EXCERPT

Fred Grant at Vicksburg

A BOY'S MEMOIR AT HIS FATHER'S SIDE DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Edited and annotated by

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Frederick D. Grant at about 15, in 1865, wearing a school uniform.

Wisconsin Historical Society

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Preface

My Encounter with Fred Grant

> My son accompanied me through the campaign and siege and caused no anxiety either to me or to his mother, who was at home. He looked out for himself and was in every battle of the campaign. His age, then not quite thirteen, enabled him to take in all he saw, and to retain a recollection of it that would not be possible in more mature years.
>
> —Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs[1]

Having been doing Civil War history for some time, I had occasionally encountered mention of the fact that young Frederick Dent Grant had accompanied his father on campaign at times during the war. I thought it just a curious factoid, that perhaps the lad had served as his father's orderly, or merely was there to keep him company. Then a recent book on the Vicksburg campaign recounted one of Fred's escapades, which piqued my interest, and reminded me that Fred's name had appeared in other works on the campaign. Checking the reference, I hunted down the source, a speech Fred made in 1907 at the annual reunion of the Society of the Army of the Tennessee.[2] What I discovered was five thousand words about the experiences of a 12-year-old hanging out with the Army of the Tennessee for over three months during the campaign for and siege of Vicksburg, and a real adventure story far superior even to Kipling's fictitious Kim O'Hara's.[3]

Digging further, it turned out that the speech was Fred's standard address when invited to reunions and other events, one which he had given over the years, each version usually a little different from earlier ones, all of which were often circulated in print. Then I found that at the request of the editor of the *National Tribune*, a veterans' weekly newspaper, Fred had written a much longer memoir, some 18,000 words, which had been serialized in January and February of 1887. This memoir told of his adventures in the field in far more detail, with many

1 Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (New York, 1885), I:487.

2 For references to this speech and its variants, and Fred Grant's other writings, see the bibliography.

3 For Kim O'Hara, see *Kim*, by Rudyard Kipling.

more anecdotes and observations on the campaign, his father, and many others, accompanied by some fanciful engravings.[4]

Of course, there were quite a number of boys of Fred's age (and even younger) in the army, as field musicians and occasionally as combatants who'd lied about their age, some of whom attained a measure of fame.[5] But those drummer boys—and occasional drummer girl disguised as a boy—and the underage soldiers in the ranks, were part of the army, and thus lived, worked, and moved under discipline within their regiments. In contrast, Fred roamed where he would, hung out with the troops, went off on little adventures, picked up souvenirs, slept where he could, evaded capture, hobnobbed with generals, witnessed battles, scrounged for food, and was at times under fire, being wounded once, and often did not see his father for days on end.

His was an experience a lot freer than any modern notion of a "free range" childhood, which seemed to this writer to be a story worthy of being made available to a wider audience, which led to this book.[6]

Over the years Fred Grant delivered several short accounts of his wartime adventures in speeches, which were often published. In addition, he occasionally recounted some of his adventures in interviews that appeared in newspapers or other publications. Over a dozen versions of his memoirs are listed in the bibliography, but there may be others that were not found in time to be included here. In all of the versions there is usually some variation among the details of events, and some things can be found in one version that are not in any of the others.

The longest of Fred's reminiscences, the 18,000 words that appeared in the *National Tribune* in January and February of 1887, comprise the text that is reproduced below. Where one of the other versions varies from this version, the difference will be accounted for in footnotes.

Fred noted that he wrote these memoirs almost entirely from memory, not resorting to any references or documents. For a time during the Vicksburg

4 On the *National Tribune*, see Appendix V.

5 For example, drummer Orion Pegasus Howe of the Company C, 55th Illinois Infantry, mentioned below on page 51, put in a Medal of Honor performance when he was 14, and William J. Johnston, a drummer in Company D, 3rd Vermont Infantry, did so at 12.

6 "Free range child raising" is defined as allowing children "of sufficient age and maturity to avoid harm or unreasonable risk of harm, to engage in independent activities." Supposedly this is how many of us grew up before the age of "helicopter moms," "over-scheduled" childhoods, and before cell phones and GPS tracking of cell phones, though from experience I can say that we were often rather lacking in the "sufficient . . . maturity" department; Donna De La Cruz, "Utah Passes 'Free-Range' Parenting Law," *New York Times*, March 29, 2018.

campaign, he kept a journal, though we do not know for how long or how faithfully, or if he had access to it in later years. It seems to have been lost.[7]

Since he was writing from memory, Fred at times got a name or a place wrong, and in at least one instance conflated two important events into one, a matter explained in the footnotes. Footnotes also provide extra details or observations about some of Fred's adventures. He was also careless about dates, and where it seems necessary these are indicated within brackets. Details about persons and places mentioned in the text are found in the appendices.

Spelling, grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and usage in Fred's text are as found in the originals, reflecting contemporary practice and his personal idiosyncrasies. When quoting letters and documents, errors and even cross-outs have been left standing. A [sic] is sometimes used to indicate these.

Being a mid-nineteenth century white American, Fred's account includes some phrases about African Americans that would today be considered offensive, though in his times would not have been so thought, given contemporary usage.

