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The War Fifty Years Ago

Midwinter Lull In Active Campaigning---Confederates Active on Land In the East and in the West---A Deadlock on the Rappahannock River In Virginia---The Armies of Hooker and Lee Watch Each Other From Opposite Banks---Grant Begins Regular Operations Against Vicksburg---Admiral Porter's Fleet of Federal Ships on the Mississippi---Obstacles In the Way of an Attack by Land Troops or Warships.

By Captain GEO. L. KILMER, Late U. S. V.

At this time fifty years ago the hostile activities on land were confined almost exclusively to Confederate initiative. The Federal Army of the Potomac was being prepared for an early spring campaign by its new commander, General Joseph Hooker. It was separated from its antagonist, the army led by General R. E. Lee, by the Rappahannock river. Lee was waiting in his camps on the south bank for his foe to cross over and open the attack. Hooker would be compelled to do this, however hazardous, in order to carry out the program which the Lincoln government had adopted.

Hooker's predecessor, General A. E. Burnside, had made a disastrous fail-

ure at Spring Hill, a few hours' ride distant from Franklin. Forrest's force joined him there the third week in February, increasing his command to 10,000 men. With these he prepared to make a bold dash into Nashville.

Swamp Barriers at Vicksburg.

This time fifty years ago the first stage of the siege of Vicksburg was taking shape. The season was rainy, and the vital problem for General Grant, freshly assigned to full command in that region, was to secure a footing on dry ground for his army within striking distance of his adversary.

Vicksburg stands on high ground east of the Mississippi. But the high land is isolated on the north and east. Grant was on the west side, where the land in the rainy season is barely



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MISSISSIPPI SWAMPS WHICH BAFFLED THE FEDERAL ARMY AND NAVY.

ure in trying to pass his army on the road to Richmond beyond the Rappahannock in the face of Lee's army. Nevertheless the powers in Washington insisted upon a repetition of the attempt.

When appointing Hooker to succeed Burnside President Lincoln had cautioned him against rashness. The new incumbent proposed to avoid that by maneuvering so as to cross the river beyond the view of Lee's army.

Lee Not Alarmed.

It was evident that General Lee had no fear that Hooker would spring an attack and rout his army, for he detached two of his best divisions for service in southeastern Virginia. He also sent with them as commander one of his two ablest marshals, General James Longstreet.

Longstreet took with him to Suffolk 18,000 men. This depletion of force left Lee with 60,000 to cope with the 130,000 which Hooker could bring into battle. Lee's vigilant cavalry, the troopers led by Jeb Stuart and Fitzhugh Lee, kept an unceasing watch at all the fords and practicable crossings of the river to see to it that Hooker should not effect a surprise with his odds of 2 to 1.

Hooker reorganized his cavalry in February and formed it into a corps under the leadership of General George Stoneman. An occasional skirmish along the river broke the monotony of life in winter quarters, but there were no saber battles in Virginia the third week in February, 1863.

Activities in the West.

The opposing armies in Tennessee occupied winter quarters thirty-six miles apart. The Federal army of the Cumberland, under General W. S. Rosecrans, remained on the scene of its victory at the beginning of the year, on Stone's river around Murfreesboro. Its opponent, General Bragg's Confederate Army of the Tennessee, lay behind a shelter of breastworks at Tullahoma, south of Duck river.

Bragg's command included a very efficient body of cavalry, led at this time fifty years ago by General "Joe" Wheeler. General Earl Van Dorn and General N. B. Forrest. After their failure to recapture Fort Donelson on the 3d of the month Wheeler and Forrest separated, Forrest moving eastward to continue his operations against the Federal defenders of Nashville.

Van Dorn had been transferred from a general command to the leadership of the cavalry of Bragg's army. Starting from Columbia, on Duck river, he began to establish outposts and picket lines within sight of Franklin and Trione, points occupied by Federals to guard against a surprise at Nashville. Van Dorn pitched his headquarters

above water. So limited was the dry ground near Vicksburg that one corps of the army was encamped around Lake Providence, seventy miles up stream.

