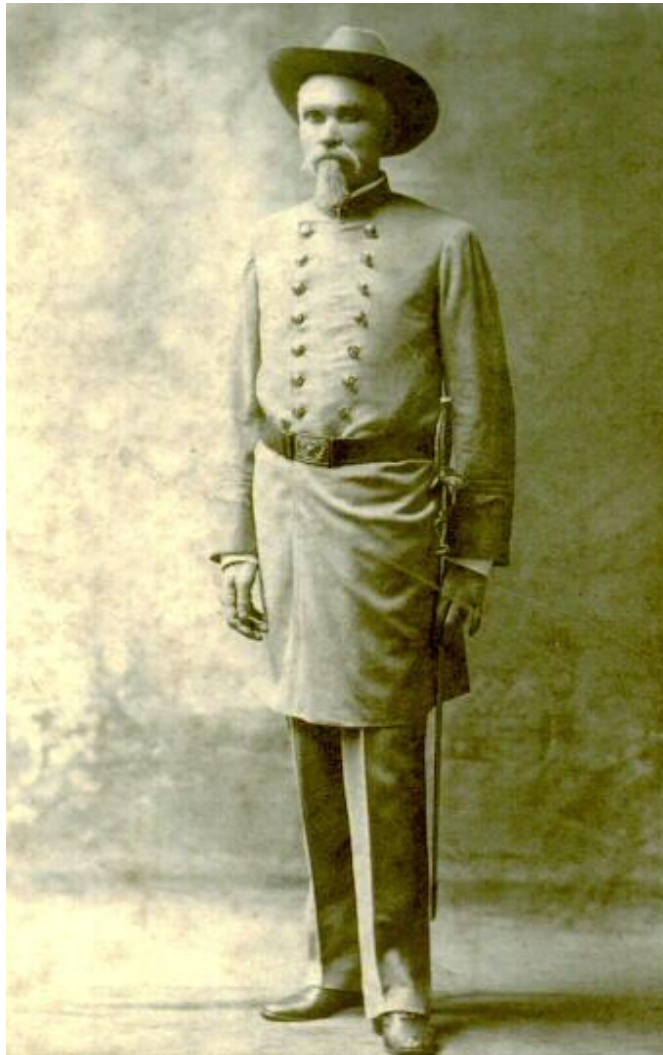


Where McGavock Fell

**A Trip to Raymond, Mississippi,
To Visit the Ghost of Patrick Griffin and See the place Where His
Stories of the Late Unpleasantness Between the States Took Place**

**By Vic Socotra
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Captain Patrick Griffin, CSA, in Nashville, TN, 1905.

Raymond Days



It was Mother's Day, and I was headed for Hinds County, Mississippi, coming up from The Big Easy via Bay Saint Louis on the Gulf Coast. I

passed through Hattiesburg in the mid-afternoon where the two city police officers, one white and one African-American , had been gunned down the night before. Flags were at half-staff, but no other signs of disturbance were observable.

The reason for the timing of this jaunt was the presence of a old shipmate who has kin in the town of Raymond, and some of the attendant family business to be done. I had my reasons to see the town, and this was an opportunity that I could not pass up. The other odd coincidence was the date- the battle had been fought on the 12th of May, and the meteorological conditions on the field for the visit would be very similar to the ones that the soldiers experienced 152 years ago.

For those of you that care, the county was a product of western expansion in the first part of the new 19th Century, established in 1821 and named in honor of General Thomas Hinds. Specifically, I was headed to a Holiday Inn Express in Clinton, 7.1 miles from Raymond, since that is as close as the interstate and the modern version of civilization get to the place.

The land of Hinds County was graciously ceded to the United States by the Choctaw Indians in 1820. The subsequent economy was based largely on the plantation system and The Peculiar Institution, as well as proximity to the famed Natchez Trace that could be used to transport goods to the waterways.

Good order being important to any society that relied on that for economic activity, the Mississippi legislature provided for the selection of three commissioners to select a site for the courthouse and jail for the county, and to locate the same either at Clinton, or “within two miles of the center of the county.”

The Commissioners determined the center of the county should be its seat, and to be on Snake Creek. They named the site Raymond, for General Raymond Robinson of Clinton who gave up his prior claim to the land. The Court and Jail were appropriately sited, and the young town grew and prospered as a seat of justice for Hinds County. The courthouse, which remains an imposing Greek revival structure, was completed with skilled slave labor in 1859, and is now on the National Register.



In May of 1863, Raymond became a speed bump for Unconditional Surrender Grant's army as he marched his army north through Mississippi to capture the strategic city of Vicksburg, center of rail and river communications to the South. On May 12, 1863, 12,000 Union soldiers of General James McPherson's XVII Corps met the 3,000 Confederates of General John Gregg's brigade in the Battle of Raymond.

I had kin there, as I have mentioned before, in the person of Great-Great Uncle Patrick, of the combined 10th and 30th Tennessee Irish. While in New Orleans the other day I was chatting with a physician- a dermatologist by specialty- who hailed from northern Mississippi.

He had been raised in Port Gibson, on the Mississippi, and we immediately began to talk about Grant's line of advance from there to the northeast toward Raymond, attempting to finesse the approach to the ultimate objective, Vicksburg. The War- you have to capitalize it, in my mind- is never that far away in places like this.

Following the Union victories at Grand Gulf and Port Gibson, Grant was using the Big Black River, a place my new friend had grown up hunting, to protect Major General John A. McClernand's corps on the Union left.

Imagine the formation of twelve thousand men advancing across the fields and through the trees. The actors included the rock stars of the ultimate Victorious constellation advancing across the fields and farms and hamlets, living off the land and devouring all in their path.

