

Timber, Torrents, and the Trans-Mississippi Mud March: Teaching Environmental History Using the 1863 Helena Campaign

G. David Schieffler
Crowder College

LATE IN THE MORNING on January 20, 1862, the Army of the Potomac, more than 75,000 strong, broke camp on the north bank of the Rappahannock River near Falmouth, Virginia, and marched west. The federal troops, led by the diffident Ambrose E. Burnside, had been shaken by their ignominious defeat at the Battle of Fredericksburg five weeks earlier, but they were by no means conquered. Many griped about incompetent officers, treachery in Washington, the Emancipation Proclamation, “stay at home” civilians, winter weather, overdue pay, and the protracted war, but most remained defiant and eager for revenge against Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia, which lay entrenched on the Rappahannock’s south bank. Their commander Burnside also yearned for retribution, and his plan for attaining it was, by most counts, bold but feasible. He ordered the bulk of his army to march west from Falmouth, cross the Rappahannock at a lightly defended ford four miles upstream of Fredericksburg, and assault the left flank of Lee’s army, whose back would be turned to the river. As with most military maneuvers, the Union plan hinged on achieving some element of surprise.¹



Figure 1: Alfred R. Waud’s sketch of Burnside’s Mud March, “Winter Campaigning. The Army of the Potomac on the move. Sketched near Falmouth—Jan. 21st,” 21 January 1863, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-22444, <<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004660450/>>.

Burnside’s army began its advance on January 20 “under threatening weather, with a chilly wind blowing from the east,” but otherwise, conditions were fair. The day was, in the words of one soldier, “a good one for marching.”² Around dusk, however, meteorological conditions took a turn for the worse. A light drizzle transitioned to a steady downpour as a slow-moving wave cyclone blew into the region and drenched the encamped soldiers. The rain, which fell in sheets for the next thirty-six hours, saturated the clayey, impermeable Piedmont soil. When Burnside’s sleep-deprived soldiers moved to cross the Rappahannock the following morning, they became mired in “ass deep” mud.³ Chaos ensued as artillery wagons and pontoon trains sank in the muck, and thousands of panting horses and mules died trying to extract them (**Figure 1**). Recalling the fiasco after the war, one Union soldier wrote that “It would be hard to tell which was the meanest...time the Army of the Potomac ever had, but for *mud, rain, cold, whiskey, drowned-*

out men, horses, mules, and abandoned wagons and batteries, for pure unadulterated demoralization...and downright cussedness, 'this took the cake.'"⁴ Demoralized troops fainted from exhaustion, and desertions—which already plagued the Army of the Potomac—escalated. Adding insult to injury, Confederate pickets on the Rappahannock's south bank witnessed the bedlam and taunted their counterparts with signs that read "Burnside Stuck in the Mud of the Sacred Soil."⁵ That night, Burnside telegraphed Washington to lament that a "severe storm" had allowed the Confederates to "discover our designs," and on January 22, he ordered a general retreat, thus ending what one scholar calls "the battle that was never fought."⁶ Three days later, President Abraham Lincoln accepted Burnside's longstanding offer to resign and appointed Gen. Joseph Hooker in his stead. As commander of the Army of the Potomac, Burnside had been undone by a number of factors, including the disaster at Fredericksburg, insubordinate officers, political machinations, dispirited soldiers, and his own vacillations. And yet, the unpredictable forces of nature were the straw that broke "Old Sides" back.⁷

Burnside's "Mud March" is the best-known example of the natural environment's influence on the American Civil War.⁸ The oft-told story also illustrates what scholars call environmental history. It is no secret that environmental history is an increasingly popular topic in the academy, and though it has not yet reached the status of what historian Brian Allen Drake calls the "social history trinity of race, class, and gender" studies, some would say it is well on its way.⁹ Nevertheless, some remain unconvinced. For instance, one of my colleagues ended our recent conversation on the subject by expressing his hope that "that fad ends soon." Similarly, when I tell my students that I do environmental history, most of them look at me rather confusedly. They assume, as many people do, that I study the history of conservation, back-to-the-landers, the Environmental Protection Agency, and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. And when I tell them that I study environmental Civil War history, the looks on their faces shift from perplexed to downright skeptical.

