

Thompson's Hill/Port Gibson, Mississippi, 1 May 1863
13th Corps under McClernand



Port Gibson MS, on Bayou Pierre river, in Claiborne Co is about 30 miles from Vicksburg. Jackson, MS, is about 40 miles south of Vicksburg.

Major-General McClernand:

"Only halting long enough to draw and distribute three days' rations, at four o'clock all my corps, except the cavalry on the opposite side of the river, took up the line of march agreeably to Major-General Grant's instructions, for the bluffs some three miles back. Reaching the bluffs some time before sunset, and deeming it important to surprise the enemy if he should be found in the neighborhood of Port Gibson, and if possible to prevent him destroying the bridges over Bayou Pierre, on the roads leading to Grand Gulf and to Jackson, I determined to put on, by a forced march, that night as far as practicable."

The correspondent for the New York Herald gave information about the area where this battle took place in an article published on 18 May 1863, page 1, available at GenealogyBank. He explained that the area was Thompson's Plantation. Beyond the plantation mansion which was on a hill there were two roads, one to the left to Grand Gulf and another to the right which headed south. On this southern road was a church. A half mile beyond was another fork with the left branch heading to Port Gibson. He said to draw a semi-circle going toward the east with the half circle spreading out from the church as the center point.

[More about Thompson's Hill written by Colonel Spiegel to Brig. Gen. Girdard, Com.1st Brig. 1st Div., 13th A.C.-- Army of the Tennessee, written May 2, 1863]

I have the honor to transmit herewith the following report of the part taken by the 120th O.V.I., in the action of Thompson's Hill on the 1st inst. **[May 1, 1863]**, and with a list of the casualties. *[List not included in this newspaper report.]*

About 5 o'clock A.M. we were ordered to advance and take a position on the right of Lampheres Battery, which we accordingly did, under a severe fire of the enemy's shell, in which position we remained about half an hour when we advanced to the edge of a ravine, and from there we were ordered to advance and form in line of battle in connection with the 18th Ill. vol. We advanced briskly to a position behind a fence fronting the enemy, in support of the 49th Ind., who were deployed as skirmishers on the edge of the woods. Soon after, Colonel Kegwin, of the 49th Ind, informed me that he was ordered to the right on a line with his position, and at the same time I received orders to cover his old position with skirmishers. I then advanced companies A, F, and K, as skirmishers, and D, I, and B, in support. At 7 o'clock A.M. I was ordered to recall all but one of my companies. I moved as ordered, somewhat to the right of the line in advance, to relieve the 42d Ohio, close to the ravine running parallel with the enemy's strongest position. I then engaged

the enemy for about twenty minutes without being able to do them much harm, they being completely under cover on the opposite bank of the ravine.

I then advanced as skirmishers some of the best shots from all the companies down into the same [ravine], with orders to advance closely, supporting them with the remainder of the Regiment and keeping up a continual fire toward the top of the opposite bank. When nearly down the ravine I discovered the exact position of the enemy's advance towards my left on the opposite bank. I then charged upon them with the Regiment and quickly drove them from the bank to a knoll beyond where they rallied and made a stand which only increased the determination of my brave boys. Pushing up the bank we drove them from behind the knoll, taking eight prisoners. When I had obtained possession of the knoll, I did not deem it prudent to follow them any further, being already at least three hundred yards in advance of any of our troops, and in danger of meeting the enemy's entire right wing massed behind a number of old buildings directly in front of me. I deployed my Regiment on the knoll in order to punish the retiring force and hold the position against a more formidable attack---- As soon as the retiring enemy had joined the main force, the attack was renewed with redoubled fierceness, but meeting with such continual and well directed volleys [sic] from us, they fell under cover of the buildings again. I then continued fighting the enemy concealed behind the logs, fences, and houses, and some perched themselves in tree tops until my ammunition was beginning to give out and a great many of the guns became unfit for use, when I was relieved by Col. Bennet, of the 69th Indiana, and ordered to retire.---- I then fell back to the 2d ravine in the rear of me replenishing the empty cartridge boxes with ammunition from the boxes of the killed and wounded comrades. I remained in that position until late in the afternoon. I saw the charge made on the left, when I quickly formed my Regiment, marching in toward the charging column in order to support it if necessary. When, however, the enemy fled in confusion, and a glorious victory won, the 120th had nothing more to do but exult and cheer and be merry, which I assure you was done.

