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OPERATIONAL RAIDS:  
CAVALRY IN THE VICKSBURG CAMPAIGN, 1862-1863

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

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

PAUL C. JUSSEL, CPT, USA  
B.A., Virginia Military Institute, 1979

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas  
1990

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This study is a historical analysis of the cavalry raids led by Confederate Major Gen. Van Dorn and Forrest in December 1862 and Union Colonel Grierson in April 1863. Each raid is examined in detail based on the historical data available and focuses on the operational concerns and considerations of Union and Confederate commanders. Some of the conclusions that can be drawn from this investigation are: the use of cavalry had evolved to large, independent units for separate operations; the operational benefit of cavalry was demonstrated first by the Confederacy, then refined and used by the Federals during the Vicksburg Campaign; the synchronization and orchestration of units from different commands against a common target produced significant benefits; and sufficiently strong units, capable of self-sustainment, can be detached from the main body of an army to operate behind enemy lines to destroy the enemy infrastructure. The study concludes that operational raids can be a significant economical operation to attack an enemy center of gravity without using the bulk of the army. The historical examples from the Vicksburg Campaign can be compared to today's force structure to show that capability is limited for the modern commander. *Keywords: Theses; Cavalry; Military operations. (RWS)*

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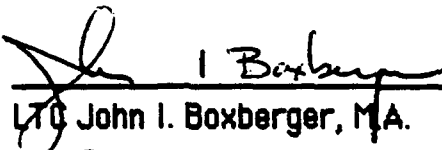
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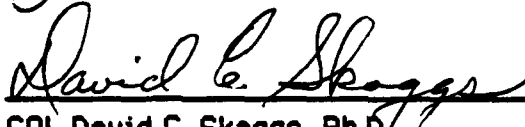
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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (Reference to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

OPERATIONAL RAIDS: CAVALRY IN THE VICKSBURG CAMPAIGN, 1862-1863,  
by Captain Paul C. Jussel, USA, 75 pages.

This study is a historical analysis of the cavalry raids led by Confederate Major Generals Earl Van Dorn and Nathan Bedford Forrest in December 1862 and Union Colonel Benjamin Grierson in April 1863. Each raid is examined in detail based on the historical data available and focuses on the operational concerns and considerations of Union and Confederate commanders.

Some of the conclusions that can be drawn from this investigation are: the use of cavalry had evolved to large, independent units for separate operations; the operational benefit of cavalry was demonstrated first by the Confederacy, then refined and used by the Federals during the Vicksburg Campaign; the synchronization and orchestration of units from different commands against a common target produced significant benefits; and sufficiently strong units, capable of self-sustainment, can be detached from the main body of an army to operate behind enemy lines to destroy the enemy infrastructure.

The study concludes that operational raids can be a significant economical operation to attack an enemy center of gravity without using the bulk of the army. The historical examples from the Vicksburg Campaign can be compared to today's force structure to show that capability is limited for the modern commander.

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Though it may seem commonplace and quaint, I must acknowledge the patience of my wife and son who, for seemingly countless hours, rarely saw their husband and father. The Dungeon was a dark place to work, but their good humor made it all worthwhile. Thanks for everything.

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## CHAPTER 1

AirLand Battle doctrine stresses the need for initiative, agility, depth, and synchronization. Initiative implies not only taking action within the commander's intent, but also forcing "the enemy to conform to our operational purpose and tempo." Agility concerns the physical ability to react faster than the enemy can, as well as the mental capability to understand changing situations and create a new plan or scheme based on the new circumstances. Depth, "the extension of operations in space, time, and resources," and synchronization, "the arrangement of battlefield activities in time, space, and purpose to produce maximum relative combat power at the decisive point," complement the other tenets to produce the conditions that lead to our intended end state - battlefield victory.<sup>1</sup>

Yet victory is not possible without the clear and purposeful application of a nation's resources against the enemy's source of strength and will: his center of gravity. The application of power in a particular area, a theater of war or theater of operations, must be coordinated at a high level, a level the US Army currently terms "operational". The operational level of war concerns the orchestration of all available forces in a coordinated effort, a campaign, against the enemy's center of gravity. Within the overall framework of a campaign, many ways and means exist to attack the enemy's center of gravity; one of them is a raid on a vulnerable supply base or line of communication. The raid, as an operational mission, is a very efficient and effective method of attacking the weak link of a

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<sup>1</sup>US Army, FM 100-5, Operations (1986): 15-17.

numerically superior enemy. In an economy of force role, with the appropriate priority, a small number of highly trained soldiers or a relatively small unit can successfully perform the mission.

By definition, a raid is designed to "confuse the enemy" or "to destroy his installations."<sup>2</sup> Though currently limited in scope to a small scale operation, large units can perform this mission successfully. History is replete with examples of large armies being stymied in their efforts by a far smaller force raiding into its rear and destroying its support system. From the American Civil War, Major General Philip Sheridan's Trevilian Station Raid, launched in June, 1864 with 8000 men in two divisions, is an example. Its purpose was twofold. Sheridan was first tasked to destroy the supply lines from the Shenandoah Valley to the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia stationed around Richmond. His secondary mission was to draw the majority of the Confederate cavalry away from the main army to allow the Union Army of the Potomac to cross the James River unmolested. Though failing in the first task, Sheridan succeeded in the second task.<sup>3</sup> This operational raid focused not only on the logistical lifelines, but also on the Confederate instrument of operational influence, the cavalry. The real Federal success lay in the control of the Confederate cavalry; they had to ride to the beat set by Sheridan's troopers.

Another example was when Major General James Wilson, with over 13,000 troopers organized into three divisions, rode into the untouched

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<sup>2</sup>US Army, FM 101-5-1, Operational Terms and Symbols (1985): 1-59.

<sup>3</sup>James Schefer, "The Tactical and Strategic Evolution of Cavalry during the American Civil War" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toledo, 1982): 228-229.

Confederate farmland of Alabama and Georgia in March and April, 1865.<sup>4</sup> This raid destroyed significant amounts of materiel and industry. Its success heralded the use of a powerful, mobile, well-equipped force whose sole aim was to disrupt or destroy an enemy's infrastructure before the main, slow-moving forces joined battle.

In the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War, the Russian commander in the Far East, General Kuropatkin, took advantage of Japanese dispositions to launch a powerful raid in January, 1905. The Japanese supply line was dangerously exposed for over 100 miles from the port of Newchwang to the front lines around Mukden. The Russians assembled a cavalry force of 7000 troopers under Major General Mishchenko to penetrate the Japanese lines and smash the depot and railway at Newchwang. The cavalry quickly pierced the front lines and struck the infrastructure that supported the enemy's ability to wage war. The benefits of the raid included not only the destruction of the supply base and its rail network, but also the delay of reinforcements to the area.<sup>5</sup> The Russian generals appreciated the situation and used the best arm available to accomplish the task. To forward looking observers of this war, and to other military writers of the period, the traditional role of cavalry was fundamentally different. Its role as the shock and exploitation force had changed and new techniques and equipment were required to keep pace with new missions, such as operational raids.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>James Jones, Yankee Blitzkrieg: Wilson's Raid through Alabama and Georgia (1976): 1; Schefer: 240.

<sup>5</sup>Gustav Wrangel, The Cavalry in the Russo-Japanese War (1907): 19, 32.

<sup>6</sup>Theophilous Rodenbough, "Cavalry of the Civil War: Its Evolution and Influence" in Francis T. Miller, ed., The Photographic History of the Civil War (10 volumes, 1911) 4: 18; General De Négrier, "Some Lessons of the Russo-Japanese War" The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution 50 (May, 1906): 692-693; Henry M. Lazelle, "Important Improvements in

The leaders of the new Red Army demonstrated their understanding of the operational raid during the 1919-1920 Russo-Polish War with their First Cavalry Army. When Polish troops penetrated Soviet defenses in the Ukraine, the Cavalry Army was brought into the area. Led by Semyon Budyonny, the cavalrymen participated in the counter-offensive during May and June, 1920 and successfully turned the Poles back. The Cavalry Army, consisting of four divisions and 16,000 troopers, became the most successful unit as it rode to the front, dismounted to fight, and remounted to attack exposed flanks or to pursue the fleeing enemy. Its ability to penetrate the Polish defenses and attack garrisons in the depth of the battlefield produced tremendous advantages for the burgeoning Red Army. The success of Soviet arms in the Polish War can, in some measure, be attributed to the First Cavalry Army.<sup>7</sup>

The American Army rediscovered the operational raid when it flexed its military might in the Second World War. Though mechanization had displaced the horse and troopers were now mounted in tanks and armored cars, the idea of operational raids to disrupt an enemy was never far from ex-cavalrymen's thoughts. In particular, Lieutenant General George S. Patton's Third Army showed the benefits to be derived from coordinated operational and tactical actions. The actions of the XII Corps of the Third Army around Nancy and Arracourt in September, 1944 illustrated these benefits.

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the Art of War during the Past Twenty Years and Their Probable Effect on Future Military Operations" The Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States 11: 351-354.

<sup>7</sup>Norman Davies, White Eagle, Red Star (1972): 116-125.

With the Third Army approaching the Lorraine region of France in September, 1944, the 4th Armored Division was used as a raiding force against the German defenders of Nancy. When the 35th and 80th (US) Infantry Divisions failed to make sufficient progress against the 3d and 15th *Panzergrenadier* and 553d *Volksgranadier* Divisions defending along the Moselle river, the 4th AD was committed through the shallow bridgeheads to create a larger lodgement. The Division, however, penetrated enemy lines and, with "a front equal to the width of the lead tank," continued for 45 miles to the vicinity of Arracourt, 15 miles beyond Nancy. The 4th AD initially destroyed supplies and command and control facilities and networks, then engaged German reinforcements as they moved forward. More importantly, the enemy was forced to evacuate Nancy without a fight because of the 4th AD's action in its rear.<sup>8</sup> The operational raid proved very useful in disrupting enemy rear areas; its continued use by the Third Army resulted in significant gain.

What, then, are the characteristics of an operational raid? What conditions are necessary for the success of this sort of mission? What type of force can best accomplish the mission? The first American use of this force and mission can be traced to the cavalry raids of the Vicksburg Campaign of 1862-1863. This study assesses the December 1862 raids of Confederate Major Generals Earl Van Dorn and Nathan Bedford Forrest on Union Major General Ulysses Grant's supply lines and base at Holly Springs, Mississippi and the April 1863 raid led by Union Colonel Benjamin Grierson against Confederate Lieutenant General John Pemberton's lines of

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<sup>8</sup>Christopher Gabel, The 4th Armored Division in the Encirclement of Nancy (1986): 15-16.

communication. It first focuses on doctrine and tactics of the cavalry as the war started, then proceeds through a historical analysis of the raids. The focus of the analysis is threefold. It will highlight the operational concerns of the opposing commanders by examining the organization and disposition of their forces during the December-April period. Second, it will show the conditions each commander believed existed just prior to launching the raids. Then, the desired results and the actual results are compared and assessed. Finally, after evaluating the results of the raids in light of modern military doctrine and force structure, an assessment of the American Army's ability to conduct similar operations is made.

## CHAPTER 2

All of the maneuvering by Northern and Southern generals was influenced by the military doctrine of the time. Napoleon was the model most of the leaders had studied. The vast majority of the West Point trained officers had been influenced by the teachings of Dennis Hart Mahan and one of his most popular pre-war students, Henry Halleck. They both espoused many of the Napoleonic concepts on war, particularly those on bases of operations and combined arms, as interpreted by Antoine Henri Jomini. A successful strategy was offensive. In order to effectively prosecute an offensive strategy against the enemy, strong bases needed to be established, first in friendly territory and then progressively deeper in enemy territory. Grant himself observed:

**It is generally regarded as an axiom of war that all great armies moving in an enemy's country should start from a base of supplies, which should be fortified and guarded, and to which the army is to fall back in case of disaster.<sup>1</sup>**

This thinking served as the basis for how both sides initially prosecuted the war. The major limitation was that it did not seem to allow an army to operate without a base. This restrictive thinking, as well as the practical fear of risking defeat, prevented much deviation from this norm until absolute necessity dictated it be done. Grant and Pemberton each had this sort of "base of supplies" and each kept them protected. Each advanced their

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Carter III, The Final Fortress: The Campaign for Vicksburg, 1862-1863 (1980): 87.

bases as the situation allowed and each believed their troop dispositions protected the bases.

Though Jomini was impressed with the mobility of the cavalry, he did not envision its operational use as a means unto itself to attack an enemy; he advocated its use during battle in combination with other arms to strike the enemy. Thus, cavalry was principally designed, equipped, and organized to be the exploitation force on the battlefield. It was kept in reserve until needed at the critical moment during the battle, when it was committed to break through and pursue a wavering infantry line. This outlook pervaded the thinking of most commanders on both sides as the war started. Generals were unprepared to think of cavalry in terms of a fast-moving, hard hitting force. Nothing they had experienced at West Point, in Mexico, or on the plains against the Indians taught them to think of a raids such as Van Dorn's, Forrest's, or Grierson's. The raids also served to challenge the traditional concepts of supply bases and secure lines of communications.

Equally influential in the development of cavalry was the small number of available regiments and their lack of training. Early Federal mobilization efforts concentrated on infantry units; it was believed the war would be over before any sizable cavalry force could be raised, equipped, trained, and employed to influence the war. The few regiments that were raised spent more time learning to ride and care for its horses than in learning the tactical concepts of Jomini. The Confederate cavalrymen, though better individual horsemen, fared little better with the tactical concepts. As a result, no commander wanted to risk his small mounted force, a force he might need during a critical portion of an upcoming battle, on missions that required long-distance detached service. This sort of



thinking relegated the cavalry, especially in the Western theater, to duty as couriers and glorified headquarters escorts and guards. On occasion, the troopers would be used as scouts, but this mission was often assigned to only a small number. There was little opportunity for a regimental commander to exercise his entire unit on a mission. These doctrinal dilemmas were being challenged and rethought by leaders on both sides as the struggle in the West centered on the Mississippi River and Vicksburg.

The Mississippi River valley became something of an obsession with the Union high command early in the war. President Abraham Lincoln's personal feeling and upbringing gave him an understanding of the importance of the river. Gubernatorial influence helped affect the decision-making process also; Governor Richard Yates of Illinois had early guided the Union hand in the taking of St. Louis, Missouri.<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant General Winfield Scott's plan for subduing the rebellious states called for a seizure of the Mississippi to divide the South. He assessed that they could not survive without use of that artery.<sup>3</sup>

Though not fully appreciative of Scott's plan, Lincoln, as the Commander-in-Chief, generally guided Union forces to the purpose of seizing the Mississippi. Control of the river would guarantee a separation of the Trans-Mississippi area from the remainder of the Confederacy. Texas, Arkansas, and portions of Louisiana would be useless to the Richmond authorities.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, it would deny all of the resources of that region to the eastern Rebels. A Northern controlled river would serve to

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<sup>2</sup>Bruce Catton, The Coming Fury (1961): 374.

<sup>3</sup>Catton: 438-441.

