston's retreat, the Federals wrecked rail and road from Jackson to Vicksburg, and in all other directions around the capital. They also destroyed the foundries that could produce artillery, ammunition, steam boilers, and rails for railroads.<sup>145</sup> Then the Union turned their sights on Vicksburg.

Pemberton decided to make a stand on the east side of the Big Black River, at Edwards Station, where he established defensive works perpendicular to the railroad leading to Jackson. Then, after a council with his generals, he shifted his posture from defensive to offensive in hopes of re-opening an operational line of communication. He would attempt to flank the Federal left. Unfortunately, he neglected to conduct a reconnaissance. On May 15, as he planned to get underway, he realized he needed provisions from Vicksburg before the army could move, so he telegraphed Major General Jonathan N. Forney to:

[s]end immediately to Edwards Depot at least thirty wagons, and more, if possible, for reserve ammunition train. Send immediately the cars ordered to be loaded with ammunition for field artillery to Edwards, and let the wagons come empty to Edwards Depot as rapidly as possible, and take on ammunition here. This is all-important. I shall take from General Vaughn twenty wagons, if he has them, to be replaced by wagons sent from Vicksburg.<sup>146</sup>

These were hardly the preparations a general wants to make on the day of an attack. When the newly-named Army of Vicksburg finally marched, they came across a swollen Baker's Creek, where the rains had washed away a bridge. This forced the Confederates to halt and turn

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<sup>143</sup> FM 3-0, 1-23; ADP 4-0, 1.

<sup>144</sup> Ballard, 281-282.

<sup>145</sup> Gabel, *The Vicksburg Campaign*, 9.

<sup>146</sup> Ballard, 282-286; J. C. Pemberton to J. N. Forney, May 15, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 882.

back. On May 15, near Champion Hill, the Confederates encountered a large Union force and, rather than fight in the dark, they made camp. Grant maneuvered during the night for advantage. Pemberton did not. On May 16, just before the battle, Pemberton received a letter from Joseph Johnston stating: “[t]he only mode by which we can unite is by your moving directly to Clinton, informing me, that we may move to that point with about 6,000.”<sup>147</sup> Pemberton responded, “[y]our letter, written on the road to Canton” found my “army on the middle of the road to Raymond. The order of countermarch has been issued.”<sup>148</sup> Pemberton decided to follow Johnston’s order and escape to Clinton via the Brownsville Road. Not forgetting the enemy directly in front of the Army of Vicksburg, Loring suggested that Pemberton instead should form a battle line. The battle had already commenced despite Pemberton’s plans to flee. Pemberton, changing his mind yet again, agreed. He then vacillated throughout the day on whether to go to Clinton or Vicksburg and whether to attack, defend, or retreat. In the end, it was a poor tactical performance by the head Confederate General in the department.<sup>149</sup> After the loss at Champion Hill, the Army of Vicksburg retreated to form a secondary line guarding the Big Black Bridge.

In the battle of Big Black Bridge, “the enemy attacked me [Pemberton] on my right, left, and center. My troops, although strongly posted behind breastworks and protected in rifle-pits, were forced from their positions, owing to the demoralization consequent upon the retreat of yesterday.”<sup>150</sup> He went on that the “army has fallen back to a line of intrenchments around Vicksburg . . . this retreat will render it necessary to abandon works at Snyder’s Mill, which has been accordingly ordered.”<sup>151</sup> He further noted, “I greatly regret that I felt compelled to make the

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<sup>147</sup> J. E. Johnston to J. C. Pemberton to J. N. Forney, May 15, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 882.

<sup>148</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. E. Johnston, May 16, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 884.

<sup>149</sup> Ballard, 287-294.

<sup>150</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. E. Johnston, May 17, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 887.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

advance beyond Big Black, which has proved so disastrous in its result.”<sup>152</sup> Upon retreat to Vicksburg, the Confederates realized that the east side of the city’s defenses had significant gaps. Confederate soldiers would make improvements to the defenses and set the battle lines for a month and a half to follow.<sup>153</sup> After May 18, Pemberton’s men had no access to the rivers and had to dig wells just to drink and cook.<sup>154</sup>

He thought he had sixty days of food and supply at Vicksburg. A continuous theme during Pemberton’s command was his desire to build enough stock in the city’s depot to support a contingent of 17,500 men in a siege for up to five months.<sup>155</sup> He set this goal as early as October 1862.<sup>156</sup> It was an expression of his notion that, if Vicksburg came under attack, the best course of action would be to fall back on the city’s defenses and await relief. But, the stock levels of ammunition, meat, and grain fell below target as the transportation network deteriorated through the conduct of the campaign.<sup>157</sup> After an eight-month Union campaign and a forty-seven-day siege, on July 4, 1863, Lieutenant General Pemberton surrendered 29,491 men to Major General Grant. The capitulated garrison constituted five percent of the Confederacy’s total ground forces and severed the Confederacy in two.<sup>158</sup>

The last official supply report sent from Vicksburg to Jackson on May 12, 1863, before the capitulation on July 4, put Vicksburg’s 30,000 troops at thirty-one days of rations in bacon, four days of lard, thirteen days of bread, fourteen days of corn, ten days of meal, and eight days

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<sup>152</sup> J. C. Pemberton to J. E. Johnston, May 17, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 887.