Lt. General U.S. Grant in command. Major General William T. Sherman in the center. Major General James B. McPherson on the right. Grant planned to strike the Southern Railroad of Mississippi between Vicksburg and Jackson and isolate Vicksburg by cutting Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton's lines of supply and communications.

I knew all that, generally, but when I pulled up at the Clinton Holiday Inn Express I discovered that my pal had completed his business for the day at the hospital and was waiting to show me the town of Raymond, and the fields where General McPherson's XVII Corps collided with Confederate forces collided with Brigadier General John Gregg's veteran brigade in the valley of Fourteen-mile Creek south of town.

We exchanged handshakes, and the skies were clear with a few puffy clouds. "Perhaps we should go to the battlefield now. I drove through some fierce weather on the way today. Might be better to do it with salubrious conditions."

"Great idea," I said. "Let me check in and dump my bag."

I walked into the lobby and presented my credentials to Tiffany behind the counter. She conceded that I indeed had a reservation, but that regrettably, the room was not ready just yet. I glanced at the clock behind the desk. It was almost five- odd not to have the beds made that late in the booking day.

But considering that I could profitably fulfill another mission and the delay was no real inconvenience, I shrugged, took my room access cards and went back outside to join my friend.

"Let's go," I said. "Do you mind driving?"

He didn't, and as we covered the seven miles toward Raymond and began to slip into the past. We discussed the mutable nature of time and its application to society in northwest Mississippi. We stopped on the road to look up a leafy lane at a stately ante-bellum house.

“Grant stayed there one night, before heading off to Champion Hill. It is called Waverly. It was the plantation of John B. Peyton.” We continued on past much more modest homes owned by the descendants of those who had been enslaved there.



(St. Mark's Episcopal Church, the Courthouse and the water tower are the landmarks of downtown Raymond, Mississippi).

We took a loop around the downtown, past some preserved old homes and St. Mark's Episcopal Church, which had been used as a hospital by the Union when they routed the Confederates. The ladies of the town had lemonade and lunch for their Rebels, but in the event, the boys were moving too fast to get away and it was the Federal Troops who got the lemonade.

“You can still see the blood stains on the church’s floor from that period,” my friend said.

“Uncle Patrick talked about that. He came back to town after his Colonel was shot dead, and carried the body back here for burial.”

My pal nodded and then we turned right at the water tower and headed south toward the battlefield.

The Field at Raymond



There is nothing like walking a battlefield to understand what happened on it. The terrain is all, an imperative you can only feel with your own legs, and marvel at what was expected of the legs of ill-fed people in heavy woolen uniforms on a humid Mississippi day. And add the realization and the simple fact that a watercourse can provide an opportune trench of opportunity, and overwhelming force, can impose the will on the unwilling.

My dual purpose for being in Raymond, Mississippi, was to see my pal (I mean, how often do we find ourselves I Mississippi at the same time?) and to find where Uncle Patrick had performed the acts that gave him the Civil

War equivalent of his fifteen minutes of fame, and try to understand it. We were there in Raymond, almost on the actual anniversary.

We turned south under the shadow of the water tower and headed south, the diametric opposite of the direction from which U.S. Grant and two Corps of Union troops came. Confederate General Gregg and his forces had arrived in Raymond on the 11th- and had been directed by General Pemberton to delay or repulse the Federal forces when they appeared.

Gregg headed south, to take a blocking position to thwart the advance. Pemberton had promised cavalry to scope the enemy's movement, though in the event, it was a dozen schoolboys that showed up, not something like John Singleton Mosby's bold Rangers. Just kids.

A dozen kids. Jeeze.

We drove past the Confederate Cemetery in the left, and the three Civil War cannon perched on the edge of the light manufacturing are on the right where the Rebel batteries had actually be perched. Three guns. My reading claimed that during the fight, one of the guns had suffered a casualty killing the crew, and leaving only two to oppose the advance of an entire Union Corps.