<sup>4</sup>William S. McFeely, Grant: A Biography (1981): 123.

protect the flank for any Union Army advancing south. The tremendous economic impact on the loyal Western states due to their dependence on river traffic, and the political clout that impact generated, was also influential in early Union strategy. Politically, geographically, and militarily, Lincoln was driven to concentrate initial operations in the West on opening the river. Capture of New Orleans in May, 1862 was the thrust from the underbelly of the South. Battles at Mill Springs, Kentucky; Forts Henry and Donelson, and Shiloh, Tennessee; and Corinth, Mississippi all served to focus Union might on the Confederate-held portions of the Mississippi.<sup>5</sup>

By the summer of 1862, Union armies had pushed the Confederates back along the riverlines into southern Tennessee and northern Mississippi. The advance up the Mississippi was stalled at Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Samuel Carter described the Federal direction at this point as focused on the "relatively narrow corridor" between Memphis and Baton Rouge. That corridor was the only link east and west for the Confederacy.<sup>6</sup>

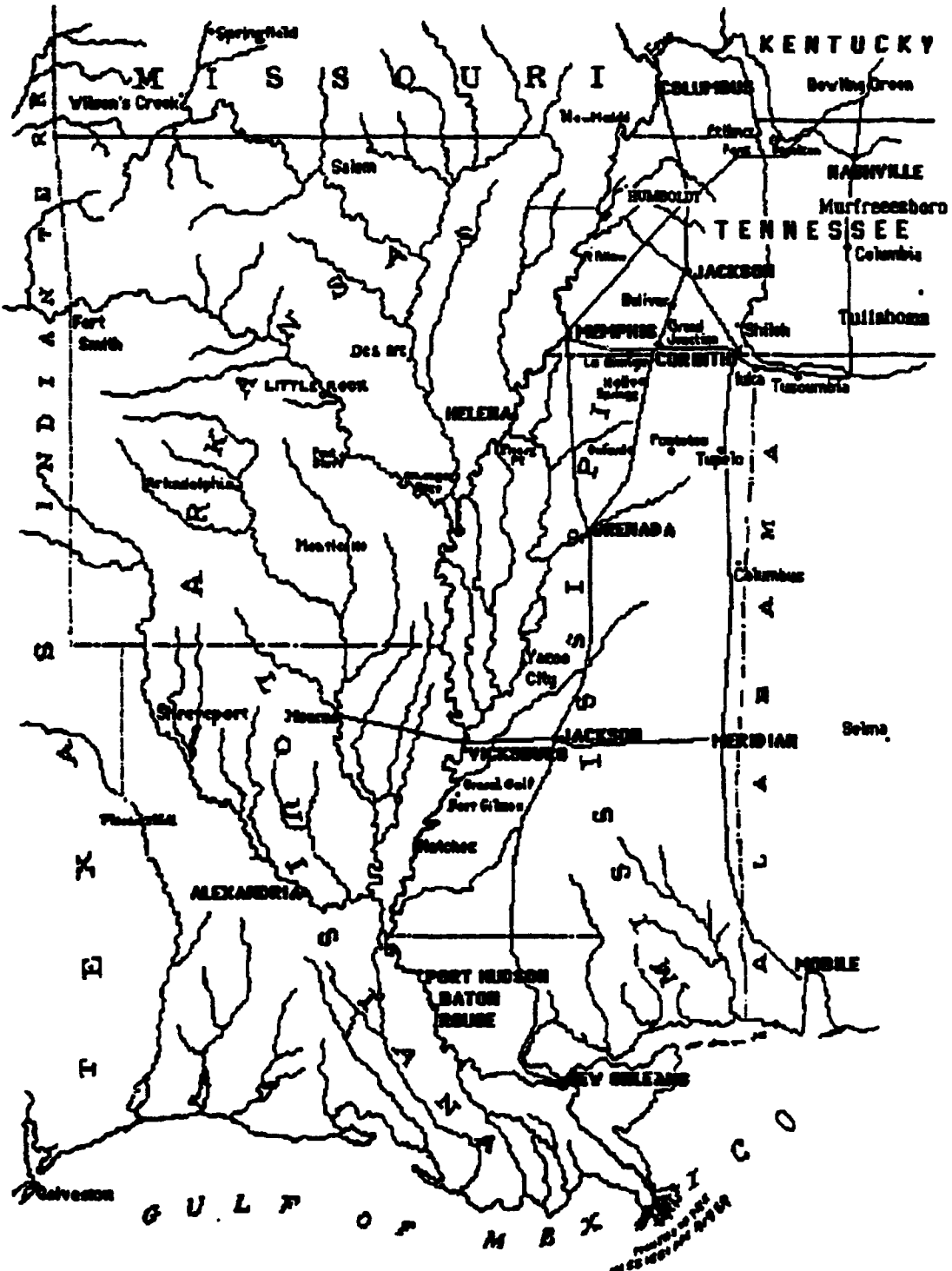
Why Vicksburg? What made that city the objective for the Federal forces along the river? Situated on the first high ground joining the river below Memphis, it served as a conduit for supplies from the West. It was the terminus of the only remaining east-west railroad along the Mississippi still in Confederate hands.<sup>7</sup> Not only the railroad, but the majority of the trafficable roads radiated out from Vicksburg. Goods from Arkansas and

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<sup>5</sup>Archer Jones, Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg (1961): 5-6.

<sup>6</sup>Carter: 81.

<sup>7</sup>Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant (2 volumes, 1885) 1: 422.



Adapted from Battles and Leaders of the Civil War

Louisiana were channeled into Vicksburg, then shipped out through Jackson into Alabama and other Confederate states. Its shipping facilities were the largest in the state of Mississippi. The infrastructure necessary to support the steamboats and railways existed before the war started and served as a magnet not only to hold the Confederates in place, but also to draw in the Federals.

Union Major General Henry Halleck seemed poised to capture the city during the early summer of 1862, but he failed to act quickly. Once he was called to Washington to act as the General-in-Chief of the Union armies, his western Army was reorganized. Major General U. S. Grant assumed command of the District of Tennessee and its Armies of the Tennessee and of the Mississippi. After another reorganization in October, 1862, Grant's focus became the Mississippi River and Major General Earl Van Dorn's Confederate forces. With the instructions "You must judge for yourself the best use to be made of your troops," Halleck left a great deal of discretion to Grant to find his own way to Vicksburg.<sup>8</sup>

In early November, Grant moved his forces south from their bases in Tennessee and Mississippi. Major General James McPherson, with two divisions, left Bolivar; Major General Charles Hamilton, with three divisions, left Corinth. Their objectives were initially Holly Springs and Grenada.<sup>9</sup> Though Major General William Sherman was in Memphis with his three divisions, he did not initially move south. When Grant thought he was opposing 30,000 Confederates, he telegraphed Sherman, "I cannot move from

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<sup>8</sup>Allen Nevins, War Becomes Revolution, 1862-1863 (1960): 154.

<sup>9</sup>Grant to Halleck, 2-4 Nov 1862, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (128 volumes, 1880-1901) Series 1, Volume 17, Part 1: 467. (Hereafter cited as QR.)

[La Grange, Tennessee] with a force sufficient to handle that number without gloves."<sup>10</sup> Supposedly, Sherman's forces would provide these gloves; he moved southeast from Memphis towards Grenada in late November. Throughout November, Grant's forces inexorably pushed the Confederates back, first to Holly Springs, then to Grenada. But in early December, Grant formulated a new plan. He reorganized his forces for a dual push from Memphis and Holly Springs. Sherman was to return to Memphis and, with four divisions, move down the Mississippi River to attack Vicksburg from the northwest. Grant, with the remainder of the Army of the Tennessee, would continue pushing overland towards Vicksburg. This would keep pressure on the Confederates in Mississippi and prevent the forces opposing Grant from sending reinforcements to a then weakly held Vicksburg.<sup>11</sup>

The Confederates, of course, had been working very hard to prevent all of this from happening. After the shocks of Forts Henry and Donelson in February and New Orleans in April, the Richmond authorities turned their attention to the West. Confederate President Jefferson Davis made General Pierre Beauregard responsible for the defense of northern Mississippi. After the loss at Shiloh, he successfully saved his army from Halleck's, but lost Corinth and Memphis in the effort. Replacing Beauregard in June, General Braxton Bragg divided his attention between operations in middle Tennessee and Kentucky and operations in northern Mississippi. Bragg believed his best chances were in Kentucky and so relegated the defense of

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<sup>10</sup>Grant to Sherman, 6 Nov 1862, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 323.

<sup>11</sup>William T. Sherman, *Memoirs of General W. T. Sherman* (2 volumes, 1875) 1: 279-281.

the river to his subordinates in the area, Major Generals Earl Van Dorn and Sterling Price.<sup>12</sup> For their part, Van Dorn and Price tried to stop Grant's forces at the battles of Iuka and Corinth in September and October, 1862. They failed to stop the Union drive and, on 14 October, President Davis placed Lieutenant General John Pemberton in command of the Rebel forces in Mississippi. Price and Van Dorn were retained in subordinate commands, though Van Dorn was often given overall front-line command while Pemberton traveled elsewhere. This relationship apparently worked well; Pemberton and Van Dorn were pre-war acquaintances and respected each other's capabilities.<sup>13</sup> However, the theater command structure, with Bragg in overall command, was not as effective. Bragg was more concerned about his area of operations in middle Tennessee than he was about Mississippi and Louisiana. President Davis finally realized this and, on 24 November, appointed General Joseph Johnston to command the Department of the West over both Bragg and Pemberton.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Jones: 74-75.

<sup>13</sup>John Pemberton, Pemberton: Defender of Vicksburg (1942): 42,60; Thomas Thiele, "The Evolution of Cavalry in the American Civil War; 1861-1863" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1951): 353,357.

<sup>14</sup>Thiele: 358; Jones: 87.

## CHAPTER 3

Grant had advanced into Mississippi against the advice of his friend, General W. T. Sherman. Early in November, Sherman advocated using the river line as an axis of advance. He argued the river route provided a secure line of communication and supply that could not be easily interdicted. The Navy's gunboats would serve as the guardians of the supply link, thus freeing Army units for the vital mission of attacking Vicksburg. Despite these objections, Grant attacked overland.<sup>1</sup> Though his infantry force was outnumbered the Confederates in the area, Grant's cavalry force was relatively small. Accompanying McPherson's divisions from La Grange were two battalions of the 2d Iowa, the 7th Illinois and the 5th Ohio, all formed into a brigade under Colonel Edward Hatch of the 2d Iowa. Hamilton's cavalry brigade from Corinth consisted of the 7th Kansas, 2d and 4th Illinois, and a battalion of the 2d Iowa, led by Colonel Albert Lee of the 7th Kansas. Sherman had a small brigade commanded by Colonel Benjamin Grierson comprised of the 3d Michigan, the 6th Illinois, and an independent battalion of Illinois cavalry. The regiments formed a cavalry division headed by Colonel T. Lyle Dickey. Even at full strength these units would have only represented 8500 troopers, but the rigors of field duty had reduced the division to around 4300 soldiers. This was a very small reconnaissance force to cover a front of almost 80 miles.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Carter, III, The Final Fortress: The Campaign for Vicksburg, 1862-1863 (1980): 87.

<sup>2</sup>Headquarters, Cavalry Division, 13th Army Corps, General Order #1, 26 Nov. 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 363-364.

As Grant moved his army south, he began to coordinate for supplies and equipment in anticipation of future requirements. His call for more railroad equipment to operate below Memphis caught the attention of General Halleck in Washington. Halleck made it clear to Grant that the Mississippi river was the route to take and not to use an overland route. However, once Grant laid out his plan to Halleck, the General-in-Chief gave his approval.<sup>3</sup> The Union forces continued to push south; the cavalry did a creditable job of reconnaissance and security as the columns converged on Holly Springs. By 15 November, the Union infantry occupied the town and the cavalry pushed on towards the Tallahatchie River. Grant did feel the necessity to caution Dickey not to operate too far forward of his infantry supports.<sup>4</sup>

General Pemberton did not wait for the Federals to come to him. He actively opposed their advance, but could not sufficiently concentrate his forces for a decisive blow. He sent telegram after telegram to his fellow commanders in the West, his immediate superior Johnston, and the Richmond authorities pleading for more troops and more supplies. Though no major units were forthcoming, Bragg, on 21 November, was able to wire Pemberton: "A large cavalry force under Forrest starts to operate in the enemy's rear and create a diversion in your favor."<sup>5</sup> By the 1st of December, Pemberton, however, had to abandon his defensive line along the

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<sup>3</sup>Grant to Halleck, 13 Nov. 1862; Halleck to Grant, 15 Nov. 1862; Grant to Halleck, 24 Nov. 1862; Halleck to Grant, 25 Nov. 1862, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 1: 470-471. It is interesting to note that Grant had not communicated his plan with Halleck before this.

<sup>4</sup>Grant to Dickey, 2 Dec. 1862, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 376.

<sup>5</sup>Bragg to Pemberton, 21 Nov. 1862, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 755. Bragg sent a similar telegram to Confederate Adjutant General Samuel Cooper on the same day. An interesting sidelight to this research was Bragg's willingness to cooperate with Pemberton in this and several other matters at the same time he was arguing with almost every officer in his own army.



Tallahatchie River and fall back to Grenada and the Yalobusha River, only 110 miles from Vicksburg.

Spirits were high among the bluecoats at this point. They had successfully pushed the Rebels south for 30 miles without fighting any major battles. Grant was convinced the Confederates were retreating because of the light resistance his cavalry encountered.<sup>6</sup> His most difficult task was to move the army itself forward. This area of Mississippi was rural in the extreme; there were few paved roads. Indeed, there were few roads at all, mostly trails and paths through the extensive farmland. The weather was the worst in recent memory and the Federals spent more time fighting the mud-sucking roads and trails than they did the mud-spattered Confederates.

Meanwhile, Halleck had been brooding about Grant's plan. On 5 December, he again telegraphed Grant not to move against Vicksburg overland. Rather, Grant's "... main object will be to hold the line from Memphis to Corinth with as small a force as possible, while the largest number possible is thrown upon Vicksburg with the gunboats." The western commander countered with the extent of his apparent success and prospects for future exploitation. Halleck was impressed and relented; perhaps advancing overland was not that bad an idea.<sup>7</sup>

However, Halleck's arguments and the adverse effects of the weather on Union movements eventually caused Grant to doubt his prospects for a quick success with the overland route. Halleck's opinion, which coincided

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<sup>6</sup>Grant to Halleck, 1 - 5 Dec. 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 1: 471-473.

<sup>7</sup>Halleck to Grant, 5 Dec. 1862; Grant to Halleck, 7 Dec. 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 1: 473.

with Sherman's, may have had greater influence on Grant's thinking than he was willing to admit in his Memoirs. The conditions of the roads, and the outright lack of roads, slowed the advance of the Army to a snail's pace. Grant needed a quicker means of attacking the Confederates. By the 8th of December, the plan was developed sufficiently to allow Sherman to write to Rear Admiral David Porter, the Navy's Mississippi River Squadron Commander, of Grant's new plan. Sherman would return to Memphis with one division, receive two from Memphis, and one more from Helena, Arkansas, move downriver, and take Vicksburg in the flank. Grant, with seven divisions, would hold the majority of the Rebel troops on the Yazobusha line. Sherman projected he would be prepared to leave Memphis by 20 December.<sup>8</sup>

In preparation for the advance, Lieutenant Colonel John Rawlins, Grant's chief of staff, directed Lieutenant Colonel C. A. Reynolds, chief quartermaster for the Tennessee Department, to move the supply depot from La Grange south to Holly Springs.<sup>9</sup> Operationally, this 3 December telegram represented Grant's realization that he was approaching his logistical limit for this portion of the campaign; further advance required a build-up of supplies first. His appreciation of the terrain and opposition probably guided him to Holly Springs, deep within his territory (40 miles) and not easily accessible by the Confederates. The town was connected by rail with all other major Union bases.<sup>10</sup> It was simple to repair the Mississippi Central southward from there as well as to store and disperse army

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<sup>8</sup>Sherman to Porter, 8 Dec. 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 392.