I cannot close this report without saying that the men of the 120th have not only justified their former reputation, but they have even excelled it. They displayed gallantry and bravery that will never be forgotten by their country. To the line officers, all of whom stood bravely up to the work, I am indebted much for their aid and courage in carrying out every order given.

Lieut. Col. Beekman has shown himself worthy of the position he now holds. While promptly assisting in manoeuvring the Regiment, his encouraging and cheering words were always heard along the line.

Major Slocum, while with me in the morning, displayed that coolness and courage for which he is well known in the army, and while detailed to take charge of the skirmishers on the left of the Division did his full duty, to the entire satisfaction of the General commanding the Division.

Adjutant Sherman, although young in years, has truly shown himself a veteran of the field. He possesses all the elements necessary to qualify him for the position he holds. Brave and cool he becomes courageous and dashing when the occasion requires it. Both officers and men have my sincere thanks for their cheerful co-operation on the field of Thompson's Hill.

I have the honor, General, to be your obedient servant,
Marcus M. Speigle

Col. Com. 120th Reg. O.V.I.

[Wooster Weekly Republican [Published 2 July 1863, available at GenealogyBank]

Muster Roll record Company A: "Comp A was engaged in the Battle of Thompson Hill as skirmishers [sic] May 1st 63"

Muster Roll record Company I: "May 1 fought the battle of Thomsons Hill or Port Gibson Battle opened early in the morning firing was terrific all day Ground strongly contested for, but at or near Sunset the Rebels fled ??? before our valiant and heroic soldiers across Bayou Pierre at Port Gibson and **burned the bridges behind them.**"

Diary of Henry S. Sherman, nephew of Gen. W. T. Sherman, Sergeant Major, 120th Regiment, Ohio Volunteer Infantry, 9th Division, 13th Army Corps [Henry was in company A when he wrote the following. He had been promoted to Sergt. Major from Private on 26 Sep 1862. Contributed

by descendant David Carter.]