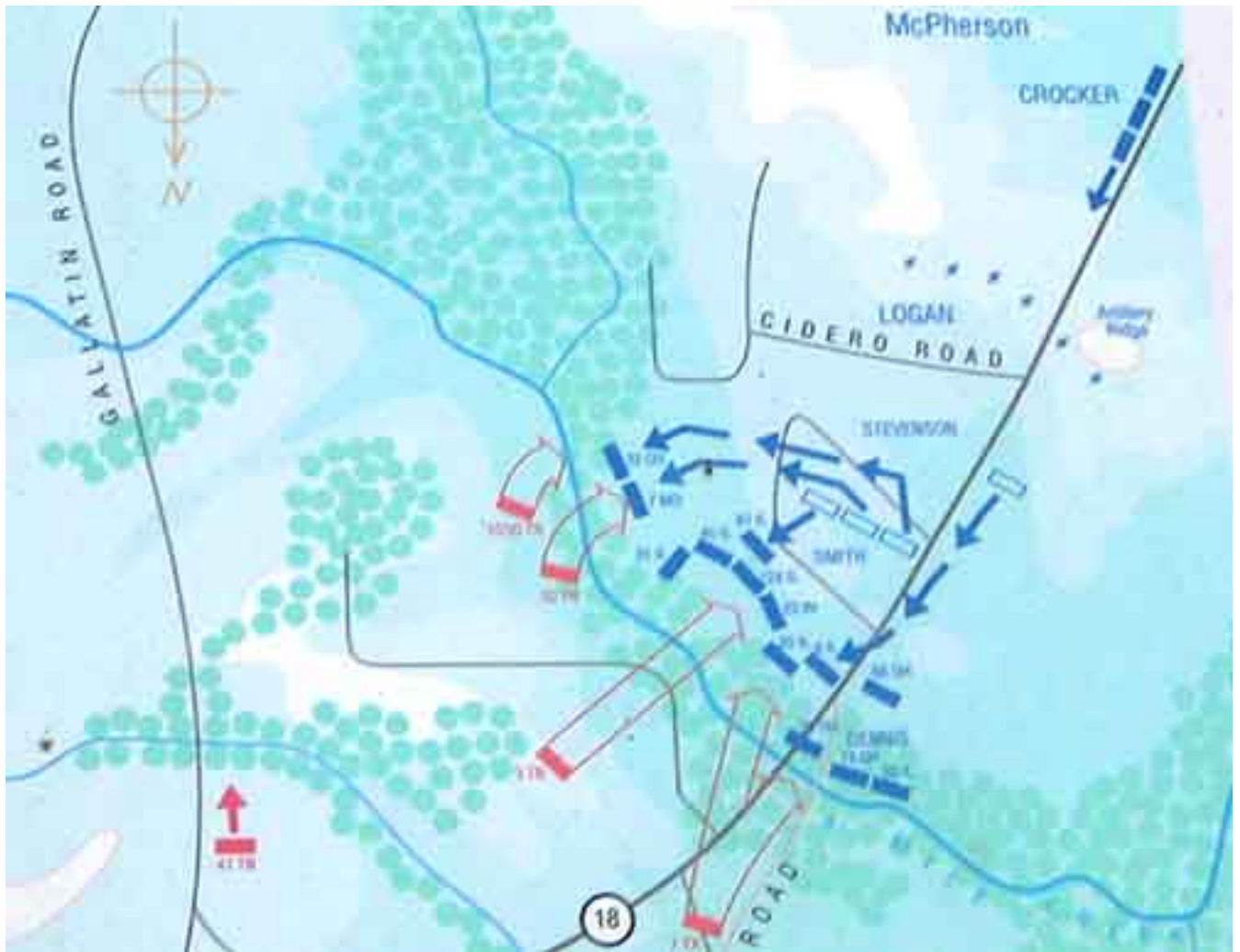
It wasn't that hot a day- almost the anniversary of the battle, but I felt a distinct chill. What is it like to know that you have been beat, and running makes sense, though honor keeps you in the line?

A little further down the road, the modern two-lane sweeps to the east, though it is clear that the original path of the road went much closer to a straight line south and connected to The Natchez Trace and ultimately back to the River.

My pal slowed the car, and parked it against a steel wire hanging from solid wooden uprights with reflectors to ensure the visiting public wouldn't drive through and crash the marble memorial.

"This is not one of you marquee battlefields from back East," said my pal, as we dismounted. "No Park Rangers and Smokey Bear hats. This is a purely local memorial. This is what the people of Raymond chose to save, and it is their money to preserve their memory that is what has been preserved."

I marveled at it as my friend parked the car. There was an extended walking path with interpretive signage around a verdant green field. We looked at the marble monument that explained who had contributed to the preservation of the core area where the battle had been fought. We walked along the black-top walking path to the first interpretive sign. It featured a map of the engagement, showing who was where on the field.



My friend pointed to the little red box on the left. “That would have been the combined 10th and 30th Tennessee Irish,” he said. “That is where your Uncle Patrick was. We are standing about where the number “18” is located on the old Port Gibson Road.”

I read a quote that was printed on the sign next to the map, from President Lincoln. It explained why this little place, for this day, was the deadliest place to be on earth. Raymond was the key to Vicksburg:

“Vicksburg is the key,” said President Abraham Lincoln. “The war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket.”

The United States government had to control the lower Mississippi River in order to move agricultural products to world markets, to split the South and sever its supply lines. In the spring of 1863, Major General Ulysses S. Grant launched the Army of the Tennessee on a series of maneuvers and battles to pocket Vicksburg and end the war.

And that is exactly what we “Cool,” I said. “Let’s walk the field.” And that is what we did.

Fourteen Mile Creek



We were walking the paved loop around the core battlefield at Raymond. It was a sunny Mississippi afternoon, the air languid and soft against our skin. There was another walker on foot, maybe a quarter mile ahead, and a jogger over by the abandoned concrete road and bridge across Fourteen Mile Creek.

“The Raymond battlefield had remained nearly unchanged for over a century,” said my friend. “Certainly in the time my father lived here. But the sprawl of development even came to sleepy country Mississippi in this new century. The improvement of Route 18- you can hear traffic from it beyond the trees- was resulting in commercial and residential development. That new activity vaulted this field up to one of the Top Ten endangered Civil War battlefields, according to the people at the Preservation Trust.”

“I have belonged to the Trust for a long time, and I am always good- or at least was- for a twenty spot to support good works.” I looked at the remains of what had been a bridge across a little tributary stream. “Do you think that was here in 1863?” I said, gesturing at the tangle of vines and fallen beams.

“I don’t know. This is probably the path of the old farm road,” he said, pointing down the narrow paved lane that ran straight as a die toward the end of the property.



“I donated specifically to the Raymond fund-raising campaign, and a fairly significant check to help purchase the high-ground at Brandy Station, where that jerk built the McMansion Spite House on the site of J.E.B. Stuart’s headquarters,” I said. “It does my heart good to see the crest of that hill naked again when I drive by.”