<sup>9</sup>Rawlins to Reynolds, 3 Dec. 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 380.

<sup>10</sup>Holly Springs, on the Mississippi Central Railroad, connected at Grand Junction with the Tennessee and Ohio Railroad, which led to Columbus, Kentucky, and the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, which led to Memphis and Corinth.

supplies. Though Grant dispatched Sherman to Memphis and downriver, the town would continue to serve the remaining divisions of the army along the Yalobusha River. In his Memoirs, Grant stated he intended to go no further south than the riverline; all the more reason for the build-up at Holly Springs.<sup>11</sup>

The move of the base also indicated a sense of security and success with the campaign thus far. Grant obviously believed the Confederates could not do much, if anything, to harm his supply line. Though the line stretched 140 miles from Columbus, Kentucky, the single track railroad was guarded by one-quarter of the Federal troops. Major General Stephen Hurlbut, with his 16th Corps, was assigned the responsibility of guarding the entire length down to La Grange. Hurlbut's men occupied blockhouses along the right of way and he stationed reaction forces in the larger towns along the route. McPherson's men were responsible for the final 30 miles to Holly Springs. The Union security plan and the forces available to implement it seemed sufficient to resist almost any force.

The Confederates developed an irresistible force. As noted previously, Pemberton had requested help and received the promise of Forrest's participation from Bragg. Pemberton knew he needed to use his own forces quickly to directly block the Federals rather than waiting for a promised relief column. As such, he chanced on the suggestion of the officers of a Texas brigade in his army. Lieutenant Colonel John Griffith of the Texas Cavalry Brigade and five of his officers recommended to Pemberton that most of his cavalry be consolidated into one corps, to be led by General Van Dorn, with the object of "penetrating the rear of the enemy,

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<sup>11</sup>Ulysses Grant, Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant (2 volumes, 1885) 1: 424, 430-432.

capture Holly Springs, Memphis, and other points, and, perhaps, force him to retreat . . . ."<sup>12</sup> The Confederate general was intrigued with the idea; he interviewed Griffith and ordered planning to begin. On the 12th of December, a week after the Texans' suggestion reached him, Pemberton ordered Van Dorn ". . . to sweep around Grant's left flank, strike the big enemy depot at Holly Springs, and wreak havoc on the [railroads]." Concurrently, the brigades of Griffith, Colonel W. H. Jackson, and Colonel Robert McCulloch, about 2500 troopers, were ordered to report to Van Dorn for service.<sup>13</sup> The most important piece of the plan was that Van Dorn's action was coordinated to "coincide" with Forrest's raid on Grant's rear.<sup>14</sup> Pemberton probably expected his troopers to cut Grant's supply line just behind the front lines. His cavalry was certainly well-led, though poorly equipped; the mission was not beyond their capabilities. The expectation that Forrest would also cut supply lines in the Union rear was not that great. Forrest came from a different command and had to travel over 100 miles, in the dead of winter, and cross a major river to reach the Union rear. These were significant problems in the context of the Civil War. Though the communication channels between Bragg and Pemberton were open, it may have been too much to hope that high level coordination could effect two strikes at precisely the same time.

The Union command continued their supply build-up and preparations for advance with little knowledge of the Confederate plans. Rawlins, acting

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<sup>12</sup>Victor M. Ross, Ross' Texas Brigade (1960): 131; John C. Pemberton, Pemberton: Defender of Vicksburg (1942): 65.

<sup>13</sup>Edwin C. Beers, The Campaign for Vicksburg (3 volumes, 1985-1988) 1: 290-291.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas F. Thiele, "The Evolution of Cavalry in the American Civil War, 1861-1863" (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1951): 360.

in his capacity as the chief of staff, published Special Order #44 on 11 December to the Army of the Tennessee. He informed the various staff officers throughout the Army the railroad from Grand Junction to Oxford, 50 miles of newly-acquired track, would be operational no later than 15 December. The Union work crews were pushing hard to keep the army's lifeline open and running. This again demonstrated the Union hierarchy's concern over the Army's supplies and their continued flow; once the railroad was complete, the advance could start again. The 11th of December also produced a telegram for Grant from Major General William Rosecrans, commander of the neighboring Department of the Cumberland. Rosecrans, alerted by his informants, wanted to warn Grant that Forrest was moving southwest from Columbia, Tennessee, heading towards Grant's rear. Grant subsequently warned Major Generals Grenville Dodge at Corinth, and Jeremiah Sullivan at Jackson, Tennessee, to be vigilant against possible Confederate actions. He even went so far as to ask Admiral Porter to send gunboats up the Tennessee River to block possible crossing sites.<sup>15</sup> Though Grant took appropriate action based on Rosecrans' information, he did not over react to the information that may have been only a rumor. The focus remained southward, into Mississippi.

On the 13th of December, Forrest reached the Tennessee River and began to cross. He finished by the evening of the 14th. Confederate security concerning the crossing had been as tight as Union reconnaissance of the possible crossing sites had been lax. General Sullivan telegraphed on the 14th to Rawlins, "The reported crossing of the Tennessee River by a large

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<sup>15</sup>Headquarters, 13th Army Corps, Department of the Tennessee, Special Order #44, Rosecrans to Grant, Grant to Dodge, Grant to Sullivan, 11 Dec 1862; Grant to Porter, 12 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt 2: 400, 404.

guerilla force seems to be false." Even though he believed the rumors to be false, Sullivan added he would shift some of his forces to patrol the area south of Jackson.<sup>16</sup> The small force that Sullivan shifted south of the town would be unable to deal with the Rebels. Forrest had around 2100 troopers organized in four regiments, a separate battalion, and several independent companies. His force was equipped with shot-guns and many flintlock muskets.<sup>17</sup> General Sullivan was not the only one fooled by Forrest. General Dodge, on the 15th, wired Sullivan that nothing was going on in his area around Corinth, but added that Forrest was near Waynesborough, Tennessee, recently. Dodge did not think the Rebels had crossed the river yet.<sup>18</sup>

By the time Sullivan received Dodge's telegram, Forrest had been on the west side of the river for two days. He had been resupplied at least once and was formulating his plan for attacks on Sullivan's forces. During the Rebels resupply rest on the 15th, bluecoats under Brigadier General Isham Haynie skirmished with them. This news travelled fast. Grant was informed of the precise location of the Confederates in his rear.<sup>19</sup> Sherman, who was in Memphis preparing for his move downriver, noted in a telegram to the commander at Helena, Arkansas that,

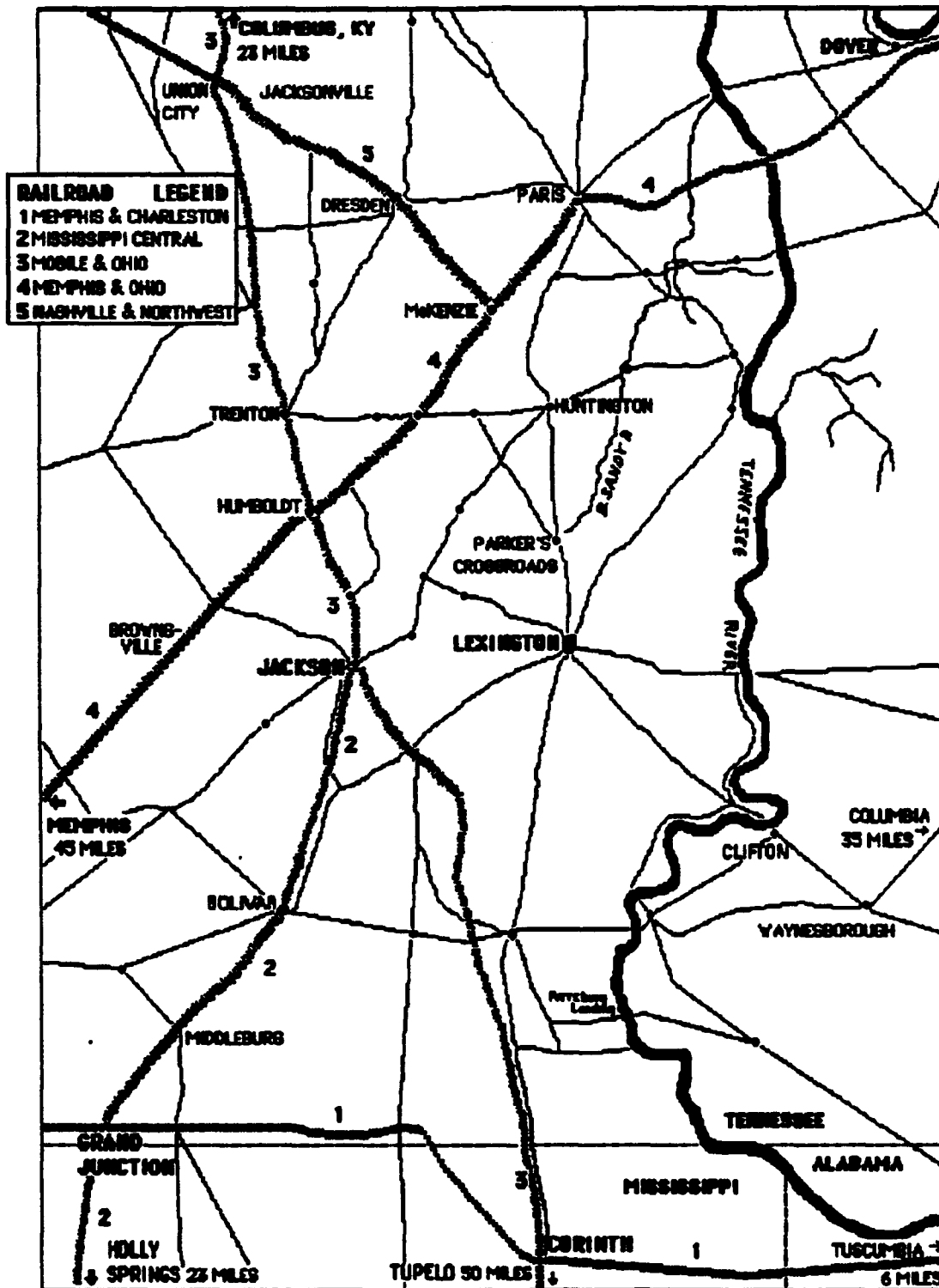
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<sup>16</sup>Sullivan to Rawlins, 14 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 413.

<sup>17</sup>Beers, 1: 232; Thomas Jordan and J. P. Pryor, The Campaigns of Lieutenant General N. B. Forrest and of Forrest's Cavalry (1973): 192. When originally ordered on this expedition, Forrest answered his troopers had "only ten rounds of caps for his shot-guns, while many of the muskets were flintless. The reply was a curtly couched order to march without delay." Jordan and Pryor: 192.

<sup>18</sup>Dodge to Sullivan, 15 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 414.

<sup>19</sup>Haynie to Sullivan, Sullivan to Grant, 15 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 415. The resupply was part of the careful planning Forrest did before he crossed the river. On the night of the 16th, "... most opportunely, a citizen reached the encampment with some fifty thousand shot-gun and pistol caps, which [Forrest] had sent agents forward to procure within the enemy's lines." Jordan and Pryor: 194.



Adapted from *The Campaigns of Lieut. Gen. Forrest and of Forrest's Cavalry.*

a boat . . . reports a rebel force crossing the Tennessee [River] from the east toward the west at Clifton . . . I rather suspect it is designed to draw us back from our purpose of going to Vicksburg. I shall disregard these signs . . .<sup>20</sup>

Sherman would later regret he disregarded these signs.

The 17th saw the Union forces begin to organize for the expected blow. Rosecrans, rather belatedly, notified Sullivan to expect Forrest to cross the river on a raid. Sullivan notified Grant that Forrest had 10,000 troops plus artillery across the river and asked for help. Later, Sullivan rounded these numbers down to a more reasonable "3000 infantry, 800 cavalry, and six pieces . . . and still crossing." Grant advised Sullivan to keep track of the Confederates and not to despair, help was on the way. Grant contacted Dodge and told him to join with Sullivan to chase down Forrest.<sup>21</sup>

The Confederates carefully examined the situation they were heading into. Forrest, with his mission to destroy Union supply and communications lines planted firmly in his mind, organized his men to accomplish the maximum destruction with the minimum contact. He realized that Sullivan's forces in Jackson were too strong for him, consequently, he divided his force in thirds. One portion remained in front of Jackson to demonstrate against Sullivan and keep him pinned in the city. The second and third detachments moved around the town and destroyed the Mobile and Ohio Railroad above and below the town as well as the Mississippi Central

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<sup>20</sup>Sherman to Gorman, 17 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 424.

<sup>21</sup>Rosecrans to Sullivan, Sullivan to Grant, 17 Dec 1862; Grant to Dodge, 18 Dec 1862; Sullivan to Grant, 18 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 423, 427, 429.



Railroad behind it. He began the operation during the night of 18 December and was miles north of Jackson by the end of the 19th. These actions netted Forrest some useful equipment, "... his train was enlarged to twenty-five excellent wagons and teams, his artillery by a section, and the main part of his men well-armed and munitioned."<sup>22</sup>

All of this action took place 90 miles to Grant's rear. What was the main body of his forces doing to deal with this raid? Basically nothing. Once past Holly Springs, Grant's forces occupied defensive positions below the Tallahatchie around Oxford. The defensive positions were necessary to consolidate forces and bring supplies forward, as already indicated. The cavalry, however, was kept free to reconnoiter as necessary to support the army. The regiments and brigades should have been reconnoitering south and east to ascertain the Confederate dispositions. Instead of using them for that purpose, Grant sent them on a raid east to the Mobile and Ohio Railroad.

There seems to be no justification for this move. By ordering the cavalry east, Grant effectively closed his eyes to any Confederate movements. Historians believe:

... [Grant] was shackled by habit and could think of nothing better for them to do .... There is nothing in the records ... to indicate what he hoped to accomplish with an operation so eccentric in every sense of the word.<sup>23</sup>

Whatever his motivation, Grant ordered Dickey to attack the Mobile and Ohio Railroad "as far south as possible" with the bulk of the army's cavalry on 13

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<sup>22</sup>Jordan and Pryor: 197-199.

<sup>23</sup>Stephen Z. Starr, The Union Cavalry in the Civil War (3 volumes, 1979-1985) 3: 139.

December, the same day Forrest crossed the Tennessee River. Grant further assured Dickey of success by ordering Dodge to send two brigades south from Corinth to cooperate with Dickey's movements. In keeping with correct cavalry doctrine, Grant also directed Colonel John Mizner, in charge of the remaining cavalry, to screen Dickey's movements to the east.<sup>24</sup> Thus with Forrest moving into his rear and Van Dorn organizing in his front, Grant ordered his cavalry outside the area of operations. Historical hindsight is generally 20/20, but Grant should have been astute enough to suspect some Confederate reaction to his advances. This is especially true because Rosecrans had warned Grant on 11 December of Forrest's move towards his rear. Grant's lack of operational focus at this point is difficult to understand; all of his efforts should have been focused on getting to Vicksburg instead of attacking a peripheral rail network.