So what is environmental history? In the words of Brian Allen Drake, it is "the study of the interactions between humans and nature across time."¹⁰ It includes, but is in no way limited to, the study of the environment. Generally speaking, it is a way to interpret

nature as an integral part of the past, as an important *actor*. Or, to use an academic buzz term, environmental history “gives voice” to flora, fauna, weather, climate, geography, terrain, microbiology, and other non-human actors. It recognizes that people do not live in a vacuum. Rather, nature has constantly influenced human thoughts and actions, and conversely, people have consistently sought to use their environment to their advantage, sometimes altering it significantly.¹¹ When one steps back and thinks about it, all of this seems rather obvious. And yet, until very recently, most scholars neglected to explicitly consider the natural environment in their histories. Environmental history did not emerge as a separate subfield until the ecologically-inclined 1970s, to then grow rather slowly in the 1980s and 1990s.¹² It has picked up considerable steam in the green-conscious twenty-first century, and with all due respect to my skeptical colleague, I do not think it is just a fad. I *hope* it is not a fad. In fact, I believe the natural environment is something we all should acknowledge, if not highlight, in our teaching and writing of history. If the job of the historian is to reconstruct and interpret the past as accurately as possible, nature must be a part of that past. To use a layperson’s analogy, if history is like a multi-layered onion, the natural environment constitutes one of its layers.¹³ As Brian Allen Drake recently put it, we know that human history “unfolds within a larger web of dynamic ecological connections, and to ignore that is to miss a good chunk of the human experience.”¹⁴

Some contend that environmental history only makes sense in the context of places where the forces of nature have been palpable—places like the American West, for example, where generations of Plains Indians depended on the American bison; where Lewis and Clark’s Corps of Discovery hacked its way through forests, swatted swarms of mosquitoes, and shot the perilous rapids of the Columbia River; where homesteaders scratched out a living on 160-acre plots of barren land; where dust storms drove thousands of Okies and Arkies westward. But the American Civil War? Some wonder, do we really need a new way of thinking about that well-trodden subject?¹⁵ Jack Temple Kirby, whose 2001 article for the National Humanities Center arguably launched the study of environmental Civil War history, said his graduate school mentor instructed him to steer clear of the Civil War because everything about it had already been studied save “The Sex Life of Lincoln’s Doctor’s Dog.”¹⁶

Some might agree with Kirby's mentor, and they have reason to do so. Nevertheless, I think there is still some work to be done on the Civil War, still some unturned stones that need turning. Since the 1980s, social historians have done a remarkable job of opening our eyes to the myriad experiences of women, African Americans, Native Americans, and the soldierly rank and file during the Civil War. I believe environmental historians are now similarly transforming the way we think about the conflict.

A quick glance at any traditional history of the Civil War reveals that nature was omnipresent in the conflict. As one scholar playfully noted, the Civil War was, after all, "largely fought outdoors."¹⁷ Union and Confederate forces marched through forests and fields, occupied strategic positions atop hills and behind mountains and rivers, dug trenches and canals, confiscated and consumed crops, battled for control of waterways, trudged through rain and mud, contracted deadly diseases, torched enemy farms, cut and burned fences and trees, and depended on hogs, cattle, horses, and mules for sustenance and transportation.¹⁸ Generations of scholars have reported and commented on these events, sometimes giving nature its appropriate due, but they have typically done so in a way that presents humans as the sole motors driving their stories. Like many of their nineteenth-century human subjects, most Civil War historians have depicted nature as something to be acted upon, dealt with, defeated, or overcome. Few have contemplated nature's pivotal role in shaping the conflict's course and outcome, and even fewer have explicitly investigated the ways in which Civil War soldiers used the environment to their strategic and tactical advantage. Thankfully, that is changing. Historians like Jack Kirby, Lisa M. Brady, Megan Kate Nelson, Kenneth W. Noe, Matthew M. Stith, Kathryn S. Meier, Judkin Browning, Timothy Silver, Ted Steinberg, Andrew M. Bell, and Mark Fiege have shown that the natural environment was, in fact, central to the story of the Civil War.¹⁹ More than that, they have proven that nature played an important, sometimes even decisive, part in the conflict. They are, to borrow the words of one historian, effectively "waving the muddy shirt."²⁰

This article represents an attempt to convince history instructors to teach environmental history in their courses and, more precisely, in their classes on the Civil War. Specifically, I propose doing so through an examination of the 1863 Helena campaign.