North and northeast of Vicksburg the land is cut up by bayous which are filled from the Mississippi waters when these are at a flood, as in the winter of 1862-3. When flooded the bayous and the channels leading into and from them are of navigable depth, but the courses were tortuous and grown up with trees from ten to thirty years old.

To march an attacking army across this stretch of swamp land was impos-

ible, and to navigate the waters with warships and transports was out of the question until the channels should be opened up.

Experiments With Canals.

In the previous summer, when Farragut's warships were repulsed by the Confederate guns on the bluffs at Vicksburg, General Thomas Williams began the construction of a canal across a peninsula opposite the town. The distance across is a mile, and it was thought that a channel could be opened which would enable the Federal ships to pass up and down the Mississippi without running the gantlet of Confederate fire. Grant's troops began to revive this project, which had been abandoned on account of low water.

Another canal project was afoot at Lake Providence, also on the west side. The lake had formerly been the bed of the river and was one mile distant from the new channel. It was

proposed to cut a canal across the intervening ground and open up a waterway through a system of rivers and bayous extending hundreds of miles south to Red river. This would enable the army under Grant to unite with the army in General N. P. Banks' department, which was preparing to attack Port Hudson.

Some of the connecting bayous which would have to be cleared of obstructions were at the time merely wooded swamps. Grant declared that he hadn't much faith in this route, but let the work of opening up a waterway go on because employment was better than idleness to keep the troops in trim. Besides, this work was a cover for other operations.

Naval Plans Afoot.

Farther up the river, on the east side, was an abandoned and obstructed pass from the Mississippi, through Moon lake into the Coldwater and other navigable rivers tributary to the Yazoo. The Yazoo flows into the Mississippi close to Vicksburg. Early in February Colonel J. H. Wilson, an engineer on Grant's staff, cut through the levee separating the river waters from the lake. The waters rushed through on a fall of nine feet and opened a channel 200 feet wide.

After some days the lake was filled, and Rear Admiral D. D. Porter detailed two ironclads, with several light draft gunboats from the upper Mississippi fleet, to explore the new water route. If navigable it might enable Grant to transport an army to high, dry ground east of Vicksburg. He could then attack the fortress from the rear. But the Confederates were wise, too, and vigilant. They had already put obstructions in the way by felling trees along the banks of the pass to the Coldwater. A Federal army contingent was called on to assist the navy in clearing the channel. This work was but barely begun the third week in February.

Meanwhile the Confederates, looking far ahead, had begun the construction of a fort at the junction of the Tallahatchie and Yazoo, 100 miles or more northeast of Vicksburg. This was being armed and garrisoned to repel Porter's ships while they were still struggling through the channel obstructions fifty miles away.

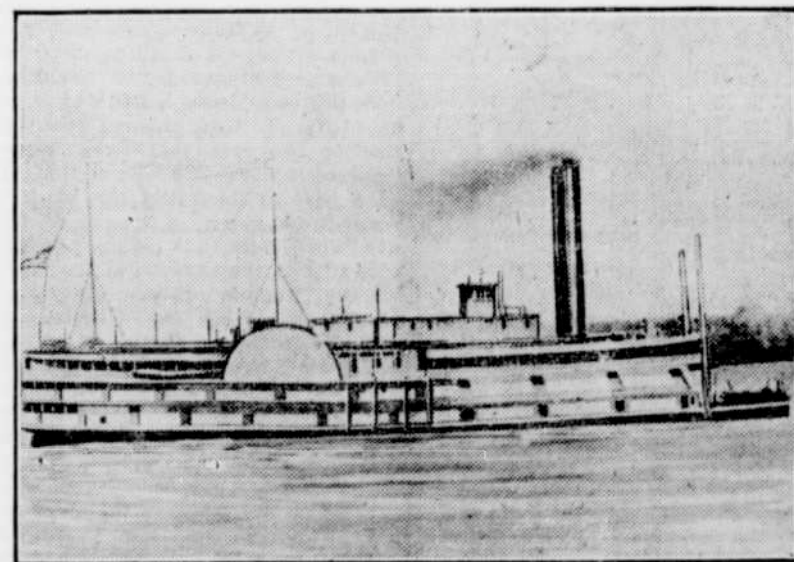
Porter's Vigilance.

