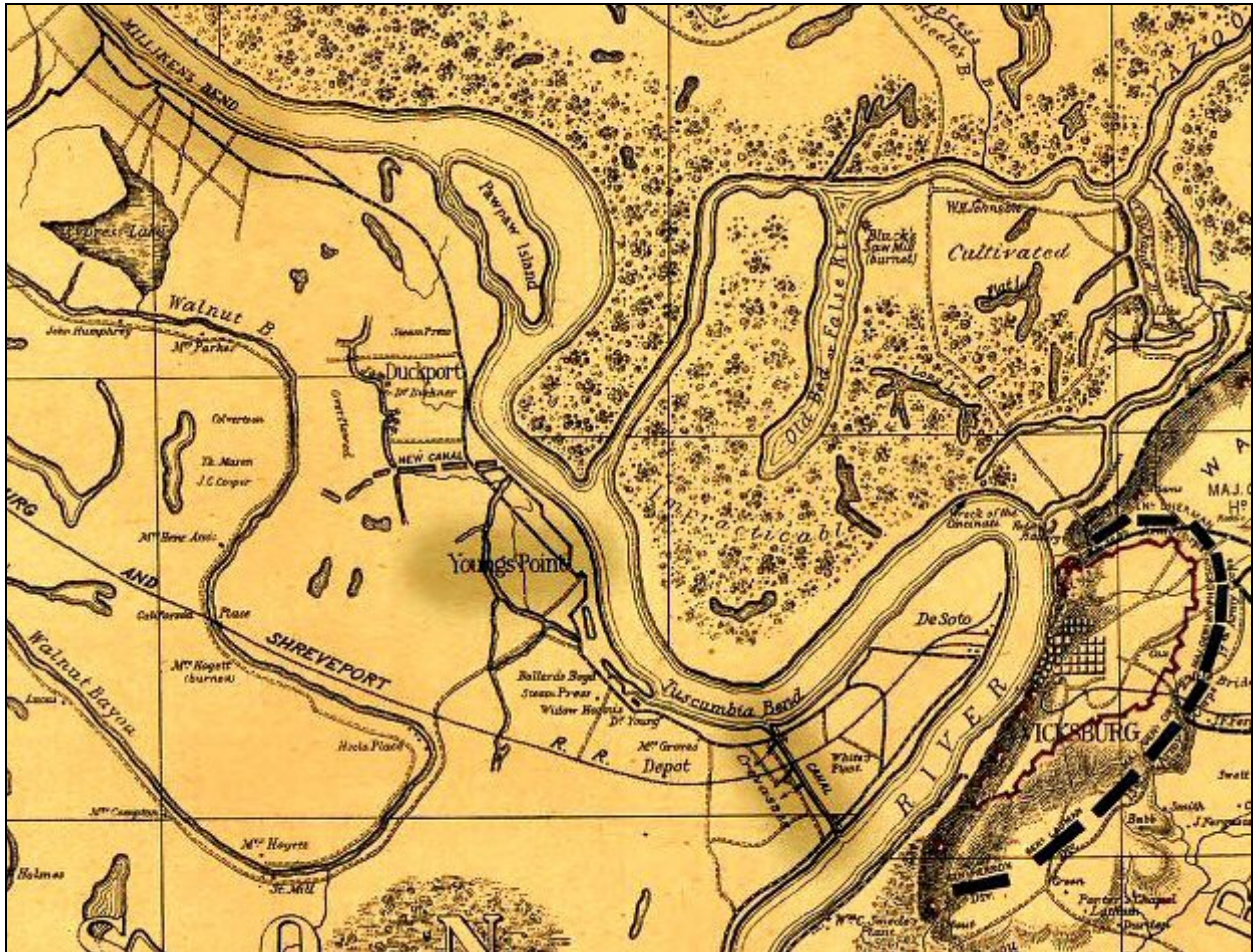


Hospital Life at Milliken's Bend

Map: National Archives, portion of [Map of the country between Millikens Bend, La., etc.](#)

This map shows the often mentioned Millikens Bend and Youngs Point in relation to Vicksburg and Grant's Canal across from Vicksburg.