“Me too. It was in 1998 that plans were announced to pave over the pastures and put a strip mall fronting the highway. The people of Raymond got alarmed at the idea, and a group of concerned citizens formed the Friends of Raymond. They raised enough money to purchase forty acres that was going to be developed, and started buying other chunks of property along the battle lines.”

I looked to the left, at the peaceful green pasture that had been the line of advance toward Fourteen Mile Creek, and tried to imagine what it would have been like with a Seven Eleven, a gas station and a Dollar Store on it.

“So, they just about doubled the size, to include the area where your Uncle fought. We will go over there later, and I think I can find it. They put up a marker, but I had to trespass to get to it last time. We will have to approach from the south.”

We walked along and I began to sweat. “I am glad we are not here for the actual anniversary,” I said. “I bet on Tuesday there is going to be a big deal. I prefer to contrast the tranquility of the present with the idea of the chaos of the past.”

“The terrain hasn’t changed, of course, but the roads and trees have. I think this path was the road the Union troops came up to confront General Brig. Gen. John Gregg’s force. You can see there is a part that goes beyond the park boundary, and the remains of another bridge. The concrete road over there replaced it, I think, and ultimately the new Highway 18 was constructed off beyond the trees. The battle lines ran from off the Battlefield property to our right across the two newer roads. And the trees around us were not here, since we can’t see the Confederate cannon behind us on the bluff.”

“It is hard to figure out what you are looking at without seeing an old-time map superimposed on the modern features.”

My friend nodded as we came to a sign telling us not to go any further down the lane that crossed the stream. Another ancient wooden structure had fallen into the stream, and the asphalt walking path turned sharply to the left, paralleling the creek. The old road continued off the Park, still straight but now overgrown.



My friend went beyond the sign and told me to come with him. We stood and looked down the steep banks of the watercourse. “This is the major feature of the field. It was a natural trench. Gregg’s men had to cross it, charging the Yankees when they thought they had the advantage on them. The other units were arrayed on the high ground across the modern roads.”

“This is a great natural fortification,” I said looking at the tree sheltered streambed. The steep sides were at least ten feet above the foot or so of water flowing languidly through the rocks and fallen limbs. “But to advance across it and then have to fall back. Jesus.”

“Yeah. Gregg thought he was facing a much smaller force when he launched his attack at the Union front. He thought he was going to roll up a Union brigade. Instead, he was assaulting the front of an entire Union Army Corps. There were 12,000 Federals pouring up the road against his 4,000.”

We walked the quarter mile up to the 1920s-era Paper Moon-style bridge. On the other side of the creek were two cannon, placed to note the flying advance of the Michigan artillery. On the high ground of the field to the south were arrayed the snouts of twenty Union cannon.

“God, this was a killing field.”

My friend nodded. “Yes it was. Look at Fourteen Mile Creek from here,” and pointed to the deep chasm that provide natural protection for the Union advance as the Confederates were hurled back toward Raymond.

“Heavy fighting broke out along the slopes and low ground as the two forces collided in clouds of smoke and dust. It was a fog of war,” my friend said thoughtfully. “And I mean that literally. The stalemate here at the creek was finally broken when General McPherson massed his artillery and began delivering barrage on Gregg’s men. These Michigan guns were probably firing grape shot, mowing down the Rebels.”



“Not a pretty sight, I imagine. What made them stand and not run?”

“Well, they did, eventually, but heavy battle smoke and difficult ground prevented Gregg from knowing he was facing a buzz saw. The Texans to our right and the Tennessee Irish were moving in echelon toward the center, where the bulk of the fighting was happening.”

More than 500 Confederate soldiers were killed, wounded or missing on the field. Slightly less for the Union. Still, it was a sharp encounter. And the vigor of Gregg's attack convinced U.S. Grant that he could not drive from here to Vicksburg and leave the Confederates in Jackson at his back. This fight changed the course of the campaign. Grant went against Jackson, and that forced the battle at Champion Hill, a much larger engagement than this was."

"Good to know. This fight was it for Uncle Patrick. He got captured again as a result of some heroics. His unit was on the high ground off across Highway 18, right?"

"Yes. I think I can find it. We may have to trespass. You up for it?" We started the walk back around the field to the car. The air was humid, but not oppressively hot. The field was peaceful, and we were alone on the field.

"Hell, yes," I said. "I just hope no one shoots us. That would be too ironic."

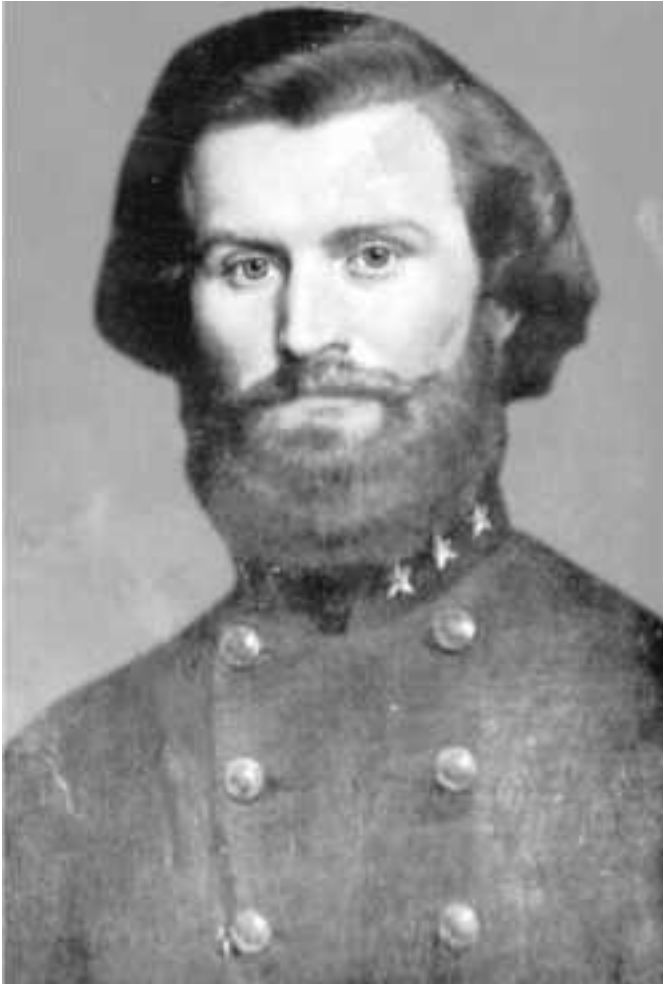
My friend just smiled.