The Federal army was kept at a distance from Vicksburg by impassable swamp lands, but the navy always had a clear course on the Mississippi, almost up to the muzzles of the Confederate guns. These guns on land were too much for those aboard ship. However, there was advantage in being able to get a vessel safely past them now and then.

Porter's headquarters were on the wooden steamer Black Hawk, a roomy and powerful packet. She was without armor of any kind. At that time there were ironclads of heavy armor and of light armor in the fleet, but they were unwieldy and slow, and great reliance was placed upon stout wooden ships because of their superior speed. The wooden Queen of the West, under Colonel Ellet, ran past the guns on the bluff early in the month, and on the 13th the ironclad Indianola followed.

The object of these exploits was to get control of Red river, down which supplies were transported to the Confederate forces at Vicksburg and Port Hudson. Ellet lost his ship on Red river on Feb. 14, and on the 21st the Indianola was stationed off its mouth on blockading duty.

There was naval fighting ahead on these two Vicksburg problems, the control of Red river and the opening of the Yazoo route. Meanwhile Porter's mortar boats stationed in the river kept up a steady fire upon the Vicksburg de-



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THE BLACK HAWK, ADMIRAL D. D. PORTER'S FLAGSHIP DURING THE VICKSBURG CAMPAIGN.

fenses. Many of these were skillfully concealed from view; others were located by the aid of a photographer's camera, which gave timely aid to the Federal gunners.

At this time fifty years ago important changes in the positions of the Confederate defenders of Vicksburg were being made. In spite of the obstacles confronting Grant's land columns and Porter's ships and boats great financial resources were back of them. The Confederate leaders were too wise to despise their energetic foe, even if nature and the elements were against them.

General Pemberton, the Confederate commander at Vicksburg, remained at Jackson, Miss., a railroad center, with connections to Vicksburg on the west and Granada on the north. Granada was on the route from the northeast, which the Federals might follow to make a land attack. About 20,000 troops were encamped at Granada and 25,000 on the Vicksburg lines.

In Adjacent Towns

Two Pastors Necessary.

Orengo, Or.—Orengo and Reedville Presbyterian churches, which have been served under one pastorate for the past five years, are to be separated, each church to have its individual pastor. Rev. Mr. Welch served the two churches for about four years up to about a year ago, the two churches being cared for since by Rev. Myron Booser. The two churches have grown to such memberships that it has been found advisable to divide the charge, having one for this place and one for Reedville. It is quite probable that the Rev. Mr. Booser will go to the Reedville church, thus leaving the Orengo church open for a new pastor.

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"Pollination" is Topic.

Orengo, Or.—Professor E. J. Kraus, of the Oregon Agricultural College, addressed the Orengo Horticultural Study Club on "Pollination" recently. While his views were much more conservative on this subject than those held by some writers, he brought out forcibly the actual benefits of pollination to the fruit-grower. He said that the three most important ways in which pollination affects fruit are, first, an increase in percentage of set; second, increase in uniformity of crop; third, change in size of the fruit. He said that flavor, quality, keeping power and color of the fruit probably were not affected.

Wife Has Husband Jailed.

Portland.—On complaint of his wife, Wilmer Cooper, formerly of Wasco, now a farmer at Sherwood, was sentenced to five days imprisonment for carrying a concealed weapon, in Justice Jones' court Saturday.

Family discussion covering a long period is said to be back of the arrest, which was made by Deputy Constable Hunter at the St. Charles Hotel, where the pair were staying.

Paving Hillsboro Streets.

Hillsboro, Ore.—The Warren Construction Company has set up a portable mixer and has a force at work finishing the gravel bitulithic pavement on Washington street, along the Oregon Electric Railway. The City Council contemplates improving several blocks of street leading out of town to the southeast, probably using macadam to connect with the county roads.

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