Van Buren, Hospital, Milliken's Bend, La., May 14, 1863

[Letter to the editor, author unknown from 120th]

It may be interesting to some who have not been permitted to take an inside view of a general Hospital, to hear something relative to its conduct. Having been an inmate of such a hospital for over five weeks we have been able to learn many things that could not be learned otherwise. The hospital is situated immediately on the bank of the river, and contains about fifteen hundred sick and convalescent soldiers. A Mr. Marshal owns the plantation and resides at Natchez-----Our tents are situated beneath o'er shadowing branches of the China trees, which are set out in a perfect alignment; the air is made melodious by the singing of birds, and the odoriferous effluvia exhaled from the flowers and shrubs, wafts in a delightful cloud of fragrance on the breeze. The exquisite natural and artificial beauty of the place reminds us of pictures of Paradise. The strictest discipline and order are enforced, and the Surgeon in charge, Dr. Whiting, merits the praise of keeping his camp as clean, neat and tidy, as any housewife ever kept her door-yard. After viewing these beautiful scenes that almost enrapture the mind, we come to notice that which seems more directly connected with the interests of the soldier -- we refer to the table -- and a view of these things brings us down from our transports of pleasure in contemplating other beauties. Long lines of tables are spread, at the ringing of the first bell the men are paraded, at the second, marched in order to their places at the tables. The breakfast consists of a piece of soft bread, a piece of smoked ham and a cup of muddy coffee, and if the unsatisfied appetite of the soldier prompts him to a complaint, he receives a blessing from the waiter, and a threat of being reported to

headquarters. This subsides the complaint for a ride astride the fence, banishment to some secluded spot for a day, fed on hard bread and water, or some other corporal punishment looms up frightly for him, and he swallows his indignation and goes quietly to his tent. For noon a dish of barley soup is served up. A light supper, --bread, stewed apples and coffee. Sometimes we have an extra dish, perhaps codfish, potatoes or eggs, which, to make them military -- if we may judge from their flavor -- have been a very long time in reaching the table.

For the sicker portion, who cannot go to their meals, light diet is prescribed, --lighter not in quality, but in quantity. The people of the North are unceasing in their patriotic labors, boxing and shipping sanitary stores to the army for benefit of the sick soldiers, but it is a lamentable fact that but very little of these stores ever come to be used by the sick, there is such a host of clerks, rascally ward masters, nurses, cooks and waiters, that but little passes safely through their hands. -- The Doctors are faithful in the discharge of their duties, rendering all the aid to the sick that is in medical skill, but proper care and diet conduce more to health than drugs and medicine. But little occurs [*sic*] here to break the dull monotony of camp life. A few days since a party of rebels who were known to be lurking in the woods on the opposite side of the river, with the design as it was supposed, of firing upon our transports, made their appearance on the bank, but a few well directed shell from a couple of 30-pound guns, which the precaution had been taken to plant for our protection, soon dispersed them. -- Scarcely a day passes but the boom of cannon at Vicksburg and vicinity can be heard, telling us that the work of death steadily goes on.

Our regiment (the 120th,) was engaged in the battle of Grand Gulf, after the capture the army moved up the Black River some distance. The boys are represented in good health and fine spirits.

A severe battle is expected at the Railroad bridge across the black River. We receive the Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis and Memphis papers almost daily, and keep informed of the war news, the advance of Hooker, the repulse of the rebels in Missouri are known. The troops are becoming enthusiastic, that enthusiasm which has been so proverbial in the great army of the Union, is again manifested here. Hope again brightens the future, the ominous clouds that hung so darksome around us are lifting and light is breaking in, and the prospect of peace and a restored Union is more cheering. We hope soon to see the tri-colored banner waving triumphantly over every foot of American soil, and men who now learn war return to the peaceful vocations of life.

I am yours, &c., CONVALESCENT.

P.S. The days are very warm, but the nights are remarkably cool. Peaches are half grown, figs will soon be ripe. No cotton or corn has been planted in this vicinity this Spring. The river is falling rapidly.

[Published 28 May 1863 in the Wooster Republican, page 3 available at Genealogy Bank]

About the lice [graybacks] that the soldiers endured:

The National Tribune (Washington DC), 23 July 1885, page 3, available at Chronicling America, Library of Congress. Sent in by W. A. Cannon, Co. B, 83d Ill., written by his comrade in the war.

"The Grayback in Rhyme"

At dead of night, when all is still,
The graybacks hold battalion drill;
Along your ribs they form a line,
Then wheel in column down your spine.

Then in platoons they quickly break,
And down your legs their course they take;
With measured tread they onward speed,
The tallest grayback in the lead.

Research by Susie Holderfield, 2001-2018

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