My pal, Rebeca Blackwell Drake is a historian of renown, and instrumental in the saving of the Battlefield at Champion Hill, a bloody encounter that solidified General Grant's relentless advance on the citadel of Vicksburg. She knows Jerry McWilliams, the local artist nationally recognized for his Civil War paintings (above), who recently unveiled his painting of **Colonel Randal McGavock: God's Own Gentleman**. The nearly life-sized work is the first of its kind to portray one of the heroes of the Battle of Raymond.

"I've always been interested in the life of Randal McGavock," stated McWilliams. *"Years ago I found a copy of the out-of-print book, 'The Life and Journals of Randal McGavock' and have read it numerous times. The book vividly describes the battlefield death of Colonel McGavock as he led the 10th Tennessee Irish on the Raymond battlefield in a charge against the enemy. I felt compelled to portray McGavock during these final tragic moments of his life."*

Where McGavock Fell



(Colonel Randall McGavock, 10th Tennessee Irish Regiment, CSA)

We walked back up the asphalt path that surrounds the core area of the battlefield at Raymond slowly. Both of us are having some mobility problems these days- I beat my knees into submission and the arthritis is painful, amplified by that damned ruptured quadriceps a couple years ago. My pal took a bad fall in an adventure on his mountain property a few years ago, and the rehabilitation has been long and not complete.

But we were both happy to be someplace where history had been made, and there were stories that were told about what had happened here. A local approached us, headed for the old disused concrete bridge over Fourteen Mile Creek.

“Howdy, all ya’all,” he said as we passed, and we responded the same way.

“He probably knew we were Yankees,” my pal said.

“I have no doubt. But I had kin on the field, maybe on both sides. I wish I could remember what Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment Great Grandfather was in. I saw on the sign that the 20th Ohio was right here, in the center of the Union counter-attack.”

“Tantalizing thought, but you should be able to do the research when you get home.”

“I wish I had a copy of his service record. I held it in my hands years ago at the National Archives. I was pretty amazed that they were able to whistle it up in a half hour. I wouldn’t think there would be that much call for the original records these days.”

We approached his white car in the parking area at the north end of the field. “I will show you the Texas Monument across the road. It is on private land, but the battle itself extended almost a mile in that direction, along the high ground.” He described an arc with his hand. “I trespassed the last time, but the gate was open and the owner showed me up to the signs that describe what happened up there. The Friends of Raymond had them placed there in the last few years.”

“So that is the ‘non-contiguous’ property they were talking about? Do we have to trespass to get there?”

“If the gate is open we can just ask the owner if it is OK. I am sure they will understand if you tell them the story.”

“So, I didn’t get it from Uncle Patrick’s account of the fight. I didn’t understand that the combine 10th/30th Tennessee Irish were the extreme left flank of the Confederate line.”

“Yes, the understrength 10th had been augmented with the 30th to bring up their TOE to something near combat effective. They got here on the 11th, marching from Port Hudson to Jackson, and then the twelve miles to Raymond.”

“They did a lot of marching. They must have been fit- and particularly in those woolen uniforms. I heard that Colonel Randall McGavock bought them for his men out of his own pocket- fine things. Patrick said the jackets and pants were Confederate Gray with a scarlet line running down the pant legs. The hats were gray with scarlet trim. The shirts and insides of the jackets were also scarlet. The officers got crimson and gold trimming on their jacket sleeves.”

“Not many got uniforms that fancy. General Gregg found this position to give fight, with the creek in front and the high-ground to his back. The 10th was up there,” he said pointing. We got in the car and drove back toward the modern route of Highway 18. Directly along what would have been the front lined there was a granite memorial to the right of a well-tended gravel drive with a gate that was firmly closed.

“We will have to try it from the other side,” said my pal. “I think I can find it.”



I said that I needed to get out and see the Texas monument.

“The Texans have been doing that lately for their Civil War battles. I guess it is because their economy is going pretty well.”