Throughout this work "Grant" refers to the general.

7 Grant to Julia, June 9, 1863, "He has kept a journal which I have never read but suppose he will read to you." Ulysses S. Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, eds. John Y. Simon, et al. (Carbondale, IL, 1969–2012), vol. 8, 33, hereafter cited as Grant, *Papers*.

Section 1

The Memoir

GENERAL ULYSSES S. GRANT: HIS SON'S MEMORIES OF HIM IN THE FIELD

Fred Grant on the Opening of the Vicksburg Campaign

On November 7, 1907, Fred Grant delivered the opening address at the 37th reunion of the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, at Vicksburg. He began with an overview of the campaign, and this portion of his address on that occasion, describing events before he arrived at the front, reviews the military background to the final phase of the Vicksburg campaign, setting the stage for his adventures with the army through to the surrender of Vicksburg.[1]

> Mr. President, comrades of the Army of the Tennessee, ladies and gentlemen:
>
> I feel deeply gratified in the honor of being invited to meet you here this evening, and in being asked to speak to you on this occasion, though my natural modesty convinces me that there are others present, who should take my place on this platform; and well knowing my imperfections, I wish for your sake that a more finished orator had been chosen. I hesitated much as to the subject which might prove most interesting, when I accepted the complimentary invitation to address you tonight.
>
> This being the reunion of the Army of the Tennessee, and that reunion in the city of Vicksburg, I feel it may be appropriate for me to speak of the campaign and siege of Vicksburg as taken from official records, as well as of incidents seen by me when a boy of twelve years of age, accompanying his soldier father through that terrible but glorious and heroic epoch of our National history.

1 Frederick D. Grant, "Annual Address," *Report of the Proceedings of the Society of the Army of the Tennessee at the Thirty-Seventh Meeting, Held at Vicksburg, Mississippi, November 7–8, 1907* (Cincinnati, 1908), 95–99.

Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck,
Commanding General of the Army
Library of Congress

Soon after the battle of Corinth, Mississippi, which occurred on October 4th, 1862, General Grant suggested to the General-in-Chief, Halleck, a forward movement against the Confederate forces at Vicksburg.[2]

On October 25th, General Grant was placed in command of the Union forces of the Department of the Tennessee, and securing some additional troops from the North, he was on November 2d prepared to take the initiative.

Vicksburg was of very great importance to the North, because when that city and its environments were held by the Confederates, free navigation of the Mississippi River was interfered with, and the products of the Northwest could not be cheaply transported to the sea. Vicksburg was of greater importance to the South, as from that city a railroad running east led to all points in the Southern States, and on the opposite side of the Mississippi River there was another railroad extending westward. Vicksburg was the channel of communication for the Confederates on the east and west of the Mississippi, and it was of great military strength, occupying as it did the first high ground near the river below Memphis. Points on the Mississippi River between Vicksburg and Port Hudson were held as dependencies by the Confederates and were sure to fall upon the capture of Vicksburg.

At that time the Army of the Tennessee had possession of the Mobile & Ohio Railroad from about twenty-five miles south of Corinth, north to Columbus, Kentucky and the Mississippi Central Railroad from Bolivar, Tennessee, north to its junction with the Mobile & Ohio Railroad. This army also held the Memphis & Charleston Railroad from Corinth, east to Bear Creek, as well as the shore of the Mississippi River from Cairo, Illinois, to Memphis, Tennessee.

2 For persons mentioned in the text, see Appendix I; For places named in the text, see Appendix II.

(Left) Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, called "Old Man" by his troops. (Right) Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton, Commander of the Confederate Army of the Mississippi. *Library of Congress*

The moving force of the Army of the Tennessee was about 30,000 men, and it was estimated the confronting force, commanded by the Confederate General Pemberton, consisted of about the same number of soldiers. The Union right wing was commanded by General Sherman, who was located at Memphis, the center by General Hurlburt, and the left wing by General McPherson. General Pemberton was fortified at the Tallahatchie River with a force thrown forward to Holly Springs and Grand Junction on the Mississippi Central Railroad.

The forward movement of the Union forces under General Grant's command commenced on November 2d, 1862, and on November 4th Grand Junction and La Grange were occupied by General McPherson's command and the troops were pushed out some seven or eight miles further south, along the line of the railroad, which latter was repaired as the troops advanced. On the 13th the cavalry in advance reached Holly Springs and the Confederates fell back south of the Tallahatchie River.

Holly Springs was selected for the Union Army's depot of supplies, and munitions of war were collected there. Sherman at Memphis was ordered forward and reached on the 29th Cottage Hill, ten miles north of Oxford. The Union troops at Helena, Arkansas, west of the Mississippi, were directed to cross the river and cut the railroad in rear of Pemberton's forces. This last movement, under Generals Hovey and Washburn, was successful so far as reaching the railroad was concerned, but the damage done by the troops was slight and soon repaired by the Confederates.