<sup>153</sup> Ballard, 304-320.

<sup>154</sup> Gabel, *Staff Ride Handbook*, 45.

<sup>155</sup> Gabel, *The Vicksburg Campaign*, 15.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-44.

<sup>158</sup> Ballard, 398.

of flour.<sup>159</sup> This is far below the desired five months of rations as directed by Pemberton when he first took command. Of course, the troops in the fort were almost double the number he expected, and a few days into the siege he cut his soldiers' meals to half rations.<sup>160</sup> But, no matter how long the rations lasted, and despite Pemberton's plan, no one came to his rescue.

## Conclusion

By October 1, 1862, when Pemberton took command of the Department of Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana, President Davis had recently departed from a terrain focused strategy for the Confederacy. Davis knew by this point that he lacked the means to defend the South's perimeter, so he adjusted and concentrated forces at select points to counter the blows of the large Federal armies. Yet, Pemberton's insistence on spreading his forces to fortifications dispersed throughout the department suggests that he failed to grasp the reasoning behind Davis's changed approach. Pemberton remained terrain focused. He banked on being able to hold Grant on the west side of the Mississippi indefinitely. Because of his dispersed approach, he could not prepare for what would come after Grant crossed the river, meaning that he could not quickly form a maneuverable and concentrated army of his own. In seeking to minimize the risk of Grant landing in Mississippi, he increased the risk that he would not be able to counter Grant after the crossing.

The dispersion of troops, from October 1862 to April 1863, drained Pemberton's tactical transportation assets and made his logistics system rigid. His logisticians could not respond to the army's needs even while not maneuvering. Emplacing forces across the entirety of the state meant that his wagons had to be spread thin across the entirety of the state as well. It is true that the Confederate influx of troops into Mississippi was necessary to match the Federal influx of troops. Additionally, he could not help losing the Mississippi River to the Union. He did not possess a navy to defend it. But, he did not need the Mississippi River to supply his forces. One

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<sup>159</sup> Report of Stores in Vicksburg, April 30, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 868.

<sup>160</sup> Report of W. A. Warner, May 12, 1863, *OR*, ser. 24, vol. 3, p. 866-869.



advantage he had while Grant tried to close his operational supply lines was that most of his supplies could move on tactical lines because they came from within the state. His army could have survived without any use of the river and with minimal use of rail. All he needed were his wagons, which are what he sacrificed by not posturing in a more centralized manner.

In the late 1862 overland campaign, Pemberton learned that he could win by establishing a defensive protection line, appealing for help from other armies and attempting to strike the enemy's lines of communication. He used this overland stencil as a pattern for victory throughout the remainder of the campaign. First, he strengthened his defensive line around the entire perimeter. He established Fort Pemberton, fortifications on the Tallahatchie, built up Grand Gulf, and increased troops presences in many smaller strongholds. Then, he appealed to General Kirby Smith of the Western Division to assist him in striking Grant's base at Milliken's Bend, to General Braxton Bragg for Cavalry to assist him against Grierson in the North, and to General Buckner for the same reason. Then, after Grant crossed the river, Pemberton thought he would be able to strike at Grant's supply lines, which led to the bungled Battle at Champion Hill. Pemberton's pattern of behavior never shifted with his environment's changing conditions.

In focusing on terrain rather than the enemy, in trying to minimize risk and protect everything, and in failing to adapt as the conditions demanded, Pemberton ceded control of tempo and the momentum to the enemy. By not attacking, he allowed Grant to decide when battles would take place, and when units would rest. Dispersing his forces led to want of horse at every location, which rendered Pemberton defenseless against cavalry raids and drained Confederate strength prior to Grant's crossing. On April 16, 1863, the day Porter passed the batteries, Pemberton's troops were spread so thin that it would have been difficult, even with great intelligence about enemy intentions, to draw in all of his forces and march to a landing site by April 30. His logistics network was rigid and not capable of improvisation as the conditions evolved. Due to his prior decisions, Pemberton lacked options. He could neither attack nor retreat.

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