

Raymond Battlefield Miles Tract

The Miles tract encompasses a full quarter of the core area of Raymond battlefield as identified by the American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP). Situated on Mississippi Highway 18 (historic Raymond-Utica Road) along the banks of Fourteenmile Creek (the dominant geographic feature of the battlefield), the 67-acre tract will be the largest and most-significant preservation victory at Raymond to date. Acquisition of this parcel will almost double the current acreage (65) preserved over the past ten years by Friends of Raymond (FOR) in conjunction with the Civil War Preservation Trust and the ABPP.

The Battle of Raymond, fought on May 12, 1863, was a significant action during the Vicksburg campaign. As the Union Army of the Tennessee, commanded by Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, pushed deep into the interior of the Magnolia State, it aimed for the Southern Railroad of Mississippi. This rail line connected Vicksburg with Jackson, the state capital, and, via Jackson, points elsewhere in the Confederacy. It was the lifeline of Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton and the Vicksburg garrison. Grant sought to destroy this railroad and thus isolate his opponent, Pemberton, in Vicksburg and cut him off from all supply and communications with the outside world. Divining his intention, Pemberton positioned his forces to contest the various crossing points of Fourteenmile Creek. The Confederate commander planned to then strike Grant's exposed right flank and drive the Union army west toward the Big Black River where Pemberton's main force awaited as an anvil against which to crush the Federals.

On the morning of May 12, 1863, Brig. Gen. John Gregg moved his Confederate brigade into position along the banks of Fourteenmile Creek, southwest of the village of Raymond. Gregg placed the 7th Texas Infantry in position to block the Utica Road crossing of the creek while his remaining regiments would be hurled in echelon across the creek from right to left and turn the Federal flank. Against an opponent of equal number, the attack was sure to succeed. But unbeknownst to Gregg, far more than a Union brigade was approaching Raymond. Rather it was two divisions of the XVII Corps led by Maj. Gen. James B. McPherson that enjoyed a 3-1 numeric advantage.

The battle started shortly after 10 a.m. as the 7th Texas contested the Federal advance. Two brigades of Union Maj. Gen. John A. Logan's division quickly deployed into line of battle on the Miles tract and moved into the woods bordering the creek, but were soon tangled in a dense jungle. Gregg unleashed his regiments which splashed across the creek in echelon and slammed into the Federals who began to give way. "With the shriek of an eagle," however, Logan restored order and continued the struggle on the Miles tract throughout the morning despite mounting pressure. Early in the afternoon Federal reinforcements arrived that stemmed the tide of battle and launched a counterattack across the Miles tract. By late afternoon, Gregg's line was faced with double envelopment and pressed by overwhelming numbers in front. The Confederate commander had little choice but to order his troops from the field.

Due to the ferocity of the battle of Raymond, Grant changed the operational direction of his army and marched on Jackson, which fell to Union forces on May 14. With his army now clear of danger from attack from the east, Grant turned west toward Vicksburg and a rendezvous with destiny.

The Miles tract witnessed most of the action during the Battle of Raymond and is where approximately 60%-70% of all casualties were suffered. As significant as this tract is in American history, it is endangered by development that is moving rapidly along the Highway 18 corridor southwest out of Jackson and the Mississippi Department of Transportation has a R.O.W. through the battlefield, adjacent to the Miles tract, to four-lane the highway. In light of this development, the tract had been prepared for high density housing and commercial development, lots were marked off and water lines installed. Earlier this year "For Sale" signs were placed on the property, but at the request of local preservationists the signs were taken down to enable negotiations to take place between the Miles family and Friends of Raymond/Civil War Preservation Trust to protect this hallowed ground. This remarkable display of patriotic spirit by the Miles family coupled with the vision, commitment, and perseverance of FOR/CWPT, along with the financial assistance of the ABPP, this significant tract will soon be preserved.