This one was relatively small- a little taller than me, and with a dense long inscription on the side facing the highway. The words read:

UPON THIS FIELD ON MAY 12, 1863, SOLDIERS
OF THE 7TH TEXAS INFANTRY, LED BY REGIMENTAL
COMMANDER COLONEL HIRAM B. GRANBURY, AND OTHER
REGIMENTS OF BRIGADIER GENERAL JOHN GREGG'S
BRIGADE FOUGHT WITH GRIM DETERMINATION AGAINST
TWO DIVISIONS OF FEDERAL FORCES UNDER COMMAND
OF MAJOR GENERAL JAMES B. MCPHERSON.
THE UNION ADVANCE WAS PART OF A LARGER
CAMPAIGN DESIGNED TO CAPTURE THE STRATEGIC PORT
CITY OF VICKSBURG ON THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER.
LEADING THE CONFEDERATE ASSAULT AGAINST THE
FEDERALS, GRANBURY'S TEXANS STEPPED FORWARD
AT NOON AND SURGED ACROSS FOURTEENMILE CREEK,
WHERE THEY MET THE ENEMY IN FORCE.
THEY VALIANTLY STRUGGLED WITH REGIMENTS
FROM OHIO AND ILLINOIS, WHILE ALL ALONG THE
BATTLE LINE THE SOUTHERN SOLDIERS OF GREGG'S
BRIGADE FACED THREE TIMES THEIR NUMBER.
DESPITE THEIR COURAGEOUS EFFORT, THE
CONFEDERATE TROOPS WERE CHECKED AND
FORCED FROM THE FIELD AROUND 4:30 P.M.
THE ENGAGEMENT AT RAYMOND WAS A PRECURSOR
TO THE INTENSE FIGHTING TO FOLLOW
DURING THE SIEGE OF VICKSBURG.
IN THE BATTLE OF RAYMOND, THE TEXANS LOST
22 MEN KILLED, 73 WOUNDED, AND 63 MISSING IN ACTION.
A MEMORIAL TO TEXANS WHO SERVED THE CONFEDERACY.

I had to take several pictures of the inscription to get it all in. I got back in the car and we backed up and got pointed toward the highway again.

“I am pretty sure I know how to find the plaques,” he said. “But it might be a long walk in the woods. We turned onto the highway and proceeded north to

the first road that seemed to lead in the right direction and drove past some houses. We didn't want to park in anyone's driveway, but there was a derelict house almost completely overgrown with some fields behind, revealed by a tractor cut through the thick underbrush.

We pulled into the gravel of what had been the driveway, parked and dismounted. We walked toward the field, passing the overgrown house.

"How is it that something with a roof on it could become so worthless that they walked away?" I asked.

"Maybe it is just the farmland that has any value, or maybe it was part of the battlefield property that the Friends of Raymond bought. I don't know."

"Just so long as no one minds we are traipsing around their property," I said. We walked on to the middle of the field. No markers visible. We didn't know whether to go left or right at the tree-line, and decided that right was the best possibility. The next field was likewise barren of interpretive signage. I was starting to lose hope when my pal let out a whoop! "There it is! Come on!"

Actually, as we approached, we saw there were two of the red metal plaques set on sturdy poles and sunk in concrete.

"So this was the extreme left of the line?" I asked.

"It was until the 10th started to move in echelon back toward the creek where we were before. The plaques had additional information:

"At noon, Gregg charged with the 7th hitting the 20th Ohio and the 3rd hitting the 23 Ind. surprising and driving back the Yankees. At 1:00 p.m., the 50th and the 10th were ordered forward. Lt. Col. Beamount of the 50th then saw what Gregg had not yet seen. Two Yankee divisions were massing to attack in his front. He withdrew his regiment to the rear. This left a 400 yard gap in the line with the 10th all alone. By 1:30, the Confederate right began to collapse. McGavock's vision was blocked by the woods and had no idea that the 50th was gone. When Gregg discovered that the 50th had disappeared, he ordered McGavock to stop the Yankees. With his sword in his hand, he turned toward his faithful Irishmen to signal to advance. With a deafening Irish-rebel yell, they surge into the oncoming Yankees. After

making the signal to advance, McGavock turned to face the Yankees. At that moment, a single Yankee Minie ball struck him in the heart, knocking him to the ground, mortally wounded.”



(Patrick Griffin, in the day).

We read the words in silence. “This is where Uncle Patrick comes in, at least according to his version of the story. He said he was standing about two paces in the rear of the line and Colonel McGavock was standing about four paces behind him. They had been engaged for about twenty minutes when he heard a ball strike something. He realized it was his Colonel, wearing that red shirt of his under his gray frock coat. The Colonel was about to fall. He caught him and eased him down with his head in the shadow of a little bush. Patrick knew he was a goner, and asked if he had any message for his

mother. The answer was: 'Griffin, take care of me! Griffin, take care of me! He lived only for a few minutes. Must have been right here. Would you take a picture of me here?' I looked skyward...'Patrick!' I shouted. 'It took a while, but I made it!'



We looked around the tree-line, seeing where Colonel McGavock would have led his wild Irishmen, if he had lived.

“So that was it or Patrick’s part of the war in the west. He continued to fight until the ‘Bloody Tinth’ withdrew from the field. Then he went to the Lt. Colonel who had risen to command with McGavock’s death, and told him he was going back to get McGavock’s body. He told him he had made the

promise as the Colonel died and he was going to ensure he got a proper burial, whatever the consequences.”

We started the long trudge back to the car. My legs were feeling a little rubbery. “I am glad I am not carrying you on foot back to Raymond,” I said to my pal.

“And I am equally glad that I am not carrying you, my friend. Perhaps we should stop at the Confederate cemetery on the way back to town.”

“I assume that is where Randall McGavock was buried, the first time. At least that is where Patrick put him. The dead used to move around a lot more than they do these days. I looked around the green fields and the shadows from the trees that hugged the high ground.

In a strange way, I felt quite at home.

Raising the Dead



(Those who died during the Battle of Raymond were buried on a hillside in the Raymond Cemetery. The hillside later became the Raymond Confederate Cemetery. Randal McGavock was buried here the day after the battle of Raymond, but later removed. The plot is mowed neatly and well maintained. Photo Socotra).