1 May 1863 [Friday]

"The Battle. -- At day light we formed in line ready for action. The men managed to get a little warm coffee and crackers before we moved. About a half hour after day light our brigade moved forward down through the ravine and deployed in line of battle in the field on the left of the main road, our rights resting on a deep ravine, the 69th being formed directly in our front. At the time we came into the field, Lamphere's Battery was playing upon the Rebels pretty sharply who replied with two guns from a cluster of houses and huts about a half mile in our front. After the 69th advanced into a ravine we occupied their position. At this time our men took off their knapsacks as the day promised to be a very warm day and we expected quite a hot fight. Our men were very eager for the contest and in better spirits than ever they were before since in service. In a short time we received orders to advance and took a position on the extreme left of the Division in a small ravine. Soon after we advanced still farther in conjunction with the 116th Ill. to support the 49th Ind. deployed and skirmishers in front of us. The position we held until about 7 and a half o'clock A. M. and were then ordered to send our two companies as skirmishers to relieve the 49th Ind. We sent Cos. A. and F. and D. and I. as support. The 49th then moved over to the left and engaged the enemy's advance and then several rounds of grape & canister were thrown at them, doing no injury. The 118 in a short time was sent over to support them and also two or three Regts. of the second brigade. In a short time we received orders to withdraw all but one of our companies as skirmishers and go over and support those regiments on the left. We moved briskly and in a short time hotly engaged the enemy who were concealed on the opposite bank of the ravine in front of us. Finding we were losing men in this position we charged down into the ravine and then saw the exact position of the enemy on the top bank in front of us. We immediately went into them with a yell and a charge driving them from there to a little knoll a few hundred yards from the edge of the ravine. After we had arrived at the top of the bank and finding that we would not gain anything and might lose more men by remaining there we determined to take the knoll at all hazards and drive the enemy back. Col. Spiegel led the charge in person and the enemy fled pell mell over the field and rejoined the main body which was concealed behind some old buildings directly in our front. In a few minutes a very hot fire was opened upon us from the houses but they could not drive us back. We remained in this exposed position (over 300 yards in advance of any of our troops) for two hours and a half when I was sent back to General Garrard to have him relieve us as our ammunition was almost gone. As I passed over our first position on this side of the ravine a shower of bullets flew thick and fast around me but luckily I came through safe. In a short time after I had delivered my message to the General and I had gone back, we were relieved by the 69th Ind. and we retired to the second ravine in our rear having taken 9 prisoners in our fights. Here we lay until late in the afternoon. **The fight was continued during the whole day but having very little ammunition in our boxes, we had to be content with remaining as a support to other regiments.** About five o'clock a part of our division made a fresh attack and with a cheer and charge they carried the enemy's position. We were drawn up in line to support them if necessary, but the enemy was driven in confusion before our forces and no support was necessary. In a few minutes after the prisoners came marching past us towards the rear. It was now nearly dark and we, by hard and determined fighting, had obtained a glorious victory capturing several pieces of artillery and a large number of prisoners. We lost 2 killed and 20 wounded, 3 of these supposed to be mortally. And now the mournful duty of searching for the dead and wounded began. I counted over fourteen dead bodies that lay not more than fifty feet from where I lay. Bivouacked on the field for the night."

[New York Herald in an article published on 18 May 1863, page 1, by a Correspondent.]

"On Saturday we reached Port Gibson, and took formal possession of the town. Just as we entered the village we discovered the suspension bridge, which crosses the Bayou Pierre, on fire. This compelled us to remain a few hours, until a floating bridge could be constructed. The enemy appeared on the opposite side of the bayou, above and below the town, and shots were exchanged, but with no damage to our army.

Port Gibson is a town of two thousand inhabitants, well built and enterprising. A railroad connects the Port with Grand Gulf."

continuing with the diary of Henry Sherman

2 May 1863 [Saturday]

"Got started about 5 and one half o'clock A. M. The battle field had a terrible look this morning, bodies of men mangled and torn lay around on all sides and the hot sun was beginning even at this time to have its effect upon them. We passed a terrible sight soon after starting which was a man with his head blown off leaving nothing but a part of the features visible. All along the route for 8 miles the bodies of the Union Soldiers and Rebels lay thick, the latter (Rebels) predominating almost three to one. Our hospitals were filled with ours and rebel wounded. Broken Caissons and wheels of artillery carriages and horses were scattered over the hills in almost every direction. It did seem to me that if the rebels had had any large force they could have driven us back or at least held their own position on these naturally strongly fortified hills. Every mile or two we crossed places that with a comparatively small force a whole army could have been kept at bay. About ten o'clock we passed through Port Gibson. It was a most beautiful little village but was almost deserted. It reminded me very strongly of some of our northern villages on the Western Reserve. We bivouacked about noon on the other side of the village in a nice little grove. Here we remained all night. We were all very tired having been fighting all the day before and marching all day before that, and all this forenoon, and we are now enjoying this resting place."

5 May 1863 [Tuesday]

"The greater part of the Division moved this morning leaving nothing but the 120th and 49th of 1st Brigade and 114th of the 2nd Brigade and Foster's Battery. We were left behind because we were out of provisions and ammunition. About dark we were ordered to move forward and not wait for the Train. We marched until about 11 o'clock P. M. where we bivouacked at **Rocky Springs.**"

10 May 1863 [Sunday]

"Received marching order this morning early. Left bivouack [sic] about 8 o'clock and marched till noon where we halted at a little town, **Utica**.....In about an hour we started again and after a march of a mile or two we bivouacked for the night. Are within 28 miles of Jackson and about 16 of Vicksburg.