Reaction was exactly what the bluecoats got. On the 16th of December, under Van Dorn's direction, the brigades of Griffith, Jackson, and McCulloch concentrated around Grenada and then moved eastward towards Tupelo. Van Dorn wanted to maintain strict security about his destination and so created the impression he was heading towards Tennessee. Unfortunately, no Federal cavalry was in the area to report the Confederate presence; most of the bluecoats were even further east wrecking the railroad. It was not until midday on the 17th that the column turned north; still no Federal scouts were anywhere near to report the movement. By

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<sup>24</sup>Captain George Spencer to Colonel August Mersy, 12 Dec 1862; Grant to Dickey, 13 Dec 1862; Grant to Mizner, 13 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 403-404, 410, 411.

evening on the 18th, the cavalrymen had passed around the Federal left flank and penetrated about 15 miles into the rear area.<sup>25</sup>

Grant got wind of some sort of cavalry force outfitting before him, but he wrongly assumed it was going to chase Dickey's column down. On 19 December he ordered General Charles Hamilton to send two brigades towards Pontotoc; "should any further advance be necessary to rescue Colonel Dickey or drive back an inferior force of the enemy it will be made." Concern about Dickey increased when Grant received a wire from his local cavalry chief, Mizner. The cavalryman reported his scouts had encountered a "heavy cavalry force" moving northeast on the line Grenada-Pontotoc. The Union commander was not overly distressed. There would soon be two infantry brigades in the area and, besides, Colonel Dickey was in that area and he had not been heard from yet.<sup>26</sup>

Dickey had already encountered the "heavy cavalry force". On the return trip from his raid on the Mobile and Ohio Railroad, the Union cavalrymen crossed the rear guard of Van Dorn's force as it was leaving Pontotoc on the 18th. Believing the Confederates to be fresh and his troopers jaded from their mission, Dickey choose not to engage the Rebels. Rather, the Union column watched the Southern cavalry pass by while couriers were dispatched to warn Grant. For some unknown reason the couriers never left the column and Grant would lose a full day of preparations.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>A. F. Brown, "Van Dorn's Operations in Northern Mississippi - Recollections of a Cavalryman," Southern Historical Society Papers 6 (October, 1878): 155; Starr, 3: 141.

<sup>26</sup>Rawlins to Hamilton, Mizner to Grant, 19 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 435, 437.

<sup>27</sup>Dickey to Rawlins, 20 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 1: 498-499; Starr, 3: 140-141.

Soon after Dickey arrived at Grant's headquarters on the 19th, telegrams began to flow out. The commander at Holly Springs, Colonel R. C. Murphy, received one. He learned Confederate cavalry was heading in his direction and to alert his garrison. Within a few hours, another set of telegrams went to the five major rail towns warning them of the Rebels' approach. Colonel Mizner was also alerted: Van Dorn "must be prevented from getting to the railroad if possible."<sup>28</sup> This was a very interesting order, keeping in mind that Forrest has already cut the railroad farther north. Perhaps Grant suddenly realized the grave danger his forces were in as a result of the damage done by Forrest and the potential for damage represented by Van Dorn's force. Neither Mizner nor Murphy were able to prevent Van Dorn from striking the supply depot. At dawn on 20 December the Confederate cavalry thundered into Holly Springs, captured the town without much effort, provisioned themselves from the huge quantities of supplies, burned the town, and departed in just over twelve hours.

The two principal Union commanders in Grant's rear area, Sullivan and Dodge, had their hands full. Grant placed the responsibility on their shoulders to track down Van Dorn. They had both been coordinating their forces to respond to Forrest's cavalry and now had to turn in the opposite direction to counter the other Confederate raid. Few units were moved back from the frontline infantry corps to assist with the Confederate cavalry. Both commanders were required to deal with the two raids with the two dozen units they had available to them. The only reinforcement they received was from the few cavalry regiments that had not joined Dickey on

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<sup>28</sup>Grant to Murphy, Grant to Commanding Officers at Holly Springs, . . . , Grant to Mizner, 19 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 439.

the railroad raid. Sullivan learned that Holly Springs was destroyed on the 21st and assumed personal command of the forces dispatched to capture Van Dorn. Colonel William Morrison, commander at the small railroad town of Bethel, notified Dodge, who was chasing Forrest, that Holly Springs had been razed and the enemy was heading north towards La Grange and Grand Junction.<sup>29</sup> The last weeks of 1862 were occupied with the Union forces trying to intercept both Van Dorn and Forrest. Van Dorn did not do much more damage before he returned to his lines on 26 December, but Forrest continued to wreck the Mobile and Ohio Railroad before he turned back on 24 December. On 30 December, he was nearly brought to bay at Parker's Crossroads, Tennessee, but escaped through skillful fighting and audacious bluffing.<sup>30</sup>

The news of the raids travelled quickly throughout the West. Colonel Chipman, chief of staff to Union Major General Samuel Curtis, in charge of the Department of Missouri, wrote to his commander on 24 December:

Grant's line of communication is completely severed and cannot be repaired for weeks. Holly Springs was surrounded by rebel cavalry . . . over a million rations burned, several hundred bales of cotton destroyed, . . .<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Morrison to Dodge, 21 Dec 1862, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 450-451. Morrison ended his dispatch with: "Now, general, after looking at this position, don't you think I ought to have my regiment and artillery, and that you ought to get back at once and save you district and Corinth?"

<sup>30</sup>Jordan and Pryor: 210-215. An uncoordinated attack by two of Sullivan brigades sandwiched Forrest's troopers in between them. The lack of Federal coordination and Forrest's personal skill allowed the Confederates to escape. Starr, 3: 148.

<sup>31</sup>Chipman to Curtis, 24 Dec 1862, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 471.

Brigadier General Thomas Davies, commander at Columbus, Kentucky, epitomized the experience of many Federals and the terror caused by the Confederate raiders. With Grant's communications to the north cut, few people fully understood what was going on in his area. Davies feared for the worst and prepared for it. On 25 December, he was in touch with General-in-Chief Halleck several times. His first telegram, at 1200, said he was evacuating Columbus and destroying everything. Two hours later, he had a better grip on himself and wired that Holly Springs was destroyed, situation grim. By 1900 the same day, he was able to say "things are easing up every way. I shall hold the place against any force." One imagines cooler heads finally prevailed at that general's headquarters.<sup>32</sup>

Even Forrest provided some information on his mission. He was able to get a message out of the Union rear on 24 December to his commander, Bragg. He believed his work was progressing well as Union troops were moving into Tennessee from Memphis after him. To the Confederate it meant, "General Grant must . . . be in a very critical condition . . ." Forrest never missed an opportunity to praise his troopers, either. "My men have all behaved well in action, and as soon as rested a little you will hear from me in another quarter." This from a force 80 miles inside enemy lines.<sup>33</sup>

As a result of these simultaneous raids upon his supply base and line of communication, Grant felt he could no longer sustain an army on a move

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<sup>32</sup>Davies to Halleck, 25 Dec 1862, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 479.

<sup>33</sup>Forrest to Bragg, 24 Dec 1862, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 1: 594-595. Jordan and Pryor summed up Forrest's raid like this: "Crossing the river into West-Tennessee with his command wretchedly armed and equipped, and with only ten rounds of percussion caps for his shot-guns, Forrest returned stronger in numbers than when he entered upon the campaign, admirably armed . . . with a surplus of five hundred Enfield rifles, some eighteen hundred blankets and knap sacks . . ." Jordan and Pryor: 221.

further south. December closed with the bulk of the infantry moving back north. This destroyed the first attempt at a coordinated attack on Vicksburg. Sherman, who had made the downriver move the same day Holly Springs was destroyed, was repulsed at Chickasaw Bayou, northeast of Vicksburg, on 29 December. Because Union pressure was relaxed in the northern Vicksburg area, Pemberton was able to shift troops south to defend the environs of Vicksburg from Sherman's assault. These actions signalled the end of Grant's first major thrust at Vicksburg. He emerged from this episode with some valuable lessons learned that he was able to apply within the next six months.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>William S. McFeely, Grant: A Biography (1981): 126.

## CHAPTER 4

Following the raids on his lines of communication in December, Grant pulled back to the line of Memphis and Corinth, consolidated and reorganized his forces, and moved down the Mississippi River to join Sherman near Vicksburg. He left Major General Stephen Hurlbut in charge of the rear area, with the mission of forwarding troops and supplies and protecting the Tennessee-Mississippi boundary. With a Union concentration now forming opposite Vicksburg, Pemberton left minimal forces in northern Mississippi and concentrated the remainder around Vicksburg.

The Confederates clearly recognized that Vicksburg was an important place to hold, more so because of the single rail connection with the western Confederacy. But the "hold" part was in dispute. Pemberton, as the local commander, and Johnston, the area commander, thoroughly believed the Confederates would eventually outmaneuver the Federal forces. Pemberton, however, believed this outmaneuvering would come from other Confederate forces in the West such as Braxton Bragg's or E. K. Smith's army. Vicksburg and the central part of Mississippi were his responsibilities and they would be defended at all costs. Johnston, on the other hand, wanted Pemberton to do the maneuvering and essentially save himself; he expected Pemberton to trade space for time to catch Grant in an extended position. Johnston explained this attitude to President Davis on 12 February. Should Grant bypass the Vicksburg defenses and get below the city, there would be significant problems; "Indeed, we have not the means of forming a relieving



army."<sup>1</sup> The unfortunate part of this essential difference was that it was never resolved between Johnston and Pemberton until it was too late.

With that background in mind, Johnston perceived a greater threat to Bragg's army in early January, 1863 and ordered Van Dorn, with three cavalry brigades, totaling over 7400 troopers, to Tennessee to reinforce Bragg. This left Pemberton with only 1000 troopers in three regiments, three battalions, and several scattered companies.<sup>2</sup> Pemberton parried other threats to transfer troops with vigorous protests that there was a very large Union force opposite his; he could not send troops to support others with the enemy close by.<sup>3</sup> It was not until the Confederate Secretary of War James Seddon ordered Pemberton to transfer units that it was actually done.<sup>4</sup>

The departure of Van Dorn and his cavalry left a vacuum of quality mounted troops in Mississippi. Almost all of the experienced regiments that participated in the December raids went to Tennessee. Left were assorted understrenght units and the questionable Mississippi State cavalry regiments. Federal opportunity for exploitation was great; it was not long before the Union leaders picked up on the opportunity offered. Major General Charles Hamilton, on 12 February, suggested to his superior, Hurlbut, that Van Dorn's departure would allow a unit to raid behind Pemberton to destroy

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<sup>1</sup>John Pemberton, Pemberton: Defender of Vicksburg (1942): 56, 59; Samuel Carter III, The Final Fortress: The Campaign for Vicksburg, 1862-1863, (1980): 90; Johnston to Davis, 12 Feb 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 23, Pt. 2: 633

<sup>2</sup>Pemberton: 90; Thomas F. Thiele, "The Evolution of Cavalry in the American Civil War, 1861-1863" (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1951): 452; Lt. Col. E. J. Harvie to Colonel Charles Fautleroy, 18 Jan 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 844-845.

<sup>3</sup>Pemberton to Johnston, 24 Jan 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 599-600.

<sup>4</sup>Seddon to Pemberton, 6 Feb 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 618. The unit Seddon ordered transferred was General Sterling Price's division.

his lines of communication. While Hurlbut was mulling over this suggestion, his superior, Grant, suggested a similar operation. From Grant's perspective, with sizable Rebel forces cleared out of northern Mississippi, Union forces would have free rein throughout the area. Grant even suggested that Colonel Grierson, of the 6th Illinois, might make it all the way down to Jackson. He ended his telegram by saying, "I do not direct that this shall be done, but leave it for a volunteer enterprise."<sup>5</sup>

Grant's suggestion came at a turning point in his thinking process. He had already begun to explore the possibility of crossing the Mississippi River below Vicksburg. One of his greatest problems was how to get across the river. Somehow the Union forces had to cross while preventing Rebel reinforcements from arriving before the lodgement was sufficiently strong. This required holding a major portion of the Confederate forces in place, both at Vicksburg and throughout the state. Grant wrestled with the decisions about holding the Vicksburg Confederates, but proposed the bold cavalry operation to tie down the state-wide troops to Hurlbut. He may have reasoned:

**A cavalry raid through Mississippi, . . . would siphon off enemy cavalry in pursuit, disrupt Pemberton's communications and supplies, and divert attention from his crossing of the river and the operation at Grand Gulf. Possibly another, simultaneous**

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<sup>5</sup>Thiele: 453; Hamilton to Hurlbut, 12 Feb 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 45; Grant to Hurlbut, 13 Feb 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3, 49-50; Edwin Beers, The Campaign for Vicksburg (3 volumes, 1985-1988) 1:123.

raid through northern Alabama would draw Bedford Forrest far from the neighborhood of Vicksburg . . . .<sup>6</sup>

Hurlbut agreed with Hamilton and accepted Grant's suggestion. On the 16th of February he telegraphed his commander, "It appears perilous, but I think it can be done and done with safety, and may relieve you somewhat at Vicksburg."<sup>7</sup> Hurlbut began the coordination that was necessary for the operation. He was fortunate in this regard because of Major General William Rosecrans' desire to launch a similar operation from his neighboring department. Rosecrans initially contacted General Dodge at Corinth, who passed the suggestion to Hurlbut in early April. This suggestion, which incidentally supported Grant's overall scheme, would eventually develop into Colonel Abel Streight's raid into Alabama.<sup>8</sup>

Pemberton remained very concerned about his lack of mobile troops. He had blocked several attempts to move troops out of his area and continued to do so throughout February. Moreover, he argued with President Davis for reinforcements because of the Federal ability to appear anywhere around Vicksburg. Still, Pemberton apparently failed to consider the possibility of Union action originating in northern Mississippi, despite rumors and reports to that effect.<sup>9</sup> He failed to give credence to these reports because of his focus on the Vicksburg area. The Union generals were subject to the same sort of self-deception. Based on increased guerrilla

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<sup>6</sup>Carter: 162-163.

<sup>7</sup>Hurlbut to Lt. Col. John Rawlins, 16 Feb 1863, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 58.

<sup>8</sup>Thiele: 455; Beers, 2: 130; Dodge to Hurlbut, 3 April 1863, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 23, Pt. 2: 205. Streight's raid was important in that it did draw off Forrest from operating in Mississippi.