I felt triumphant that our search had been successful, and what had been family myth was now filled in memory and digital record with a sense of space, and place. The air was moist and gentle on our skin and we turned back on the black-top and drove slowly down to Highway 18 for the right

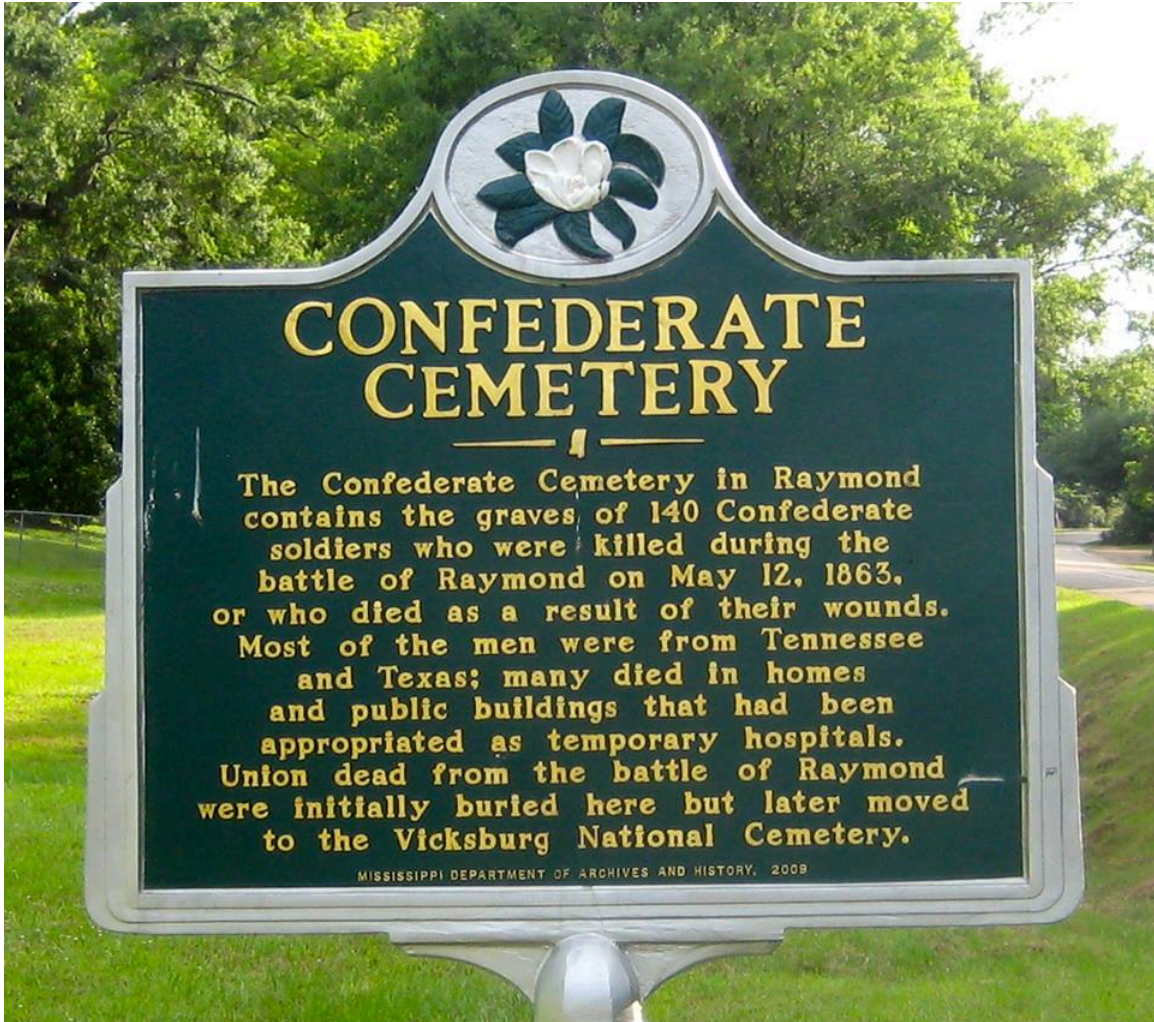
turn north back to Raymond. I took a sheaf of notes out of my back-pack and glanced quickly down Uncle Patrick's account of the aftermath of the battle, recapping the events that happened after the battle.

“So, Patrick goes back to get Colonel McGavock's body, which was just where he left it, near the edge of bluff near the sign we found. He got two members of H Company to volunteer to go with him and carry the body. Gregg's Confederates were beating feet north to escape the Yankees.”

“The ladies of Raymond had made lemonade and a light lunch for them,” said my friend, negotiating off the big bypass road and back onto the human scale of Port Gibson Street. “They could not stop to tarry, and you can say that the Yankees ate their lunch.”

“Uncle Patrick and his comrades were making a slow go of it with the body. They were overcome by the vanguard of the Yankee advance, and Patrick had to threaten his friends at gunpoint to keep them from running. Seeing that capture was inevitable, he let them go. The Union troops gave him the raspberry, but he said he was beyond caring. Eventually the commander of the rear guard, a Captain of Infantry named McGuire, took pity on his fellow Irishman and had the Colonel's corpse put in a wagon to be hauled to town.”

“Sounds a little like the movie Weekend at Bernie's,” smiled my friend, swerving off the road onto the grass near the historical marker at the Raymond Cemetery. We dismounted and walked over to read what was on it.



“A hundred and forty Confederates,” I said. “Where did the Union dead go?”

My friend smiled, a little sadly. “Look at the terrain, going up slope toward the wrought iron fence around the Confederate graves.” I did, and the lowering sun showed a pattern of shadows revealing oblong dimples under the verdant greensward.