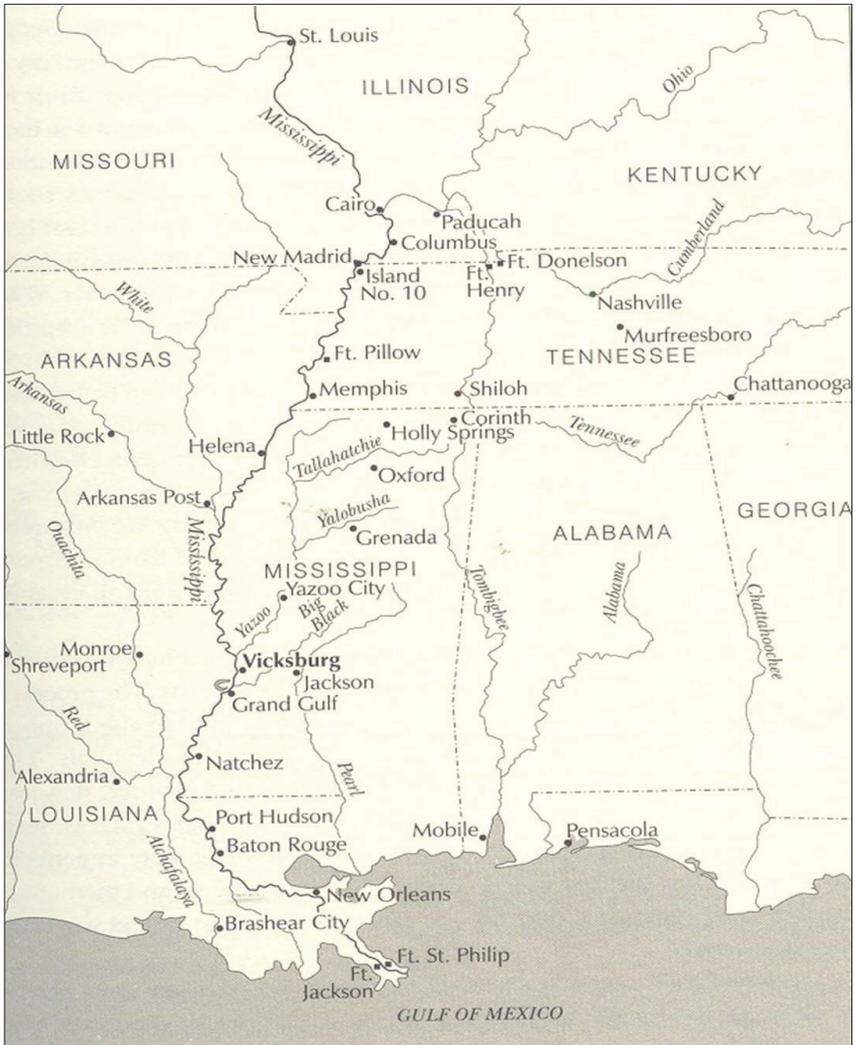


Figure 2: Helena, Arkansas, on the Mississippi River. Reproduced from William L. Shea and Terrence J. Winschel, *Vicksburg Is the Key: The Struggle for the Mississippi River* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 3. Permission granted by the University of Nebraska Press.

The 1863 Helena Campaign

In December 1887, Union veteran W. A. Jenkins delivered a speech to a gathering in Illinois. Jenkins' topic was the battle of Helena, a July 1863 engagement in which more than 7,000 Confederates attacked and were repulsed by 4,100 Federals entrenched at Helena, Arkansas, on the Mississippi River. "Had the Battle of Helena occurred at almost any other period during the war," Jenkins proclaimed, "it would have been heralded far and wide all over the land, for what it really was,—a splendid victory."²¹

Although Jenkins' participation in the Union victory at Helena certainly contributed to his lofty opinion of the battle, his observation nevertheless highlights an important point about the engagement's place in history. The battle of Helena occurred on July 4, 1863, a day when Union armies scored key victories in three different locations. One of those was at Gettysburg, where on July 1 to July 3, federal forces defeated Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, which retreated on July 4. On that same day, 1,000 miles to the south of Gettysburg, Union forces under Ulysses S. Grant forced the surrender of Vicksburg, the most important rebel stronghold on the Mississippi River. By far the smallest military engagement of the day occurred at Helena, 200 miles upriver from Vicksburg (**Figure 2**), but while overshadowed and mostly forgotten, Helena was by no means insignificant.²² The rebel attack on the Union garrison was conceived at the highest level of the Confederate command. It was intended as an important strategic move to relieve pressure on the collapsing Confederate garrison at Vicksburg and secure a crucial rebel position on the Mississippi River in the case of Vicksburg's surrender. The Federals had gained control of Helena in the summer of 1862, and for the next year, they used it as an important supply depot and staging ground for military operations on the Mississippi, particularly those aimed at Vicksburg. The Union occupation of Helena was a constant threat to the Confederacy's control of the Mississippi River and the Arkansas interior. The Helena campaign was initiated to eliminate that threat. In the end, the July 4 attack was too little and too late to save Vicksburg, which capitulated on the same morning. Still, the battle of Helena proved to be among the most significant engagements of the Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi. Over 1,800 men were killed, wounded, or captured in the campaign (15% of



