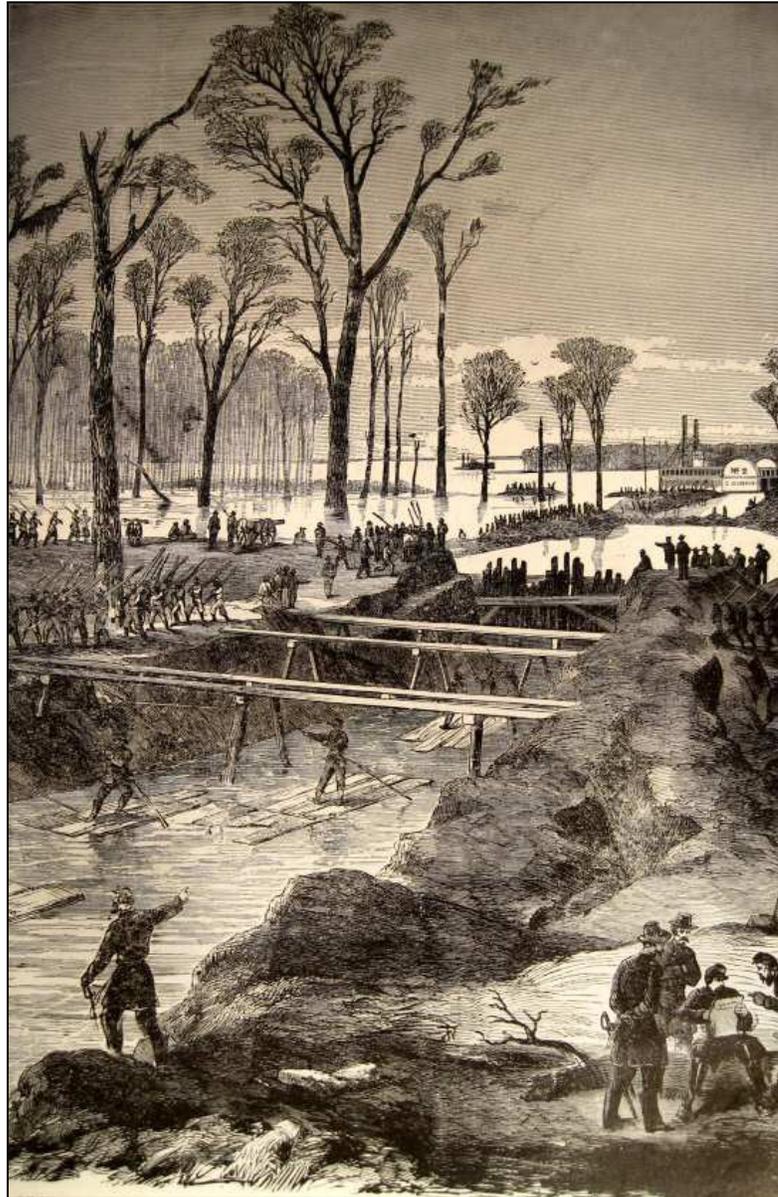


Grant's Canal

Note: Grant needed to get boats down past Vicksburg so that he would have transports to take troops across the Mississippi below Vicksburg. He tried the canal and failed. But he wasn't giving up. And another plan was formed.

Sketch of the canal from the book Battles and Commanders of the Civil War : a graphic and pictorial history prepared directly from the government records in the Departments of War and Statistics, by Frank Leslie and Marcus J. Wright, 1902 and 1906, page 201.



"Grant visited the army afloat at Napoleon, and, as Gen. Sherman narrates: 'On the **18th day of January** ordered McClernand with his own and my corps, to return to Vicksburg to disembark on the west bank, and to resume work on a canal across a peninsula, which had been begun by Gen. Thomas Williams the summer before, the object being to turn the Mississippi River at that point.' "

[Cincinnati Daily Gazette, Saturday 23 July 1881, page 4]

[My Editorial Comment: Politics can be an ugly thing. The slavery question was still a hot topic in Ohio and there were many Democrats in Ohio who were against the war and were willing to appease the South.]