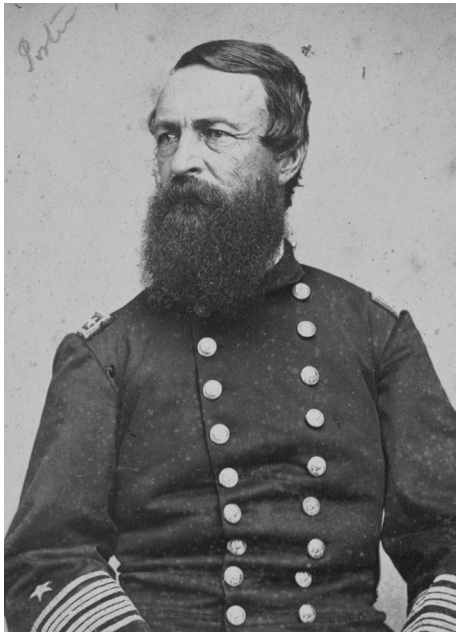
The Tallahatchie River was high, the bridges destroyed, and the Confederate forces strongly fortified on the south side of the river, so a crossing in their front was impossible. The Union cavalry were sent up the river to find a ford and were successful. This, in conjunction with the expedition from Helena, caused Pemberton to evacuate his fortified position on the Tallahatchie and go south. He was followed by the main body of the Union troops as far as Oxford and by McPherson's command for about seventeen miles further. Here the pursuit was halted, for repairing the railroad to the rear. On the 8th of December General Sherman was ordered back to Memphis to take command of an expedition down the Mississippi River for an attack on Vicksburg.

On December 20th, when all seemed progressing favorably toward the capture of Vicksburg, the Confederate General Van Dorn appeared before Holly Springs, the Union base of supplies, captured the garrison of 1,500 men and destroyed all the munitions of war, food and forage there. The surrender of Holly Springs demonstrated the impossibility of maintaining the long line of railroad to Columbus, over which to draw supplies, and the campaign as at first planned was abandoned and General Grant decided to so change the plan as to make the Mississippi River the line over which to transport supplies to the Union forces operating against Vicksburg.

While the surrender of Holly Springs was disgraceful, it nevertheless proved of great value to the Union forces, for being thus without supplies they were obliged to live off of the country, and finding how easily this could be done, the greatest difficulty of the problem of the campaign by which Vicksburg was captured was solved, as was the question of supplying Sherman's army in its campaign from Atlanta to the sea.

The expedition down the Mississippi under General Sherman to attack Vicksburg was unsuccessful; he attacked the Confederates located upon Walnut Hills and failed to carry the hills, retired to his transports and returned to the mouth of the Arkansas River, where he learned of a Confederate garrison at Arkansas Post, some fifty miles up the Arkansas River. He turned his forces against this garrison and after a sharp fight, being assisted by the gunboats under Admiral Porter, he captured it with 5,000 prisoners and seventeen cannon and then returned to the town of Napoleon on the Mississippi River.

New plans for the capture of Vicksburg having been made, the Northern army, which had been somewhat increased by reinforcements, was divided into four corps, the Thirteenth, Fifteenth, Sixteenth and Seventeenth, commanded respectively by Generals McClernand, Sherman, Hurlburt and McPherson. Three corps, the Thirteenth, Fifteenth and Seventeenth, were moved down the Mississippi as near as possible to Vicksburg and placed on the west bank of the river. Owing to the high water they could camp only on the levee and the three



(Left) Rear Adm. David Dixon Porter. *The Photographic History of the Civil War*
(Right) Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman, photographed by Mathew Brady in 1864. *Library of Congress*

corps occupied the river front from Young's Point through Milliken's Bend to Lake Providence, seventy miles above Vicksburg. Hurlburt, with the Sixteenth Corps, was left to guard the rear and occupy the territory of value to the Union forces in Northern Mississippi and Western Tennessee.

By the end of January 1863, General Grant arrived at Young's Point and assumed command and the real work of the campaign and siege of Vicksburg began. The first step was to secure a foothold upon high ground on the east side of the river, from which the troops could operate against Vicksburg. The river was high and rains were incessant and the prospects of making land movements before spring did not seem propitious. The political situation in the North called for a forward movement and the morale of the army required activity, so a number of experiments were attempted in order that the troops should be kept occupied and the people of the North be made to feel that operations were in progress. A canal was dug across the point of land opposite the city of Vicksburg and the levee was cut at Lake Providence, which it was thought would open a water route from the Mississippi through Lake Providence, Bayou Baxter, Bayou Mound and the Tensas, Washita and Red Rivers to the Mississippi. An other opening in the levee was made opposite Helena to Moon Lake to secure a passage through the lake, Yazoo Pass, to

the Coldwater and then to the Tallahatchie River where it joins the Yallabusha and forms the Yazoo River. An expedition was sent up the Yazoo River to Steel's Bayou, Black Bayou, Deer Creek, Rolling Fork and into the Big Sunflower River. These experiments consumed time and directed the attention of the Union soldiers, the Confederates and of the Northern people until the river fell and the movement by land could be carried out.

* * *

This rather concisely summarizes events during the campaign up until Fred's arrival at his father's headquarters, on March 29, 1863. Fred followed this with an account of his adventures with the army during the campaign, which is considerably shorter than the version he had given in the *National Tribune* in 1887, which follows.

END OF EXCERPT