Figure 3: “Map of Arkansas’s Six Major Natural Geographic Divisions,” by David Reed. Courtesy of *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, <<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net>>.

those involved), and its outcome ensured federal control of the Mississippi River. It also preserved the Union foothold in eastern Arkansas, which, in turn, allowed the Federals to capture Little Rock only two months later.²³

The Helena campaign deserves consideration for all of these reasons. It also merits attention because it illustrates lucidly a number of ways in which the natural environment shaped the course and conduct of the Civil War. In recent years, scholars have shown that nature played an important, sometimes crucial, role in the conflict.²⁴ The Helena campaign offers yet another example of that impact. In the summer of 1863, the Confederates believed if they moved against Helena with “celerity and secrecy,” they

would easily capture the post.²⁵ However, the natural environment of east Arkansas—and the Union army’s strategic use of that environment—prevented the Confederates from achieving those ends. Harsh environmental conditions during the rebel approach to Helena in tandem with the federal garrison’s ability to leverage the landscape as a key ally during the battle led to Confederate defeat and, by extension, solidified Union control of the Mississippi River and Arkansas.

Union and Confederate officials appreciated the significance of Helena’s topography in the war’s opening months. The town itself lay on a flat alluvial plain on the banks of the Mississippi River. However, Crowley’s Ridge, an upland reaching heights up to 250 feet above the surrounding delta land, originates just north and west of Helena and extends north for 150 miles to southern Missouri (**Figure 3**).²⁶ Scientists believe this loess-capped ridge was once an island between the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers; when the rivers shifted course millions of years ago, they formed “an erosional remnant that is now Crowley’s Ridge.”²⁷ Some also think fault lines beneath the ridge augmented its height. “Whether it had a boost from fault lines or is strictly the result of erosional forces,” one author contends, “the tertiary deposits of Crowley’s Ridge remained high ground towering above the Mississippi Alluvial Plain.”²⁸ A cavalryman who patrolled east Arkansas during the Civil War called the ridge “one of those freaks of nature,” while a reporter who visited Helena in 1862 described it as “a series of picturesque bluffs that will do no discredit to the wildest scenery of the Rocky Mountains.”²⁹ Though certainly an exaggeration, his observation nevertheless underscores the ridge’s prominence in an otherwise flat region (**Figure 4**). As the only high ground on the Mississippi’s western bank between Missouri and the Gulf of Mexico, Crowley’s Ridge represented a strategic position for anyone trying to control traffic on the river.³⁰ The Confederates maintained ostensible control of Helena during the war’s first year, though, like other rebel positions in the Mississippi Valley, their fortunes changed in 1862. Following its victory at the Battle of Pea Ridge in Northwest Arkansas, Gen. Samuel Curtis’s Union Army of the Southwest began a long march east that would eventually end at the Mississippi River. After three months and 500 miles of marching, Curtis’s army reached and seized an undefended Helena in July 1862.³¹

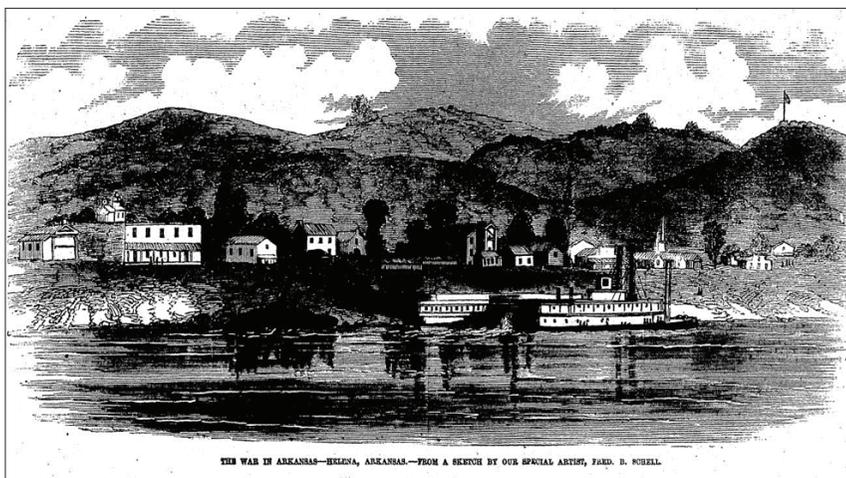


Figure 4: “The War in Arkansas—Helena, Arkansas—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist, Fred. B. Schell,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* (New York), 23 January 1864, p. 276, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers.