<sup>9</sup>Pemberton to Davis, 17 Feb 1863, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 631-632; Beers, 2: 135.

activity and unconfirmed reports of a Rebel cavalry build-up in his area Hurlbut postponed his raids.<sup>10</sup> Within two weeks, though, Hurlbut had calmed the guerrillas and determined the actual Confederate dispositions; he was prepared to launch his strikes. On 9 March, Grant wired his permission to execute the raids but retained the authority to designate the starting date.<sup>11</sup>

The reports of Union activity began to increase in Pemberton's headquarters as March wore on. The chief of Confederate scouts in northern Mississippi, Captain Sam Henderson, notified Pemberton that the Union forces had abandoned the railroad above Jackson, Tennessee and concentrated their forces at Memphis and Corinth. Pemberton fired telegrams to Johnston again asking for more cavalry. He used a different strategy, explaining that northern Mississippi planters needed protection in order to get their crops harvested. He specifically asked for Van Dorn's return. Johnston was implacable; no reinforcements were available. Pemberton turned to Major General Simon Buckner, commander at Mobile, Alabama, and pleaded for help. By the end of March, Buckner was able to cut one cavalry regiment loose and send it north to support Pemberton.<sup>12</sup> The true plight of the Confederates defending the Vicksburg lines of communication was sounded by Major General Daniel Ruggles, commander at Columbus, Mississippi, along the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. In a telegram to Pemberton, Ruggles told of his inadequate force. If the Federals came his

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<sup>10</sup>Hurlbut to Rawlins, 21 Feb 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 62-63; William H. and Shirley A. Leckie, Unlikely Warriors (1984): 83.

<sup>11</sup>Thiele: 454; Grant to Hurlbut, 9 Mar 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 95.

<sup>12</sup>Henderson to Pemberton, 19 Mar 1863; Pemberton to Johnston, 20, 21 Mar 1863; Pemberton to Buckner, 24, 26, 28 Mar 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 677, 681, 687, 691, 695.

way, as Colonel Dickey had done in December, his lack of cavalry prevented any sort of quick response. Without cavalry, he had no advance warning of the enemy's approach or their objectives until it was too late. He simply did not have enough troop to garrison all the threatened points in his district.<sup>13</sup>

The Federal command was preparing to press the thinly-spread Confederates. On the 1st of April, Hurlbut outlined to Grant his plan. From the left flank, Hurlbut's subordinate, Dodge, would launch a sizable force from Corinth west towards Tuscumbia, Alabama as the supporting attack for Rosecrans's main attack with Colonel Straight's raiders. From the center at La Grange, the main raid, led by Grierson, would strike south towards Jackson, Mississippi. Another column would also leave La Grange and move southwest to complement an advance from Memphis. Advancing from the right flank at Memphis would be a column headed towards Oxford.<sup>14</sup> All of the feints were designed to mask the real raid from the center. Grant approved these moves and informed Halleck of his operations.

Significant in the April 4 dispatch was Grant's indication of crossing the Mississippi River below Vicksburg around Grand Gulf. This was an important step for the Western commander. It signalled the orchestration of all his forces to accomplish the desired end of seizing Vicksburg. This was further reinforced by Hurlbut's desire to coordinate his movements with Grant's move below the Confederate stronghold, "this cavalry dash I desire to time so as to co-operate with what I suppose to be your plan, to

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<sup>13</sup>Ruggles to Major R. W. Memminger, 31 Mar 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 699-700.

<sup>14</sup>Hurlbut to Grant, 1 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 26-27; Bears, 2: 134-135.

land below Vicksburg, on south side of Black River, . . ."<sup>15</sup> Hurlbut ensured his end of the operation was well coordinated. He wrote Dodge on 9 April, "As I propose to throw a strong cavalry force south under cover of your movement, I wish to time the two as nearly cotemporaneous [sic] as possible."<sup>16</sup>

The Confederates keenly felt the lack of troops to counter the forming Union thrusts. As discussed earlier, Pemberton defended as much of Mississippi as he could; he did not economize in many places. He wrote the President, "It is indispensable that I have more cavalry" at the same time he turned down Ruggles's "I must have more troops."<sup>17</sup> Pemberton believed he had to defend against every Union thrust, perceived or actual, in his area of operations. To do this he needed enough troops to defend every position adequately; in essence he had allowed the initiative in Mississippi to fall into Grant's hands. Now, in order to rectify the situation, Pemberton continuously demanded more troops. Perhaps, as he assessed his situation, Pemberton felt his best prospect at thwarting the Federals was with Van Dorn's troopers.

The situation was further aggravated when Pemberton received Johnston's assessment of the Mississippi situation. Johnston believed the current Union dispositions of both Grant and Rosecrans threatened Bragg more than Pemberton. Therefore, Van Dorn's cavalry, still on detached service with Bragg, would not return to Mississippi. According to

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<sup>15</sup>Grant to Halleck, 4 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 1: 25; Bearss, 2: 131; Hurlbut to Rawlins, 6 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 23, Pt. 2: 214.

<sup>16</sup>Hurlbut to Dodge, 9 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 181.

<sup>17</sup>Pemberton to Davis, Ruggles to Pemberton, Pemberton to Ruggles, 2 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 709, 711.

Johnston's reasoning, the concentration of cavalry in Tennessee provided greater potential to wreck either Rosecrans' or Grant's communication and supply links than a concentration in Mississippi would. Furthermore, five infantry brigades had been detached from Bragg for Pemberton's use during December. These troops, in Johnston's assessment, were more valuable than cavalry and the balance of troops was appropriate.<sup>18</sup>

For the time being, Pemberton was forced to use only the troops at hand. On 6 April Ruggles reported the Union forces moving south from Corinth. He was not sure of their intentions yet, but he was reorganizing his forces to block the most likely routes into his area. This message was followed by a report from Brigadier General James Chalmers in northern Mississippi that the bluecoats were advancing from Memphis. These pieces of information prompted Pemberton to wire General Cooper in Richmond that Union forces were active in the Vicksburg area; Pemberton was still unable to discern their intentions. Part of the message also related to Grant's infantry around Vicksburg. Pemberton reported Union Major General John McClelland's forces were moving to a point below Vicksburg, but added he "much doubted it."<sup>19</sup> Information received after this message to Cooper led Pemberton to believe the Federals were leaving Vicksburg. On the 11th of April he wired Cooper again that Grant was leaving his area to reinforce Rosecrans; Pemberton blamed Union failure to get at Vicksburg during the winter as the cause of the movement. Pemberton felt so secure in this

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<sup>18</sup>Colonel Benjamin Ewell to Pemberton, 3 Apr 1863, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 712. The story of Johnston's situation as the Department Commander and his ability, or inability, to control troops in his theater is not a part of this study. Johnston faced significant political and military pressure to aid both Bragg and Pemberton.

<sup>19</sup>Ruggles to Pemberton, 6 Apr 1863, Chalmers to Pemberton, 8 Apr 1863, Pemberton to Cooper, 9 Apr 1863, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 718, 728, 730.

knowledge that, after he informed Johnston of the Union retrograde, he offered 8000 soldiers to reinforce Bragg.<sup>20</sup>

Hurlbut and Grant, though unaware of the Confederate confusion, continued to confound their enemies. With Dodge's columns moving on the left flank and the right flank units making headway against Chalmers, Hurlbut issued his final guidance to Grierson. The cavalryman was directed to cut the "Mississippi Central [Railroad] at or near Oxford, the Mobile and Ohio [Railroad] near Tupelo, and . . . the Selma and Jackson Railroad . . .," a distance of three hundred miles through Confederate territory. Further, ". . . he was to destroy . . . supply dumps, stir up all the alarm he could, creating if possible the impression that a big move was in preparation . . . ." Hurlbut's final words to Grierson's commander at La Grange, Major General W. Sooy Smith, were an understatement, "Rapidity is the necessity of this special duty."<sup>21</sup>

Preparations to transfer troops to Bragg continued during the middle of April, but Pemberton began to fear he may have misjudged enemy intentions. On the 15th of April, Pemberton learned that Union forces were still strong opposite Vicksburg and in northern Mississippi; apparently no units had left. Furthermore, Union activity indicated a coming move.

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<sup>20</sup>Pemberton to Cooper, Pemberton to Stevenson, 11 Apr 1863, Pemberton to Johnston, 12 Apr 1863, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 733, 735, 738. Pemberton proposed sending the brigades of Brigadiers Rust, Buford, and Tilghman, a total of 15 regiments, 3 battalions and 5 artillery batteries. Memminger to Major A. B. Cooke, 13 Apr 1863, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 739.

<sup>21</sup>Bearse, 2: 188; Bruce Catton, *Grant Moves South* (1960): 422; Hurlbut to Smith, 15 Apr 1863, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 196-197. Another by-product of this study is Hurlbut's flash of military glory. To him goes most of the credit for planning, coordinating and organizing Grierson's raid. Though he may have appreciated the fine nuances of troop control, he was not appreciated by Grant. After this portion of the Vicksburg campaign, he faded into military obscurity and did little else of note for the remainder of the war.



Pemberton thus informed Johnston that Grant was not moving north to reinforce Rosecrans, but two brigades can be detached for Bragg.<sup>22</sup> Within a day of this dispatch, Pemberton regretted his action. He reported to both Johnston and Cooper that the U. S. Navy had passed below the batteries at Vicksburg with both gunboats and transports. This forboded no good: "Indications of an attack on Vicksburg are so strong, I am not warranted in sending any more troops from this department." Immediately after informing his superiors of the new Union movements, Pemberton received more information from Major General Carter Stevenson, commander at Vicksburg. Stevenson fully believed the worst was about to happen, "Every movement of the enemy indicates that they are about to execute some plan."<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, Hurlbut executed his part of the plan flawlessly as all of his movements started successfully. He reported to his superior:

These various movements along our length of line will, I hope, so distract their attention that Grierson's party will get a fair start and be well down to their destination before they can be resisted by adequate force. God speed him, for he has started gallantly on a long and perilous ride. I shall anxiously await intelligence of the result.<sup>24</sup>

Now the components for Grant's shift across the Mississippi were in place. His soldiers were moving south along the river; the Navy was prepared to cooperate and protect his movement. The Confederates knew of the main

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<sup>22</sup>Bowen to Memminger, Stevenson to Pemberton, Chalmers to Pemberton, 15 Apr 1863, Pemberton to Johnston, 16 Apr 1863, *QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 744-745, 747.*

<sup>23</sup>Pemberton to Cooper, Pemberton to Johnston, 17 Apr 1863, Stevenson to Pemberton, 17 Apr 1863, *QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 751, 756-757.*

<sup>24</sup>Hurlbut to Rawlins, 17 Apr 1863, *QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 202.*

body's movement, but were distracted by the feints along the Tennessee-Mississippi border. The lack of Confederate focus became even more apparent as the Union movements progressed.

As Dodge's movements east from Corinth became more threatening, Johnston requested Pemberton to focus his northern Mississippi forces on the Union column's rear. Simultaneously, Chalmers reported Union pressure on his forces; the bluecoats seriously threatened the Mississippi Central and the Mississippi-Tennessee Railroads. Though his troops were pulled in several directions, Pemberton accurately told General Cooper on 20 April the Federals were "making strong raids from three points on the Memphis and Charleston Railroad. I shall look to them."<sup>25</sup> It was not until a crisply worded dispatch from Johnston arrived at Pemberton's headquarters on the same day that the strain on the Confederate leader and his resources became apparent. Johnston reminded Pemberton of his duty to cooperate with adjacent commanders, in particular Bragg's left flank cavalry commander Colonel Phillip Roddey, to "prevent or defeat serious raids." Pemberton immediately sent back a blistering reply:

I have not sufficient force to give any efficient assistance to Colonel Roddey. [Enemy] are advancing from Memphis, via Hernando; from Grand Junction and La Grange, via Holly Springs and Salem; from Corinth, via New Albany. You are aware I have but feeble cavalry force, but I shall certainly give you all assistance I can. I have virtually no cavalry from Grand Gulf to

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<sup>25</sup>Johnston to Pemberton, 18 Apr 1863, Major Crump to Chalmers, Colonel Falkner to Chalmers, 18 Apr 1863, Major Bradford to Pemberton, 19 Apr 1863, Pemberton to Cooper, 20 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 760, 765, 766, 767-768. An interesting note to Confederate strength at this point is a message from Chalmers to Pemberton reporting the arrival of General McCulloch's brigade to Chalmers command. Though consisting of two regiments, the brigade numbered only 330 troopers, the paper strength of just over three companies. Chalmers to Pemberton, 18 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 765.

Yazoo City, while the enemy is threatening to cross river between Vicksburg and Grand Gulf, having twelve vessels below Vicksburg. On yesterday Chalmers met enemy at Coldwater and repulsed him.

After presenting his problem, Pemberton requested assistance from Johnston as the overall commander in the West:

Can you not make a heavy demonstration with cavalry toward Abbeville, on Tallahatchie River, if only for 50 miles? The enemy is endeavoring to force a diversion of my troops to Northern Mississippi.<sup>26</sup>

The frustrated Pemberton even chided his subordinates that day. To Ruggles he sent, "I hear from several sources, but not your headquarters, that enemy is approaching Pontotoc. This is a mere raid, but should not be unmolested by you."<sup>27</sup>

The true state of affairs in Mississippi was certainly not well known in Johnston's Tullahoma headquarters in April. When a telegram arrived at Pemberton's headquarters from Johnston that said "The enemy cannot be in force near Vicksburg and on the three routes you mention," Johnston's grasp on the situation and his trust for the commander on the spot at Vicksburg must be questioned.<sup>28</sup> Since Johnston controlled any reinforcements for Pemberton, he should have been more concerned about the Federal forces

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<sup>26</sup>Johnston to Pemberton, Pemberton to Johnston, 20 Apr 1863, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 769.

<sup>27</sup>Pemberton to Ruggles, 20 Apr 1863, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 770; *Bearsse*, 2: 192; *Thiele*: 457. Skillful deception by Grierson eventually fooled Ruggles' cavalry commander into following the wrong column, thus allowing Grierson to drive deeper into Mississippi unmolested. *Bearsse*, 2: 195.

<sup>28</sup>Johnston to Pemberton, 21 Apr 1863, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 773. Johnston sent the telegram from Tullahoma, Tennessee, hundreds of miles away.

threatening Pemberton. Despite his superior, Pemberton attempted to organize his forces to deal with the Federal thrusts. To General Stevenson's 21 April request for more cavalry at Vicksburg, Pemberton replied:

... that, with regard to cavalry, it is impossible to send you more, as the force now in this department is very limited and deficient, and as on it almost entirely now depends the successful defense of the northern part of the State against the strong raids of the enemy.<sup>29</sup>

Pemberton gave serious thought to his cavalry problem. Even with the stated attitude of "my cavalry is weak and wholly inadequate, either to cut the lines of communication of the enemy . . . or to guard and protect my own," he considered mounting infantry on farm horses just to get a mobile force.<sup>30</sup>

Response to the Federal raids remained the greatest problem for the Confederates. All of the Union columns in northern Mississippi pressed the Rebels to their limits. Pemberton was beginning to perceive that the center column was the main thrust and tried to organize an effective defense. The problem was where to organize it. With a seemingly powerful cavalry force somewhere in his rear area, Pemberton could not perceive their destination. Though he alerted his forces east and south of Vicksburg to concentrate against the raids, he could not pinpoint a location to catch the Federals. On 23 April, he wired Cooper:

I have so little cavalry in this department that I am compelled to direct a portion of my infantry to meet raids in Northern

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<sup>29</sup>Colonel J. C. Taylor to Stevenson, 21 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 775

<sup>30</sup>Pemberton: 101.