13 May 1863 [Wednesday]

"...About dark we bivouacked in a thick grove about five miles from Raymond and remained there until about 11 o'clock P. M. when we resumed the march in the midst of heavy rain. We arrived at **Raymond** about 2 A. M. and bivouacked there."

18 May 1863 [Monday]

"Left Raymond about 7 O'clock A. M. with orders to march night and day until we joined our Division in the front [at Vicksburg]. We took our prisoners (250) with us to deliver them at **Edwards Station.** We marched all day (leaving our prisoners at Edwards about 3 P. M.) and about 11 P. M. we were compelled from fatigue to rest two or three hours, having marched about twenty-five miles during the day."

[Note: **Letter written by Francis B. Rickerd**, Company F, from Claiborne county Mississippi after the battle at Thompson's Hill, Miss. [Port Gibson], 1 May 1863. The letter was written on the front and back of a page taken from a ledger book. [Note: Looking at the Sherman diary, they would have been camped north of Rocky Springs but south of Utica on 9 May.] Francis died of disease 17 Aug 1863 at Port Hudson, LA. His brothers George and James, also in Company F, 120th OVI, survived the war. **The spelling in the letter remains as it was written by Francis.**]

Contributed by Sharon Korte.

Clabern Co.

May the 9 - 1863 Mississippi

Dear father and mother i tke the plesure to sit don to write a few lines to let you now that wee are all well and injoining good helth and i hope wen these few lines coms to hand that they will find you injoining the same state of helth. I will state that wee had **a Big fight on tomson hill** and i will state god was by our side he saved us and we thank him for his kindnes and O i will state that it was a hard site to see and i will state that **John Brindle** got sot and he he has gone to his long home and he will not see home no more. But i hope that he has gon to a good home where there is no parten no more and I will state that george macra got woned he got woned in the lage and I

will state that **the fight commenced on the first day of May and I will state that wee march a bout 30 mile and on the last day of April and there we had to march all night and the first day of May we had to fight all day and a bout night wee ron the Rebles and then we chast them all but to vixburgh and i wil state that wee are a looking for a big fight in vixburgh be for long and i think that it will be befor long and i hope that we wont loss many men, and father i will state that wee hope that wee will slip threw it safe and if it falls to our lot to fall on the battle field i hope that god will take us up in heaven ware there is no parten no more and father i will state that i hant got time to write very much at this present time But i will state that if i get threw the next fight i will write a good long letter.**

[back of first page, (pg. 46 of ledger)]

But i will state that i will tell you that **wee sent a bout 100 Dolars home** and i wood like to now wether you got it or not i wish that you wood write to me rite away and tell me wether you got it or not and i will state that wee sent it on the 16 Of April and i will state that i wrote a letter on the same day that i sent the money and i will state that i hant got eny letter sence and i would like to here from you and here how you was a geting a long and i wish that you wood tell Cathrine to write to us and tell her and Charely that wee hant forgot them yet tell them that wee wood like to here from them and i will tell you dont forget to wirte to us and I will not forget to wirte to you i will state that it is hard day to send male we cant send male when ever wee pleas wee haft to send wen ever we can and i will tell you that wee cant get the male like we did when wee was a long the river and i will state that i haft to bring my little scribbling to a close and i will say that i wood write so more if i had time But i hant got time and i will haft to close as the male is a going to start they wont wate a minit for you, so good by this time an plese ecuse all poor writen and spelling as i am in a hurry writen. by your son

Francis B Richerd

to our father so good by

anser this

as quick as it coms to hand

[PostScripts he added to the page]

I will say that george masters is all write he got hit with a boolit on the temples but it did not ___hert___ him

Direct your letters by the way to s vixburg and then wee will get them so good by this time.