[Solon Boydston, Private, Company A, 120th OVI; Isaac Huntsberger, Private, Company A, 120th OVI]

"The Soldiers on the Negro - What They Think. The following extract is from a letter written by a soldier of the 120th regiment, who was an ultra Republican when he entered the army. The lovers of the negro can see what misery their policy entails upon the unfortunate objects of their love:

Camp at Young's Point, La., **February 15th 1863**. We are encamped in a swamp on the banks of the Mississippi. Old Abe's Proclamation has had a bad effect here. We have about 1,000 n***** at present. They are working in the ditch. Those of them that starve and get sick, are turned out to die. (When I speak of the 'ditch,' I mean the canal we were going to dry up the Mississippi river with.) I. Hunsberger was down to see it yesterday. He says that the very air is black with negroes. -- You can see negroes lying around dead almost any place. This is the effect of Uncle Abe's 1st of January Proclamation. The war is over with me. I didn't come to fight for the freedom of the negroes; and you may tell the Republicans who like negroes to come down here and they can get lousy with them.

Solon Boydston

[Published in The Democratic Press, 2 Apr 1863, page 1; published in the Columbus Crisis, 25 Mar 1863, page 72, available at GenealogyBank]

Letter from the 120th Regiment.

Young's Point, La, Feb. 18, 1863.

Friend Wallace: If the radical Republican Abolitionists will persist and say this war should be prosecuted for the abolishment of Slavery, and think it can be done at the point of the bayonet - if they think it an easy and pleasant thing, send a few of those bold, defiant and smooth-tongued Abolitionists to take my place for six months, and if they think it a pleasant way of living and the right method of reconstructing the national government I will go back and take my post cheerfully, I have always been at my post; but if they let me go home I won't say a word, at least not of complaint.

We are now involved in a debt of \$1,500,000,000 since the 15th of April 1861, which must be paid by a tax direct or indirect. If this damned Abolition rebellion continues what will be our prospect of ever paying this debt? I believe the words of Douglas, that a war for the Union is a war of dissolution. These words are endorsed by thousands in this army, who before they smelled gun powder denounced Douglas' sentiments. It does me good to hear these men talk at times. **If they had the 'father' of these American citizens of African descent, Abe Lincoln, and his children all in a pile they could discharge a few charges of grape and canister at them with a good conscience.**

The health of this regiment (120th) has been on the decline. Only about 200 able-bodied and efficient men can be mustered for service.

J. D. H. [Note: This could be Isaac D. Huntsberger, Co A. See previous letter by Boydston.]

[Published in Crisis [Columbus OH], 25 Mar 1863, page 72 available at GenealogyBank]

[Unsigned letter: The paper's editor left out the names of the recipient and the sender. I have edited the letter to leave out parts that show that some of the soldiers were treating the freed slaves worse than they would an animal. The Democrat papers were against the war and against abolition.]

"Camp Young's Point, Louisiana [sic], **February 23, 1863**.

Friend T____ : I pen you a few lines to let you know how the bloody 120th is getting along down here in this land of cottonI tell you I have come to my senses at last. I now think that this is nothing but a damned abolition war.....under the present Administration this war will not be closed. I think the only way to close it is to have an armistice of 90 days. One thing is sure; this emancipation policy must be recalled or all of the army of the Mississippi will desert inside of six months.....We say stop this civil war immediately, and settle this question in

some other way. Our boys, (some of them) are of the opinion that the trouble will be settled in this way in less than two months from this time. Amen to the war.

We are busy digging canals, like Irish paddies. We have dug two canals since we have been down here, and they both proved to be a fizzle.

I must close. I want you to write to me soon.

Your friend, &c."

[Published in The Ashland Union, 18 Mar 1863, page 3, available at GenealogyBank]

"From the Fleet near Vicksburgh. Correspondence of Cleveland Leader. Opposite the Mouth of Yazoo River, Near Vicksburg, Miss., **Feb. 6, 1863.**

.....That Vicksburgh will be taken, I have no doubt, but how much of blood and treasure, of sickness and of death, it will cost, Heaven only knows. Twice have our brave troops been foiled; twice have the army and the fleet been repulsed; and I take it for granted that as the third time is always the charm, --that the preparations are now on a scale commensurate with the importance of the object, and of a character that will not only command success, but will deserve it.

The Canal which General Grant had dug to make Vicksburgh an inland city and which secured for its author a great deal of laughter from the 'knowing ones,' is just now quite popular. Small boats can run it, and soon the Mississippi, it is thought, will pour its greatest body of water through it, and thus at a common stage of water leave the stronghold of rebeldom high and dry, with the bed of a mighty river in front, but no water to work it. The canal is one and a quarter miles in length, and connects the Mississippi above with the Mississippi below the town. The distance around is seven miles with a fall four inches to the mile--by canal the fall is twenty-eight inches to the one and a fourth miles. Rapidly is the water doing its work, by sweeping out the clay soil, below which is a bed of quicksand, into which the water, in places, has already penetrated, and is rapidly undermining the clay pan. When this is done, and the water gets a fair sweep at the sand for a few hours, the canal will be a finished concern, and then it matters but little whether Vicksburgh be taken or not, for she will be no obstacle to navigation."