Mississippi. If any troops can possibly be spared from other departments, I think they should be sent here.<sup>31</sup>

Pemberton's confusion was evidenced when he ordered troops from Jackson, Mississippi, east to intercept Grierson, then ordered them back when news reached headquarters the raiders were even further south. Pemberton reached up to Chalmers' command in northern Mississippi to send troops after Grierson on 24 April. Even though Chalmers reported a large enemy force in his front, Pemberton ordered his entire force, save one regiment to watch the Federals, fifty miles south to Oxford.<sup>32</sup>

Pemberton continued to search for ways to trap the Federals. He petitioned the Governor of Mississippi, John Pettus, to provide horses for infantry units to chase Grierson. Even the President of the Confederacy attempted to intercede on Pemberton's behalf, but no troops were forthcoming from anywhere in South. As a precaution, Pemberton warned the commander of the next Confederate garrison, Major General Franklin Gardner at Port Hudson, that "information from General [William] Loring, at Meridian, renders it more than probable that cavalry raid will endeavor to join [Union Major General Nathaniel] Banks," at Baton Rouge. While the

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<sup>31</sup>Bearse, 2: 203; Pemberton to Brigadier General Abraham Buford, Pemberton to Commanding Officer . . . , 22 Apr 1863, Pemberton to Cooper, 23 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 776, 778; Pemberton was relieved of the responsibility for the Federal force operating from Corinth as Bragg ordered Bedford Forrest to help Roddey counter Dodge's move. Forrest ably blocked the cover for Streight's raid and turned to run the Union soldiers into the ground. Streight surrendered on 3 May.

<sup>32</sup>Pemberton to Brigadier General John Adams, Pemberton to Chalmers, Chalmers to Pemberton, 24 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 781-783.

Confederate command struggled to snare his force, Grierson was still moving south at a leisurely pace.<sup>33</sup>

By 25 April, the Union raids could be called a success. Together they had confounded the Confederate commanders throughout the state and drawn off troops required along the Mississippi to block Grant's infantry. Pemberton advised Stevenson that Grand Gulf or possibly even Port Hudson would require reinforcement from his troops in Vicksburg. This was necessary because of force redistributions from both strongpoints to counter the raids; the reserve forces stationed in and around Jackson were now spread thin. Pemberton counselled him further:

It is indispensable that you keep in your lines only such force as is absolutely needed to hold them, and organize the remainder, if there are any, of your troops as a movable force available for any point where it may be most required.<sup>34</sup>

On the 26th of April, Pemberton was forced to acknowledge to Johnston that he had blocked the two flanking columns, but the center one needed attention. A day later, Pemberton again brought up his lack of cavalry and the effect it was having; the enemy was below Jackson and no Confederate cavalry was nearby to block them. Johnston immediately telegraphed back, "Cavalry from Mobile is directed to operate in enemy's rear. Am sorry that you did not sooner report raid in Southern Mississippi." Johnston implied he would have reacted differently had Pemberton kept him better informed.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Pemberton to Pettus, 25 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 786; Pemberton: 51; Pemberton to Gardner, 25 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 786; Bears, 2: 211.

<sup>34</sup>Colonel J. C. Taylor to Stevenson, 25 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 788.

<sup>35</sup>Pemberton to Johnston, 26 Apr 1863, Pemberton to Johnston, Johnston to Pemberton, 27 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 789, 791.

As Grierson continued deeper into the state, Pemberton ensured his subordinates were prepared to receive them. To Brigadier General John Bowen at Grand Gulf and Gardner at Port Hudson, Pemberton sent warnings of imminent Federal approach. Bowen acknowledged on 28 April, but added he was currently engaging Federal forces in his area. Pemberton inquired if Bowen could handle the bluecoats; there was no one to send to Grand Gulf now because of the Union raiders.<sup>36</sup> Something must have dawned for Pemberton once he digested Bowen's report. He rapidly cut off the forces chasing Grierson and began to concentrate his men around Grand Gulf. Though advised twice about reinforcing Grand Gulf, Stevenson warned Pemberton that Bowen only faced a feint; the real attack would soon come at Vicksburg.<sup>37</sup> This information and advice must have confused Pemberton, uncertain as he was about the intentions of the Federal cavalry raiders and the large infantry force known to be opposite Grand Gulf. Because of the differing reports, Pemberton was unable to effectively position his forces to meet the lead elements of Grant's army.

As April drew to a close, Pemberton must have been concerned about Bowen's forces at Grand Gulf. On 28 April, he wired Cooper and Johnston there was a demonstration on his side of the Mississippi and he had lost communications with Bowen. Pemberton assessed that either Grierson's cavalry had cut the wires or some Federals had crossed the river. In either case, Pemberton asserted, help was required. In another telegram to

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<sup>36</sup>Pemberton to Bowen, Pemberton to Gardner, 27 Apr 1863, Bowen to Pemberton, Pemberton to Bowen, 28 Apr 1863, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 792-793, 797.

<sup>37</sup>Pemberton to Lt. Col. W. N. Brown . . . , Pemberton to Stevenson, Stevenson to Pemberton, 28 Apr 1863, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 798-799, 800. As part of the deception plan, Grant sent Sherman's Corps to feint against the northern approaches to Vicksburg. This force led Stevenson to caution Pemberton.

Johnston, Pemberton seemed to assuage his conscience by reminding Johnston of his frequent requests for more troops and Johnston's unwillingness to send them.<sup>38</sup>

As the infantry action developed around Grand Gulf on 29-30 April (Bowen was indeed facing the lead elements of McClelland's Corps) Grierson raiders faded from Pemberton's focus. The Union troopers finally entered Banks' lines at Baton Rouge on 2 May, much to the chagrin of the Confederates. The following day, Grant was able to report to Halleck on Grierson's success:

Colonel Grierson's raid from La Grange through Mississippi has been the most successful thing of the kind since the breaking out of the rebellion . . . . The Southern papers and Southern people regard it as one of the most daring exploits of the war.

It was later added that "Grierson has knocked the heart out of the State." What he truly knocked out was Pemberton's ability to focus on the Federal objective, getting at Vicksburg. With Confederate attention focused on blocking all of the Federal thrusts, the one thrust they failed to perceive in time was the one across the Mississippi. Everything else, including Grierson's cavalrymen, were subordinate to that objective.<sup>39</sup> Grant must have taken some satisfaction in his unopposed river crossing.

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<sup>38</sup>Pemberton to Cooper, Pemberton to Johnston, 29 Apr 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 3: 801-802. Complaining as if the Federals had not played fairly, Pemberton told Johnston, "He [Grierson] has studiously avoided meeting our infantry . . . ."

<sup>39</sup>Grant to Halleck, 3 & 6 May 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 1: 33-34; John Bigelow, Principles of Strategy (1894): 340.



## CHAPTER 5

Pemberton and Grant entered the Vicksburg campaign as products of the current military thought. They believed infantry maneuver produced the desired victory and that infantry was supported by the other combat arms available, artillery and cavalry. Certainly their use of cavalry to this point in the war gave no indication that they had any insight on a new use of their troopers. What then caused them to believe the horse soldiers could perform the raid with any degree of success?

The Confederates started the war as better horsemen and with better horses; they did not have as long a way to go before they reached the point of launching raids such as Van Dorn's or Forrest's. They quickly realized the organizational and operational benefit of using their cavalry as a body, though the process was painful. As late as November, 1862, Pemberton cautioned Sterling Price about the number of mounted soldiers he had; a proper proportion of infantry and cavalry had to be maintained.<sup>1</sup> When pressed by Pemberton for help, Bragg responded with his cavalry. However, he expected his troopers to "examine" and "harass" Grant's rear, a significant difference over what Forrest actually accomplished. Bragg, not yet understanding cavalry potential, added regretfully, "This was all that we could do directly for your aid."<sup>2</sup> With these expectations, it was a surprise when the impact of the Van Dorn and Forrest raids became clear.

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<sup>1</sup>Memminger to Price, 4 Nov 1862, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 741. "... it is not desired that you should increase your present cavalry force to any extent."

<sup>2</sup>Bragg to Pemberton, 7 Nov 1862, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 744. It is currently accepted fact the Confederate cavalry started the war on a better footing than the Federals did. Not

Pemberton, not completely satisfied with Bragg's promised aid, organized his own forces to counteract Grant. The cavalry was selected for obvious reasons. It was fast enough to get around the Federal flank, light enough to move unencumbered, and heavy enough to attack a rear echelon installation. Conversely, the cavalry was not strong enough to attack fortified positions, could not fight an organized infantry force, and could not sustain itself behind Federal lines for more than a few days.

Pemberton's risk in sending his cavalry deep against the supply base was twofold: could the cavalry survive against an organized resistance and could the Confederate army survive without its eyes for several days. He believed the advantages outweighed the risks. The Confederates had a reasonable estimate of the Union cavalry strength after six weeks of combat. With a sizable Union cavalry force operating far to the Confederate right (Dickey's force), Van Dorn's troopers had a good chance of getting into the Federal rear before any force could move against them. The strength of the Confederate positions along the Yalobusha River provided enough security for the army to allow the cavalry to be absent for several days. The Confederate dispositions would also serve to hold the majority of the Federal infantry in position and prevent detachments from being sent to chase the cavalry. Thus, Pemberton formulated his plan, assessed the risks involved, and executed the raid vigorously.

The initial Union reaction to the Confederate raids was typical of the narrow expectations of cavalry. Grant wired McPherson on 18 December that Forrest was in their rear and would "probably succeed . . . in cutting the

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only were they better organized, but they were more aggressively led. James Schaefer, "The Tactical and Strategic Evolution of Cavalry During the American Civil War" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toledo, 1982): 146.

[rail]road and wires so as to interrupt communication north for a day or two."<sup>3</sup> Grant did not demonstrate much concern over this cut in communications. The following day, he again wired McPherson to hold his forces in place until Forrest was dealt with; a problem Grant did not expect to be difficult. He did caution his subordinate, "We must be ready for any move. I think, however, it will not be a retrograde one."<sup>4</sup> This indicated Grant was still thinking of holding his present line, or possibly moving forward; this despite the fact Forrest destroyed over 60 miles of railroad and telegraph lines.<sup>5</sup>

As noted in Chapter Three, Van Dorn's troopers were riding towards Holly Springs as the previous message was drafted. Though Grant discovered the raid late on the 19th and eventually warned the appropriate depot commanders, there was still no indication Grant was contemplating a "retrograde". The first inkling of any real problem can be found in McPherson's telegram to his 1st Division Commander, Brigadier General James Denver, "I am apprehensive that the cavalry dash into Holly Springs has been a pretty serious affair for us, though I have not heard anything definite as yet." Was it McPherson's grasp of the situation that caused him to fear a serious problem? The obvious conclusion was that McPherson fully understood what had happened as well as the consequences. Grant reinforced the conclusion when he telegraphed McPherson on the 20th to fall back to the north side of the Tallahatchie River.<sup>6</sup> Grant was at least as

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<sup>3</sup>Grant to McPherson, 18 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 428.

<sup>4</sup>Grant to McPherson, 19 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 435.

<sup>5</sup>John C. Pemberton, Pemberton: Defender of Vicksburg (1942): 63

<sup>6</sup>McPherson to Denver, Grant to McPherson, 20 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 445.

militarily competent as McPherson and understood what the combined raids meant to his army. The Union army could have survived in Mississippi with its communications north cut by Forrest's men. It could not, however, withstand both the loss of communications and the loss of its major supply base. This was consistent with the doctrinal requirement to have a secure base of supplies in enemy territory. Grant, with all his tactical and strategic prejudices, did not believe he could remain deep in Mississippi without it.

This view was supported by Grant's dispatches for the remainder of December. On the 23d, he wired Major General John McClelland, then operating along the Mississippi River:

Raids made upon the railroad to my rear by Forrest northward from Jackson, and by Van Dorn northward from the Tallahatchie, have cut me off from supplies, so that farther advance by this route is perfectly impracticable. The country does not afford supplies for troops, and but a limited supply of forage.<sup>7</sup>

Grant could not maintain his army without the required base and supply lines. He telegraphed Halleck two days later, "It is perfectly impractical to go farther south by this route, depending on the road for supplies, and the country does not afford them."<sup>8</sup> Allan Nevins's assessment of the raids were consistent with that reasoning, "To stand still long was to starve, while to

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<sup>7</sup>Grant to Commanding Officer Expedition Down Mississippi, 23 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 463. It is assumed that the Commanding Officer is McClelland; Grant was unsure whether he had reached Sherman's forces yet.

<sup>8</sup>Grant to Colonel John Kelton, 25 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 1: 478. Kelton was Halleck's Assistant Adjutant General.

go forward, depending on the country for food, was too dangerous . . . ."

Samuel Carter also supported the view:

What Grant feared most had happened. His supplies destroyed by Van Dorn, and his means of replacing them destroyed by Forrest, he had no choice but to pull back to Grand Junction, leaving Pemberton free to return with his army to Vicksburg.<sup>9</sup>

The Union commander was so concerned with his supplies now that he sent an entire division back to Memphis to guard the army's supply train as it slowly worked its way down to the combat troops.<sup>10</sup>

The Union generals learned several very valuable operational lessons. Confederate cavalry was capable of operating on a large scale by itself against Union forces. While it was known that Forrest's command could operate that way, the capability demonstrated by Van Dorn and his troopers was something new. The combined capability of both was entirely new and unexpected. Neither Grant nor any of his subordinates could have predicted the combination of forces and their synergistic effect on the overall Union plan. Another lesson concerned the protection of the lines of communication. Over the distances of northern Mississippi, security at isolated garrisons would have to be very tight to prevent similar raids from achieving the same results. Just because a unit garrisoned a station behind the main lines, it was not out of the war; cavalry could very easily bring the war to them. Methods of better protecting the rear echelon forces had to be

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<sup>9</sup>Allen Nevins, War Becomes Revolution, 1862-1863 (1960): 381; Samuel Carter III, The Final Fortress: The Campaign for Vicksburg, 1862-1863 (1980): 95.

<sup>10</sup>Headquarters, 13th Army Corps, Department of the Tennessee, Special Order #34, 25 Dec 1862, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 485.

devised. For the current Union plan, a reevaluation of the requirement to attack overland was a direct result of the inability to protect the extended supply lines. Methods of rapidly organizing an effective counterattack force to combat raids was a very real problem. Infantry alone could not hamper a cavalry striking force that did not want to be stopped; the slow moving soldiers were easily sidestepped by the mounted troopers. Only on rare occasions could cavalry be trapped by an infantry force.<sup>11</sup> It was quickly obvious that the best defense against cavalry was other cavalry forces. The significance of a powerful mounted force, capable of rapid movement within the theater of operations for either offensive or defensive operations, was not yet fully understood, but the organization for success had been demonstrated by the Confederates.

There were two quirks to the accepted reasoning for Grant's withdrawal. One concerns the rapidity with which he conducted the retrograde. The other centers on another general, John McClelland. As indicated earlier, Grant halted his forces on the 19th. If his attitude was that Forrest was only a nuisance, and he knew nothing of Van Dorn yet, why issue an order that said, "There will be no farther advance of our forces until further directions"? Though Grant may have feared Forrest would do more damage, the only good reasons to stop were to replenish supplies in preparation for an advance or to simply hold the line in front of

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<sup>11</sup> Infantry units could catch cavalry if circumstances were right. Forrest's battle at Parker's Crossroads on the way back to Tennessee and Chalmers's near entrapment by Colonel Bryant and General Smith are examples. Though the Union cavalry was organized into brigades in November, they were rarely used as brigades. After Holly Springs, they were seen in the 16th Corps along the Tennessee-Mississippi border after the remainder of the army moved down the Mississippi River. Scheefer: 134.