“They were all here, too. There was no provision for a Graves Registration Service in either of the Armies. After the fight, combat troops were detailed to bury the dead before they putrefied. There was no embalming for most of them. There wasn’t any specific provision for it, unless a Suttler following the Army was there to provide the service at private cost. The threat to public health was the biggest deal in what we know now as the first modern mass war.”



(This is what the cemetery at Raymond would have looked like in the days immediately after the battle. This image is of the graveyard at the City Point Hospital near Richmond, VA. *Collection of the New York Historical Society, nhnycw/ad ad35012*).

“No wonder most of the casualties were from infection or disease. But if the Union dead were here, where did they go?”

“Probably to the National Cemetery in Vicksburg. That is a story in itself. The number of soldiers who died between 1861 and 1865 is estimated to be north of 600,000.”

“Wait, that is more than all the other wars in American history until Vietnam!”

My pal nodded. “Yep, and they were buried where they fell. That led to a bold plan devised by Army Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs to find, disinter and re-bury the Union dead in a new system of national cemeteries.”

“I knew he directed the first burials at Arlington, partly out of revenge for the death of his son in combat. But I had no idea he was behind an entire campaign to dig up all Union Corpses and bury them together.”

“Aside from the War itself, that was the first big government social program. As Reconstruction was rolled out, resentment was growing across the South. Union cemeteries in the southern towns were becoming an emotional issue. General Meigs dispatched teams to all the major battle sites in a six-year massive Federal program to locate, disinter and rebury the Union dead. Ultimately, well over 300,000 bodies were reinterred in 74 new national cemeteries. They tried their best to identify them, eventually naming more than half. Clara Barton ran her own agency to locate and identify the dead.”

“That boggles the mind, no kidding. Clara’s vision for the Red Cross came out of her experience in Fairfax County and the search for the missing after the war. I saw that her Missing Soldiers Office in DC has become a museum. I will put that on my District Bucket List. Was that only for the Union Dead?”

“Of course. The South was vanquished. Identifying and memorializing the Rebels was a local or State matter, and there was no money for that. Outraged at the official neglect of their dead, white southern civilians, mostly women, mobilized to accomplish what federal resources would not. That is where the cult of the Lost Cause began in the sense of violation. The ladies of Columbus, Mississippi began to decorate the Southern graves in 1866.”

We unlatched the wrought iron gate and walked slowly down the rows of Confederate graves. They are marked with distinctive stones that come to a gentle point, unlike the Union markers that are gently rounded. It is said they were carved that way so that Yankees wouldn’t sit on them.

“And the whole Memorial Day holiday flowed from that, right? But even that is controversial. Some people claim it was freedmen in Charleston who began decorating the graves of Union prisoners in 1865 to commemorate what the fight was *really* about.”

“Controversial indeed. In fact, like the social changes brought by World War II, there is one America before 1861, and completely different one after 1865. So, your Uncle Patrick brought the Colonel’s body back to Raymond,

and then what happened?”



“Patrick was a prisoner, again. By nightfall he had been taken to a hotel in Raymond that was being used as a prison by the Union forces. The Colonel’s body spent the night on the porch. The next morning, Captain McGuire stopped at the Hotel to deliver a two-day parole. Free to move around, Patrick found a carpenter and paid him \$20 to build a plain wooden coffin. He then hired a wagon, and a procession of prisoners under guard gave an escort of honor, and the burial was right here. He got the grave marked so the Colonel’s relatives could find it easily. Then he went back to being a POW.”

“He escaped later, right?”

“That is his story, and he stuck to it the rest of his life. His daring escape from a prison boat and the trip back down the river to re-join his family is quite an epic. Ultimately, he rejoined the fight as a headquarters scout and railway saboteur in the Georgia campaign of that crazy Texan John Bell Hood.”

“Good story,” said my friend.

“Might even been true. Patrick named his daughter Louisa McGavock Griffin after the Colonel.”

“What happened to the Colonel’s body after Raymond?”

“My understanding is that McGavock’s sister Ann and her husband, Judge Henry Dickenson, traveled to Raymond and made arrangements for the body to be brought to their home in Columbus, MS. After the war, the remains were moved one final time to Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Nashville. On St. Patrick's Day, 1866, Patrick’s Colonel finally came to his final destination and was interred in a formal Masonic ceremony. They say most of Nashville’s Irish population was there to honor their former Mayor. Far as I know, he has remained there since.”

“He moved more in death than a lot of people do in life. Care for a drink?”

I did indeed. We walked back down the hill and mounted up to drive the back roads back into the future, and presently we found ourselves in the bright lights of Clinton.

We stopped at an Applebees near the Holiday Inn Express. It was Mother’s Day, and the crowd was brisk and very diverse. We sat at the counter in the middle of the restaurant and the server brought us some menus.

“Sweet tea?” she asked pleasantly. “Sunday, no liquor.”

She must have assumed we were ignorant Yankees, but was courteous about it. It is the way of things down South.



There is a lot more to see about the War in the West. I will be back to visit Champion Hill and the Vicksburg Military Park, and visit the National Cemetery there.

One of the organizations I have supported for years is the Civil War Preservation Trust. They are currently engaged in a campaign to save an additional 66 acres at the Champion Hill battlefield. I sent them a check this morning, because I have seen what happens when the developers get their claws into historic property- and the result destroys the ability to contemplate what those extraordinary Americans did in the titanic struggle over States Rights and the appalling institution of slavery.

Saving it for generations to come is the right thing to do. Should you wish to join us, you can help save the past for the future at:

<http://www.civilwar.org/battlefields/championhill/champion-hill-2015/>