[Published in Cleveland Morning Leader, 23 Feb, 1863, page 4, available at GenealogyBank]

"Mr. Stake and his comrades were next employed in digging the canal near Vicksburg, Mississippi. They worked for six days, and then the project was abandoned." Hardesty's Richland: (George Stake, Co H, biography page 486)

"....[Mathias Harter of Company B] assisted in **digging the canal in front of Vicksburg, to allow our gunboats to pass below the city and thus escape the obstructions in the river and also avoid the fire from the rebel batteries.** He was then employed in patrol duty up and down the Mississippi river, for several weeks. At the siege of Vicksburg the 120th were under fire five days and nights in succession." The original Hardesty's Historical and Geographical Encyclopedia. [Richland County OH version] 1885...original available at the Ohio Historical Society.

The original plans for a canal were abandoned and a new plan began.

From Vicksburg:

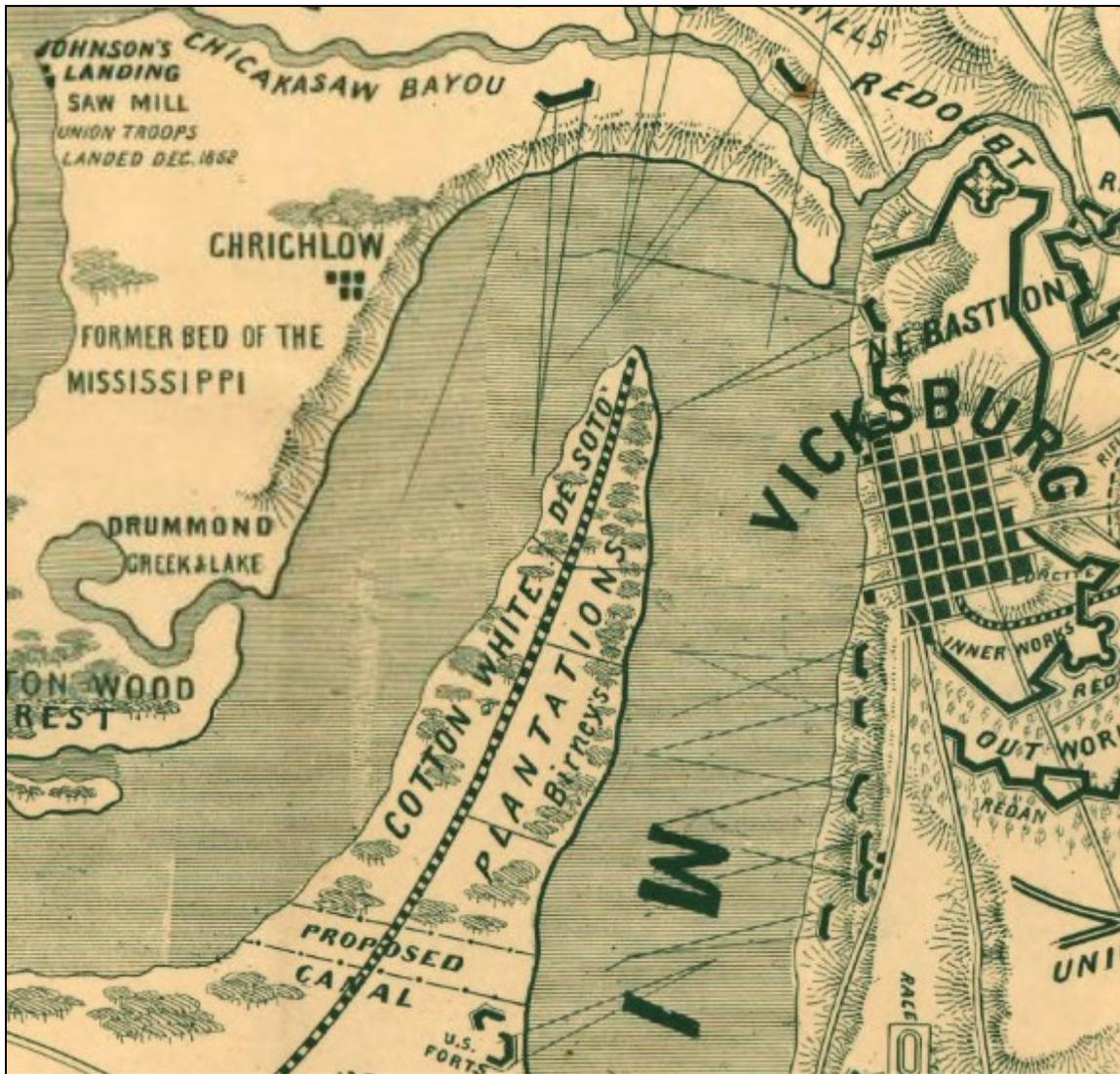
'Young's Point, April 1 via Cairo, April 7: The health of the army has greatly improved within two weeks. Small-pox is abating and is no longer alarming. Weather windy and cold.