Pemberton.<sup>12</sup> If the reason was to stop for supplies, Grant would not have been prepared to issue orders to his major commanders on 21 December to begin a withdrawal and reorientation down the Mississippi River. The rapidity with which the decision was made and orders issued indicated forethought and planning.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, Grant may have been thinking about a withdrawal, though he had not articulated that particular plan to anyone yet.

The case for withdrawal because of General McClelland concerned Grant's future. Through some convoluted political process, McClelland was empowered by President Lincoln to raise an army and command an expedition down the Mississippi to capture Vicksburg. This move was initially independent of Grant, but became tied to him when Halleck subordinated McClelland to a corps command under Grant. There may be some truth to the reasoning that Grant pulled back to personally take command of the Mississippi expedition in order to block any potential independent operation by McClelland.<sup>14</sup>

In either case, did Grant decide to move back before the devastation of the raids became fully apparent? This was unlikely. Pulling back before Sherman's forces struck the defenses of Vicksburg would have admitted defeat before the plan was tested; Grant would not have abandoned Sherman except to save the remainder of the army. Though the rapidity of the withdrawal orders was unusual, they indicated the speed and agility with

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<sup>12</sup>Grant to McPherson, 19 Dec 1862, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 435; Grant: 430-431.

<sup>13</sup>Grant to McPherson, Grant to Hamilton, 21 Dec 1862, *QR*, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 451-452. The orders indicated a pull back to the Tallahatchie and a defense of northern Mississippi. To McPherson, Grant outlined the plan to send divisions to Memphis for another move downriver, while the remainder of the army defended the Tennessee-Mississippi border. The speed surrounding these messages is rather uncommon.

<sup>14</sup>Carter: 218.

which Grant was capable of acting once a course of action was clear. The McClellan situation provided the impetus, a focus point, to force the Union commander into action after the physical and psychological blow imposed by the Confederates.

Besides giving the Federals lessons, the Confederates learned two. First, the Confederate cavalry could be used as a potent operational strike force to block an enemy thrust. Major General J. E. B. Stuart's exploits in the Army of Northern Virginia were well known; Van Dorn and Forrest accomplished the same sort of mission for the western army. But the effects of the Western raids were far more reaching the Stuart's ride around Major General George McClellan; the Union army turned back. Ed Bearss characterized the raids as being instrumental in Grant's retrograde:

Van Dorn's dash on Holly Springs, in conjunction with Forrest's sweep into West Tennessee, had immediate repercussions on Grant's master plan. Destruction of the big Holly Springs base compelled Grant to abandon his advance.<sup>15</sup>

Stephen Starr also believed the raids had significant effect:

There can be no question of the soundness of Grant's decision [to pull back]. That being conceded, it becomes apparent that the twin Van Dorn-Forrest raids had a military significance out of all proportion to the monetary value, however large it may have been, of the damage they caused. Inducing the federals to terminate a campaign already two months old, then to retreat and begin building up resources for an entirely different - both

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<sup>15</sup>Ed Bearss, The Campaign for Vicksburg (3 volumes, 1985-1988) 1:321.



geographically and conceptually - campaign was a considerable accomplishment.<sup>16</sup>

By the 8th of January, Bragg was able to write Adjutant-General Cooper that Forrest's raid was highly successful and caused Grant to "... virtually ... abandon a campaign which so seriously threatened our [the Confederacy's] safety."<sup>17</sup>

The second lesson was one for the generals. The success of the two Confederate endeavors was due, in part, to their simultaneous execution. How did that happen? The true answer is beyond the scope of this study, however the fact it worked was noteworthy. Bragg and Pemberton, and to a lesser extent Johnston, were responsible for laying the groundwork that established the timetable for the two raiders. No further documentation exists in the Official Records to indicate that Van Dorn or Forrest coordinated their moves further.<sup>18</sup> However, both Thiele and Schaefer cited the synchronization of the two movements. Thiele characterized the plan as a "brilliant concept" and gave much credit to the leadership of Van Dorn and Forrest. Schaefer cited the distances involved and the interdepartmental cooperation, so rarely seen.<sup>19</sup> For the Confederate commanders it should have been obvious that cooperation and synchronization of their limited assets would produce similar results in the future. This should have been Johnston's responsibility as the Department commander, but politics and

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<sup>16</sup>Stephen Z. Starr, The Union Cavalry in the Civil War (3 volumes, 1979-1985) 3: 151.

<sup>17</sup>Bragg to Cooper, 8 Jan 1863, OR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 1: 592. Bragg's army was as threatened by Grant's advance as Pemberton's. If Grant had been successful, Bragg's lines of communication and rear area would have been dangerously exposed.

<sup>18</sup>Bears, 1: 345-347.

<sup>19</sup>Thiele: 365; Schaefer: 206.

personalities prevented a coordinated employment of the available troops.<sup>20</sup> Rather, he ordered forces around the Department in such a way that negated the operational benefit gained by combining forces. Units were unavailable when and where they were needed most. As the Federal raids began in April 1863, Pemberton had few units to counter them. Pemberton's assessment, though prejudiced by hindsight, was close to accurate:

[The success of the Federal raids] . . . clearly demonstrated the great deficiency . . . of cavalry in my department, and the absolute impossibility of protecting my communications, depots, and even my most vital positions, without it; and, further, to show that . . . I was compelled to employ infantry, and thus weaken my force in that arm at other important points.<sup>21</sup>

The lesson of coordination and synchronization had missed its mark in the Confederate high command. Though Johnston tried to coordinate help for Pemberton's army, he was singularly unsuccessful. Pemberton was left to his own devices to solve the problems presented by the Union cavalry.

The Confederate raiders also taught some lessons that were used against them: an army can operate without a base of supplies and no communications for a limited period and a cavalry force, properly led, can operate independently to do serious damage against an enemy. The former was a radical departure from the accepted doctrine of the day. As outlined in Chapter Two, it was an accepted fact that an army needed a secure base

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<sup>20</sup>Bearss, 2: 134. Because Pemberton could not convince Johnston of his need, he went to President Davis who intervened with Johnston. The interaction of Johnston, Pemberton, Bragg, Davis, and other about how the war should be fought in the West was the subject of much controversy. See Connelly and Jones, The Politics of Command.

<sup>21</sup>Pemberton to Cooper, 2 Aug 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 1: 255.

of supplies. The Van Dorn-Forrest raids taught the Union leadership that this was not always true. Grant informed Halleck on 6 Jan that the surrounding countryside was providing "forage and fresh meat" and that "supplies will last thirty days" by using that source. In his Memoirs, Grant stated, "Our loss of supplies was great at Holly Springs, but it was more than compensated for by those taken from the country and by the lesson taught" and "I was amazed at the quantities of supplies the country afforded. It showed that we could have subsisted off the country for two months . . .

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The lesson was one of total war: live from the enemies supplies and not your own for as long as possible. Grant reinforced this lesson when, on 2 Jan, he proposed to attack south overland again. If his army was starving, how could he make the proposal to the General-in Chief? Two days later, he informs Halleck, "Since the late raids this department . . . has subsisted off the country. There will be but little in Northern Mississippi to support guerrillas in a few weeks more."<sup>23</sup> These messages would be consistent coming from a commander who knew his units were not starving due to the loss of the army's supply base.

By 4 Jan, the date of the second message, the army had completed its 25 mile retrograde to the north bank of the Tallahatchie. There were ample estates and plantations to provide "forage and fresh meats" to the army and there was every reason to believe they did. Grant's comment that the

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<sup>22</sup>Scheefer: 206; Grant to Halleck, 6 Jan 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 1: 481; Grant, 1: 435.

<sup>23</sup>Grant to Halleck, 2, 4 Jan 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 1: 479-480. In the first message Grant, in response to the Confederate redeployment to counter Sherman's troops, says he can "make a dash at enemy's line of communication. . ."

Confederate guerrillas still had a "few weeks" to subsist from the country, even given generous exaggeration, indicated there was more than enough food and general supplies to liberate for the Union cause.

The loss of communications with the North presented more problems for Washington than for the Union army. The dispatches of the time indicate the army, corps, and division commanders had little trouble communicating among themselves. The glaring exception was Sherman as he moved downriver, but that was tied more to moving in enemy-held territory, or at least territory the Union had not operated in before, than to the loss of telegraph lines due to cavalry actions. There did not appear to be any significant lapses within the theater due to Van Dorn's or Forrest's actions. There was difficulty in establishing a coherent defense and pursuit after 20 December, but that related more to the command and control techniques of the time than to a loss of communications. Once Grant identified the units to pursue Van Dorn, they moved as best they could to trap him. Van Dorn's superior mobility and the widely dispersed, slow-moving, pursuing units combined to facilitate the Confederates escape. Though Grierson led two cavalry regiments in pursuit of Van Dorn, he started out of position and did not close until the Rebels were approaching the Tallahatchie River and safety. The infantry units sent in pursuit had no chance to catch the mounted troopers.

Forrest's raid closed communications with the North. This action created great concern in northern Tennessee and Kentucky; the name "Forrest" was enough to create a problem in those areas. In Washington, Halleck was concerned when he did not hear from Grant for several days. He was forced to rely on Major General Samuel Curtis in St. Louis and Brigadier

General Thomas Davies in Columbus, Kentucky for information until communications were reestablished on 26 December. Other than not keeping Washington informed, there was no significant effect from the loss of that communications link. If Grant could talk to his major commanders, he probably gave little thought to Halleck; it was not the first time the two had a loss of communications.

The evolution of thought concerning cavalry employment during the campaign was a result of practical experience. The Confederates started with a better organization, but, after the December raids, capitalized on the wrong lesson. If Van Dorn's and Forrest's units could wreck such havoc, the high command reasoned, then a larger force of cavalry could do even more damage.<sup>24</sup> Instead of keeping a strong cavalry force with Pemberton's army most of the regiments were ordered to join Bragg. This created a powerful mounted force for Bragg, capable of influencing the Union army opposing him, but deprived Pemberton of the same capability. While the requirements of the central region and Bragg's situation called for reinforcement, the transfer of the cavalry created a vacuum in Mississippi that infantry alone could not fill.

The Union commanders, on the other hand, realized the advantages offered by a united, powerful, and mobile striking force of cavalry. Rather than frittering the cavalry away on superfluous raids, like Dickey's in December, the troopers were given more vital tasks. The cavalry became the centerpiece in the April operations to distract the Confederates. Everything Hurlbut organized was centered around getting Grierson's units deep into Mississippi unmolested; it also helped Streight's raiders get into

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<sup>24</sup>Johnston to Bragg, 30 Dec 1862, *OR*, Series 1, Vol. 17, Pt. 2: 811.

northern Alabama. In April, it was the Confederates turn to be caught with a diluted and dispersed mounted force with which to counter a strong Federal cavalry thrust.<sup>25</sup> The Federal commanders, Grant and Rosecrans, demonstrated the same sort of interdepartmental cooperation and coordination that characterized the Confederate's December raids. Dodge and Rosecrans directly coordinated their movements; Hurlbut ensured all of his columns moved together. Both Grant and Rosecrans benefitted from this cooperation, though Streight did not fare as well as Grierson did. As a direct result of the Federal synchronization, "between April 15 and May 3, 1863, all Confederate commands from Tullahoma, Tennessee, to the Mississippi River were engaged in efforts to contain the hydra-headed thrusts launched by the Federals."<sup>26</sup>

Hurlbut, as noted previously, should be given most of the credit for the "hydra-headed thrusts." He was the one who orchestrated all of the moves from the Tennessee border. Purposely launching Dodge's column from Corinth before Grierson's left laid the groundwork for the latter's success. Once fairly launched, Grierson caused the same sort of confusion that Van Dorn and Forrest had created four months earlier. Ten days after starting, the Union cavalrymen were 35 miles east of Grand Gulf, Mississippi. West of Grand Gulf, across the river, was McClelland's Corps. Though the commander at Grand Gulf correctly assessed his situation, Pemberton was sufficiently confused as to the real objective of Grierson's column that he ordered the cavalry regiment at Grand Gulf to pursue the bluecoats. Thus, General Bowen, on the eve of Grant's crossing of the Mississippi, saw his

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<sup>25</sup>Schaefer: 162-163.

<sup>26</sup>Bearse, 2: 129.

cavalry sent to intercept Grierson.<sup>27</sup> The damage was done. Though Pemberton slowly shifted his attention from the Union cavalry riding through the state to the Union infantry crossing the river, he had been tricked into focusing on the wrong force. Pemberton was later to complain that his lack of cavalry was the chief cause of Grierson's success; he failed to consider the Union development and refinement of his ideas on the use of cavalry.<sup>28</sup> James Schaefer described the Union concept:

Utilizing the cavalry's consolidated organization and taking advantage of the new tactics, the long distance raid allowed mounted troops to disrupt enemy communications and supply lines swiftly and to do sudden significant damage deep within enemy territory, often without serious loss to the raiding party.<sup>29</sup>

This concept clearly established the operational raid as an economical move to effect a certain response from the enemy.

In the December raids the effect desired was to force the Union army to retreat from central Mississippi. They achieved the desired result and Grant was forced to seek another path to his objective. The Union April raids focused on a different end result. With Grierson's troopers as the centerpiece, the raids were intended to divert Confederate attention from the main Union army as it worked its way down the west bank of the Mississippi and sought a way across. Historical opinion seems consolidated

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<sup>27</sup>Bearss, 2: 187, 217.

<sup>28</sup>Bearss, 2: 222, 233; Pemberton to Cooper, 2 August 1863, QR, Series 1, Vol. 24, Pt. 1: 250.

<sup>29</sup>Schaefer: 197.

behind the success of the Union effort. Bruce Catton described the results as:

... [Grierson] had done substantial damage to Pemberton's communications, he had compelled various Confederate units to wear themselves out chasing him, and he had stirred up precisely the sort of alarm which Grant had intended.<sup>30</sup>

Carter credited the raiders with diverting attention from the river crossing, allowing McClernand to come across unopposed, as well as initially diverting "General Pemberton's reserve force at Big Black River bridge." James McPherson acknowledged the troopers role in decoying "most of Pemberton's depleted cavalry plus a full infantry division into futile pursuit. . . ." Even Pemberton's biographer acknowledged Grierson's success in confusing the Confederate commanders and destroying communications, railroads, and supplies. Schaefer summed up the operation, "The confusion, destruction, and terror the raid caused deep in Southern territory was devastating, and well worth the effort."<sup>31</sup>

An unexpected benefit from the Grierson's move was the effect it had on Southern morale. For two years, the Rebel cavalry had thrashed the bluecoats almost every time they crossed sabers. Now, here were Union troopers deep in the heart of Mississippi. The event was significant enough to make its way into J. B. Jones's Richmond war diary.<sup>32</sup> The residents of

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<sup>30</sup>Bruce Catton, Grant Moves South (1960): 422.

<sup>31</sup>Carter: 180; James McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom (1989): 628; Pemberton: 102; Schaefer: 216.

<sup>32</sup>J. B. Jones, A Rebel War Clerk's Diary (2 Volumes, 1935) 1: 298-299. It is interesting to note Jones's attitude towards the relationship of the Pennsylvania-born Pemberton and the President: "Well, Mississippi is the President's state, and if he is satisfied with Northern generals to defend it, he is likely to be benefited as anyone else."



