

Siege Of Vicksburg, 1863

Siege Of Vicksburg --January 20-August 10, 1863.

Report of Mr. Charles A. Dana, special commissioner of the United States War Department.

BEHIND VICKSBURG, MISS., June 8, 1863---10 a.m.,

VIA MEMPHIS, June 10...5 p.m.

I have just returned from the vicinity of Mechanicsburg, whither I went with a party of cavalry from Haynes' Bluff yesterday. There were no signs of any considerable force of the enemy, though Kimball had retreated from there the day before in a semi-panic. No doubt Johnston has moved some of his troops this side of the Big Black, but his main force yet stays at Canton. The idea of operating in that direction, both for devastation and for more direct military objects, General Grant has by no means abandoned. His intention has been to put C. C. Washburn in command there, but I now think he will send Sherman with a force of from 15,000 to 20,000 troops, including 2,500 cavalry. The country is like the rest of this peninsula--broken, wooded, unpopulous, with few streams. It still has many cattle, but the corn is pretty thoroughly cleared out. Johnston cannot move through it without bringing all his supplies with him.

Advices from Port Hudson to the 4th instant were brought yesterday by Col. J. Riggins, of General Grant's staff. The siege has not reached a decisive point. General Banks thinks if he had 10,000 troops more he could reduce the place in a few days, but we have not facts enough to understand the grounds of this opinion. So far as it is possible to judge at this distance, a regular siege is as indispensable there as it is here. The reason General Banks gives for not cooperating with General Grant is that he could not spare more troops from his own army and still hold New Orleans safe against any possible attack; then he would, by giving up the siege, liberate the enemy to join Johnston.

Milliken's Bend and Young's Point were both attacked day before yesterday by a body of rebels reported at about 1,500. At Milliken's Bend the negro troops at first gave way, but hearing that those of their number who were captured were killed, they rallied with great fury and routed the enemy. The white troops at Young's Point also repulsed him decisively.

C. A. DANA.

Hon. E. M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

NEAR VICKSBURG, MISS., June 22, 1863--9 a.m.,

VIA MEMPHIS, June 28--Noon.

(Received July 1--11 p.m.)

Joe Johnston's plan is at last developed. He began yesterday to throw his army across the Big Black at various points above Bridgeport, and principally in the vicinity of Birdsong's Ferry. A squadron of the Fourth Iowa Cavalry had a fight at Bridgeport with about 500 rebel horse, and lost 40 or 50 killed, wounded, and captured, besides one mountain howitzer. At once on the receipt of this intelligence the troops prepared for Sherman here, with the division at Haynes' Bluff, proceeded to move out, and before 11 a.m. to-day all will be at their destination on the heights and beyond the bottoms in the headwaters of Clear Creek. Johnston must move up mainly by the Benton or Jackson road, which makes a detour from Oak Ridge Post-Office to the northeast, until in the region of his crossing it nearly touches the Big Black; but the greater part of this road winds along very narrow and precipitous ridges, heavily wooded, where a column cannot deploy, and where the advance can easily be checked or its attack repulsed. On this side of Oak Ridge, about the head of Clear Creek, there is a broad, open region, extensively cultivated, where a great army might deploy and fight advantageously--at least on equal terms. The effort of Sherman will be to settle the question before Joe Johnston can get to this open place. Sherman has in all about 30,000, besides cavalry. General Grant holds in readiness to march to reinforce him five brigades more, under A. J. Smith and Herron, while Osterhaus, with one brigade stationed at the Vicksburg and Jackson Railroad crossing of Big Black, is to join him in case of need. As to the strength that Joe Johnston commands, we have no new information. If he pushes his advance, a battle may be fought to-day or to-morrow. The roads he has before him have all been obstructed. Nothing to report here except steady progress in the siege. Ord is working very hard to bring up the lines where McClern and left them behind, but it will take some time to remedy the disorder which that incompetent commander produced in every part of the corps he has left.

Allow me to represent the very great necessity that some first-rate officer, with suitable energy, patient in character, should be sent here, or found here, to take the place of General J.P. Hawkins, and conduct the organization of the African forces. Hawkins is sick, and very probably will not again be robust enough to efficiently resume his duties in this climate, and the public service is suffering terribly in this most delicate matter in consequence of his absence. I do not know here an officer who could do the duty half as well as he, so that I make no recommendation; but none but a man of the very highest qualities can succeed in the work. I am happy to report that the sentiment of this army with regard to the employment of negro troops has been revolutionized by the bravery of the blacks in the recent battle of Milliken's Bend. Prominent officers, who used in private to sneer at the idea, are now heartily in favor of it.

C. A. DANA.

Hon. E. M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

SOURCE: United States War Department. THE WAR OF THE REBELLION: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901.

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