For three days the weather has been very high but is now stationary.

Work on the canal has been abandoned. A new one is commenced, leading into Walnut Bayou, which comes near the river on the Louisiana side, at Milliken's, and runs into the river at New Carthage, fifteen miles below Warrenton. The canal commences a mile above a point opposite the mouth of the Yazoo Bayou, two miles distant. Success doubtful." [No author given]

[Published in Cleveland Morning Leader, 10 Apr 1863, page 3 available at GenealogyBank.]

This is a portion of G. W. Tomlinson's map of Vicksburg, showing all the surrounding fortifications.....1863, available at the Library of Congress online. <http://www.loc.gov/> Grant's Canal is marked as "proposed canal."



George W. Tomlinson's map of Vicksburg, showing all the surrounding fortifications.....1863, available at the Library of Congress online. <http://www.loc.gov/>

"The proposed canal, which is simply a huge ditch, was made about fifteen feet wide, and three or three and a half feet deep. This, it was supposed, was of sufficient depth to allow the water of the river to flow through; but when the levee at each end was cut through, it was found to be above the level of the water. The river had fallen some during the process of digging, but not enough to account for so great a short coming.

The mountain would not come to Mohammed, and some wisecrackers determined to make it come by placing an old steamwheel boat at the lower side of the entrance to the canal, to work her wheel, and so paddle the water up into it, which succeeded in wetting the bottom of the canal just enough to make it muddy, but no more. This experiment of making water run up hill not proving very successful, it was determined to deepen the ditch. The bottom being, as stated before, about fifteen feet wide, the one half of this bottom, longitudinally, was dug five feet deeper, the entire length of the canal, the earth being thrown up on the other half of the original bottom. By this means, a small thread of water, about a foot wide, was decoyed into it, where it remains, looking very much bewildered, as though it did not know where to run to. The entire south side of the canal is now composed of loose earth, thrown up from the deepening [sic], and should the river rise sufficient to make a current through the canal, this loose earth would undoubtedly be undermined by the current, and coming down would soon fill it up sufficiently to stop the current. G. W. Tomlinson, Boston."

"About the latter [canal], there has been some question, but it was done under his direction and he [Gen. Grant] could be frequently seen with Sherman and McPherson on the upper line of the canal, alternately watching the progress of the men, and then through his glasses scanning the coveted citadel [Vicksburg], whose tiers of batteries, protected by that great river in front, challenged his nearest approach. The canal, which was dug during a low stage of the river, was expected to receive, when it rose to a high stage, a direct swift running current from the head of a distant bend, but the dynamics had been misunderstood, as the rising river showed no eddy at the upper mouth of the canal which failed to give forcible current enough to scour it out to a navigable depth."

[From Grant's Earlier Campaigns. Interesting Recollections of a Missouri Officer [Col. C. G. Fisher] 11 Aug 1885 Boston Journal, Vol. LII Issue 17190 Page 3, available at GenealogyBank]

[Note: In the meantime, on on February 2, 1863, Col. Charles Rivers Ellet, US Ram Fleet, proved that rams could get past Vicksburg when he took the "Queen of the West" down the Mississippi past the batteries and an opposing steamer. Eventually Admiral Porter and General Grant ordered more boats down the river eventually to be used in getting troops to a point south of Vicksburg from which they could carry out an attack on that city.]



Sketch from the book Battles and Commanders of the Civil War : a graphic and pictorial history prepared directly from the government records in the Departments of War and Statistics, by Frank Leslie and Marcus J. Wright, 1902 and 1906., page 198

Admiral Porter's flotilla trying a run past Vicksburg, 16 Apr 1863.

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[Index to History of the 120th OVI](#)