Mississippi were up in arms and besieged Governor John Pettus and Pemberton to do something to stop the raiders. The absolute shock of Grierson's success was a very bitter pill to swallow for the Confederates; with actions like these, what did the future hold? Grant noted in his Memoirs, "... the notice given this raid by the Southern press confirms our estimate of its importance."<sup>33</sup> The Union leaders, having borrowed a page from the Confederate cavalry book, demonstrated their understanding of the operational raid. The psychological effect of the Union raid upon the general population as well as the military leaders cannot be underestimated. The Federals demonstrated an alarming ability to bring the war and its effects home to the Mississippians.

The Union and Confederate commanders, and their cavalry leaders, had been through a great deal in five months. The operational raid was conceived, planned and executed first by the Confederates, then matured and employed by the Federals. The successes were significant: the first turned an army back, the second captured an army's attention. Coordination and synchronization became increasingly significant to the astute observer. The Rebels practiced the two until personalities prevented further cooperation. The Yankees continued to practice until whole armies were orchestrated by a single man. Traditional concepts of supply bases, command and control, and attached cavalry were challenged and tested and found wanting. New concepts such as total war, cutting lines of supply and communications, and large scale cavalry raids evolved and matured as the war progressed. The use of cavalry and its evolution to a powerful, mobile force, capable of

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<sup>33</sup>Thiele: 459; Schaefer: 165; Bearss, 2: 235-236.

independent operations, was one of the many new faces in the Civil War.

James Schaefer characterized the mounted arm at the end of the war:

The cavalry that emerged from the first modern war was a thoroughly integrated combat force capable of an independent defensive and offensive tactical and strategic role.<sup>34</sup>

Does that "integrated combat force" still exist in the American Army? Notwithstanding the projections for force reduction, the Army has, at best, only a limited capability to conduct operational raids with conventional forces. Due primarily to maintain supplies of POL, a modern force equipped with M1s and M2s would be hard pressed to operate behind enemy lines for much more than 12-15 hours. Though the distance that could be covered in that amount of time is large, the vehicles would be short on fuel and unable to press the advantage to its ultimate conclusion. The force could penetrate enemy lines and operate in the rear, but would be unable to effectively escape the tactical depth of the battlefield. The combat support and combat service support forces that would have to be dedicated to the combat force would deprive the parent organization of a significant amount of its support forces. If a large, self-contained force was committed on an operational raid, such as a separate brigade or an armored cavalry regiment, there would be difficulty in maintaining the momentum of the advance while conducting sustainment operations.

If the projected force reductions are placed over our current capabilities, the chances of conducting a successful raid to operational depth decreases. The only possible lights on the horizon for the

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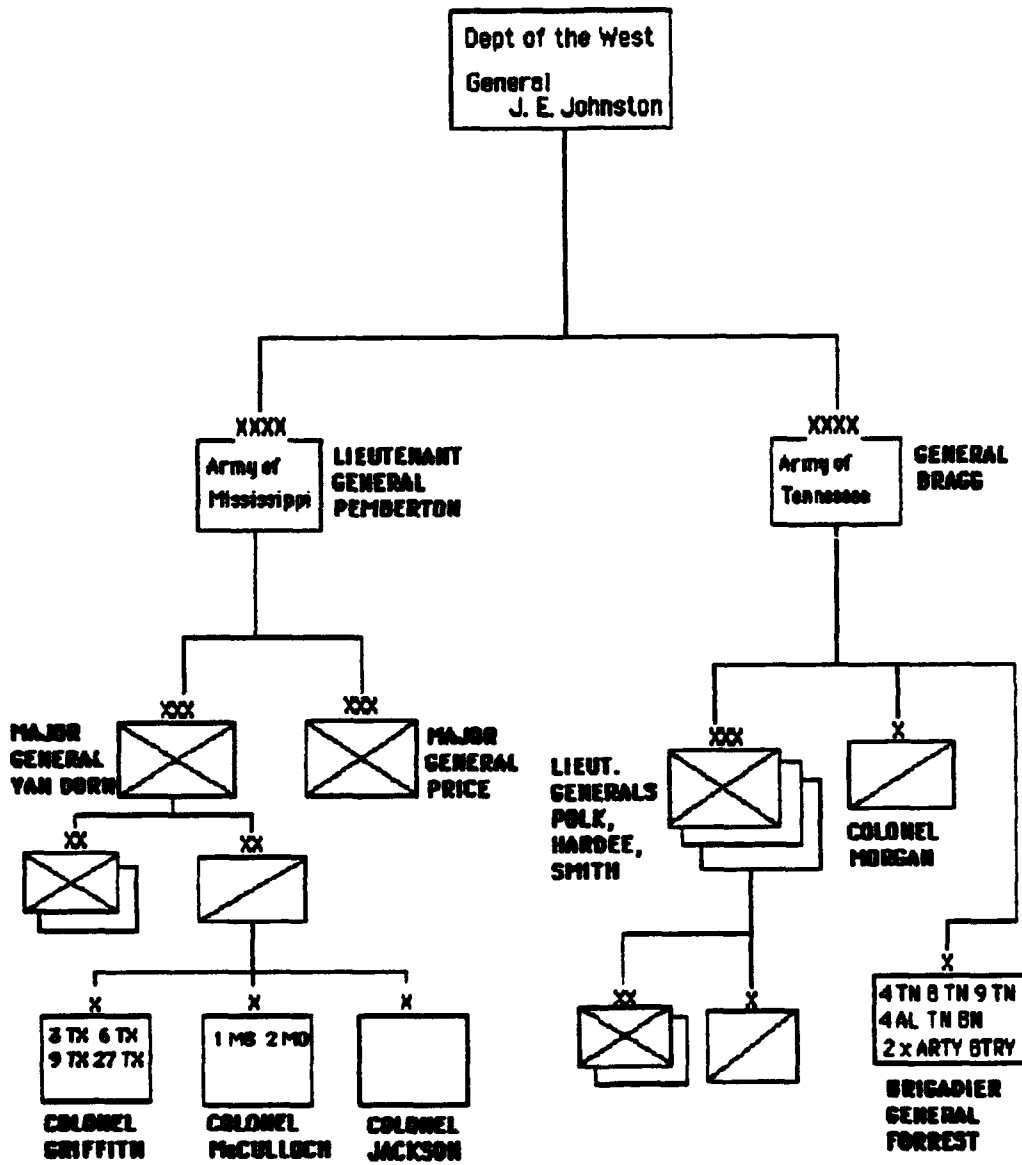
<sup>34</sup>Schaefer: 251.

conventional forces are several prototype vehicles contained in the Armored Family of Vehicles Program that would allow for protected rearming and resupplying on the front lines. This advance in technology would enhance our ability to send a force into the enemy's operational rear to destroy the infrastructure vital to the conduct of war. Again, though, the prospects of this ever happening are dim.

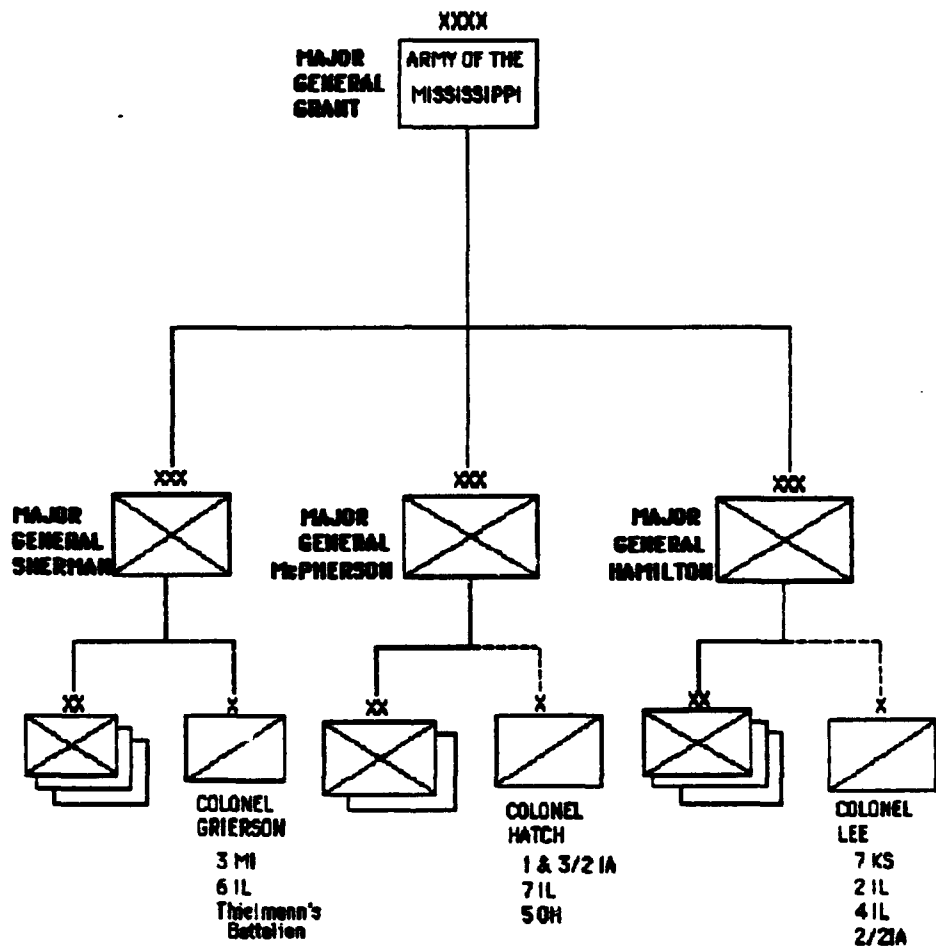
Unconventional forces offer a hope for the conduct of operational raids. Together with special operations aviation, special operations units may be able to penetrate enemy lines to conduct a pinpoint operation to destroy an enemy supply base or vital communications link. These forces are capable of destroying the infrastructure that supports an enemy force operating in captured territory. They also offer the possibility of conducting the raid into the enemy's homeland, but their support and sustainability would be difficult to ensure.

The chances of the United States Army fixing its ability to operate deep with conventional armored forces is limited and is likely to remain that way for the foreseeable future. It is hoped that the ability to look back upon the examples of past conflicts as an inspiration for future possibilities will not be diminished. History provides many examples and situations that can be studied and examined for applications to today. This study has attempted to provide some background on the operational raid as it existed in the American Civil War during the Vicksburg Campaign. The raids added a significant new dimension to the conduct of the war. The challenge of today is to be able to discern the conditions and possibilities that will allow the raid to be practiced again.

**APPENDIX 1**  
**CONFEDERATE AND UNION CAVALRY**  
**ORDER OF BATTLE**  
**December, 1862**



CONFEDERATE ORDER OF BATTLE, DECEMBER 1862



**Note:** Though each Corps had a cavalry brigade attached to it, the three brigades formed a cavalry division under the nominal control of Colonel T. Lyle Dickey.

UNION ORDER OF BATTLE, DECEMBER 1862

**APPENDIX 2**  
**CONFEDERATE AND UNION CAVALRY**  
**ORDER OF BATTLE**  
**April, 1863**

**MANY UNITS PARTICIPATED IN THE PURSUIT OF COLONEL GRIERSON'S  
COMMAND. BELOW IS A PARTIAL LIST OF THE CAVALRY UNITS THAT  
PARTICIPATED IN THE PURSUIT. THE OVERALL COMMANDER WAS  
LIEUTENANT GENERAL JOHN C. PEMBERTON.**

**Brigadier General Daniel Ruggles, based at Columbus, Mississippi**

**Lieutenant Colonel Clark Barteau**

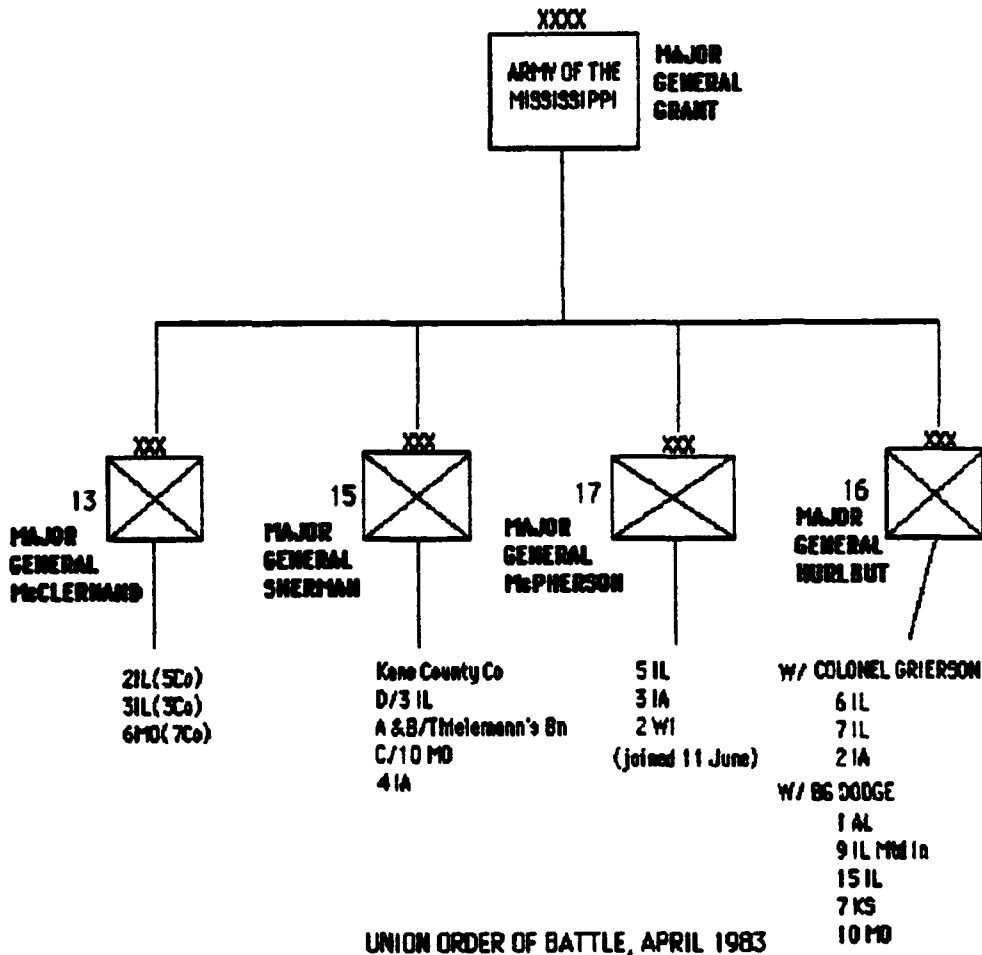
**2d Alabama  
2d Mississippi (State Troops)  
12th Battalion, Partisan Rangers  
16th Mississippi Battalion (State Troops)  
2d Tennessee**

**Brigadier General James Chalmers, based at**

**1st Mississippi Partisan Rangers  
3d Mississippi (State Troops)  
18th Mississippi Battalion  
    2 separate State Battalions  
    3 separate State Companies  
2d Arkansas  
2d Missouri**

**INFANTRY UNITS BASED IN VICKSBURG, JACKSON, AND PORT HUDSON ALSO  
PARTICIPATED IN THE PURSUIT.**





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