A newspaper article in the Wooster Republican on **28 May 1863**, page 1, states that **the action [at Port Gibson]** is represented as resulting in a brilliant victory for the Union Troops. A casualty list was brought back by a H. J. Kauffman who had been to the Mississippi Army "in charge of hospital stores and clothing for the 16th and 120th Regiments at Port Gibson." Available at GenealogyBank.

Samuel Smedley, Co A, wounded slightly in left elbow
H. H. Mowers, Co B, wounded in left arm and right hand
John O. Byers, Co B, left thigh
John Stewart, Co B, below knee in left leg
John Eberhart, Co C, seriously left breast
Wilson McCreary, Co C, wounded in face
Wm. Ciphers, Co C, severely bruised
Henry S. Shaner, Co D, slightly wounded right breast
James Christy, slightly wounded right thigh
James Johnson, Co D, slightly in left shoulder
Wm. H. Shoup, Co E, killed
Isaac Wagner, Co E, wounded and since dead
Elijah Boor, Co E, in left shoulder [See photo]

John Brindle, Co F, killed.

Sam'l Hoover, Co G, severe wound in left arm [See Photo]

Isaac Mylar, Co H, wounded slightly in the foot;

Bigelow Buzzard, Co H, wounded seriously in the side/lung[1 May 1863]; and remained in the field hospital for about 2 months before he was discharged.

Alfred Wilson, Co I, wounded right arm and leg

Christian Buishlen, Co I, flesh wound in thigh

Eli Kelly, Private, Co H, severely wounded left hand, 1 May 1863 [History of Mercer County, Ohio & Representative Citizens, 1907] ..."then ran the blockade at Vicksburg, on the Grand Gulf and marched all night to Thompson's Hill, going into battle the next morning without anything to eat. About 11 o'clock that morning Mr. Kelly was severely wounded in the left hand by a musket ball, which tore part of it away. He was then sent to the field hospital where he underwent an operation, being later removed to a hospital near Grand Gulf, where rations were cut off and Mr. Kelly had nothing to eat for four days. He was later moved to a camp near Vicksburg, where he took fever and was moved from camp to camp until June 1st, when he was sent to St. Louis where he lay in the hospital for three months. After leaving the hospital, he obtained quarters in St. Louis, and after examination was assigned to the Invalid Corps, but was rejected. He then underwent a medical examination and was finally discharged after 13 months of most trying experiences."

From other sources:

David Hoff, Co H, was also wounded.

Christopher C. Stouffer, Field and Staff, knocked senseless by canon fire, recovered within two hours

Peter Sparr, Co A, had two horses killed

Frank Kissinger, Co G, had his suspenders shot in two but was not wounded

Elijah Boor, Private, Co E, wound in left shoulder, photo contributed by ktross_1 at Ancestry.com

Sam'l Hoover, Private, Co G, severe wound in left arm, photo contributed by descendant "Mickey"



Elijah Boor



Samuel H. Hoover

[Jacob Harker, next page]

Meanwhile, left back at Smith's Plantation, Private Jacob Harker, Company C, 120th OVI:



Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs at the National Archives.

Letter in pension.

"Depot Hospital
James Plantation

May 8th 1863

Mrs Harker,

It becomes my painful duty to inform you of the decease of your husband who departed this life about 10 o'clock to day. He arrived here last night almost exhausted. The vital spark almost extinguished - too late to receive any benefit from medical aid. He died the death of a christian as far as I was able to judge. His disease was chronic diarrhea. I examined his knapsack and find the contents of not much value and shall consign them to the grave with his body. Enclosed you will find all the money he had on his person. A good coffin shall be made and he shall be decently interred.

May the god of mercy sustain you in your troubles is the prayer of the undersigned

R. Carley, Actg Asst Surg, General Hospital,
Army of Tennessee

Johnson, Silas, Co D, died 19 May 1863 on hospital steamer "D A January".

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