The Army of the Southwest’s arrival at Helena marked the beginning of an uninterrupted federal occupation of the town that spanned the remainder of the war. Although the troops stationed there enjoyed the benefits of a river-based supply line, few found comfort in the low-lying, oft-flooded, disease-ridden post, which they nicknamed “Hell-in-Arkansas.”³² A Union general who inspected Helena in 1864 called it the “most deadly place on the [Mississippi] river,” and a journalist who visited the previous year warned his readers to stay away. “This is a dreary little town,” the correspondent wrote:

If you have never been at Helena, take a friend’s advice and never go if you can help it. It is low, marshy and unhealthy.... One thinks, as he looks at this country, of that expression—God-forsaken! There is something utterly desolate and dreary in the whole landscape as far as eye can see.³³

In spite of Helena’s insalubrious environment, the federal army remained there. From 1862 to 1865, the town served as a permanent Union enclave, supply depot, cotton-trading hub, coaling station, and staging ground for federal operations in the Mississippi Valley, particularly those aimed at the Confederate bastion at Vicksburg. Union occupation posed a continual threat to the Confederacy’s control of the Mississippi River and the Arkansas interior, and throughout

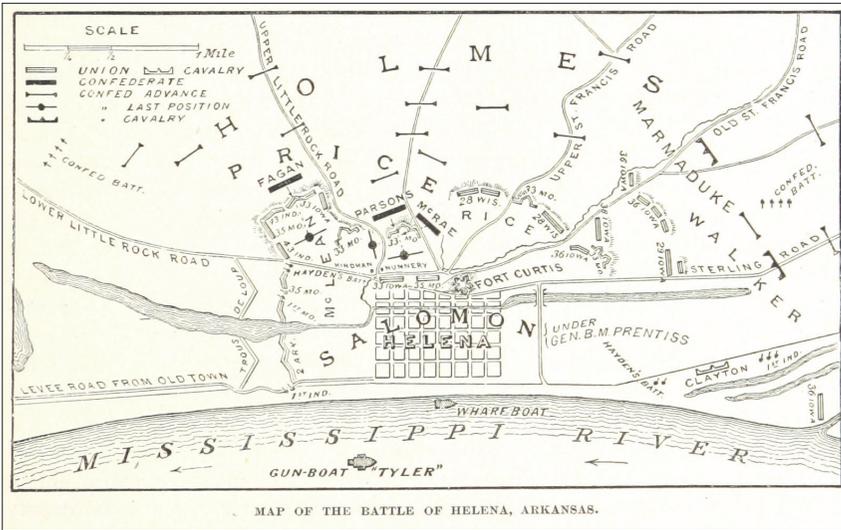


Figure 5: “Map of the Battle of Helena, Arkansas.” Reproduced from Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, Volume III* (New York: The Century Co., 1888), 455. The British Library via Flickr, <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/britishlibrary/11186240513>>.

1862 and 1863, the rebels contemplated removing that threat. At one time or another, recommendations for attacking Helena were made by such high-ranking Confederates as Gen. Samuel Cooper, Secretary of War George W. Randolph, Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, Secretary of War James A. Seddon, Gen. Robert E. Lee, and President Jefferson Davis. Ultimately, however, responsibility for capturing the town fell to Gen. Theophilus Holmes, commander of the Confederate District of Arkansas. In the summer of 1863, Holmes received word that “all Federal troops that [could] be spared [were] being sent to re-enforce Grant” at Vicksburg, thereby leaving Helena’s garrison “very weak.” This promising intelligence prompted Holmes to seek permission to attack the town, and in June 1863, Edmund Kirby Smith, commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, granted it.³⁴

Holmes, who would personally lead the attack, called for two Confederate columns to converge on Helena on June 21. He ordered Gen. Sterling Price’s 3,095-man infantry division and Gen. John S. Marmaduke’s 1,750-man cavalry division to move south from Jacksonport, Arkansas, while Gen. James F. Fagan’s 1,339 infantrymen marched east from Little Rock (**Figure 5**). Holmes told

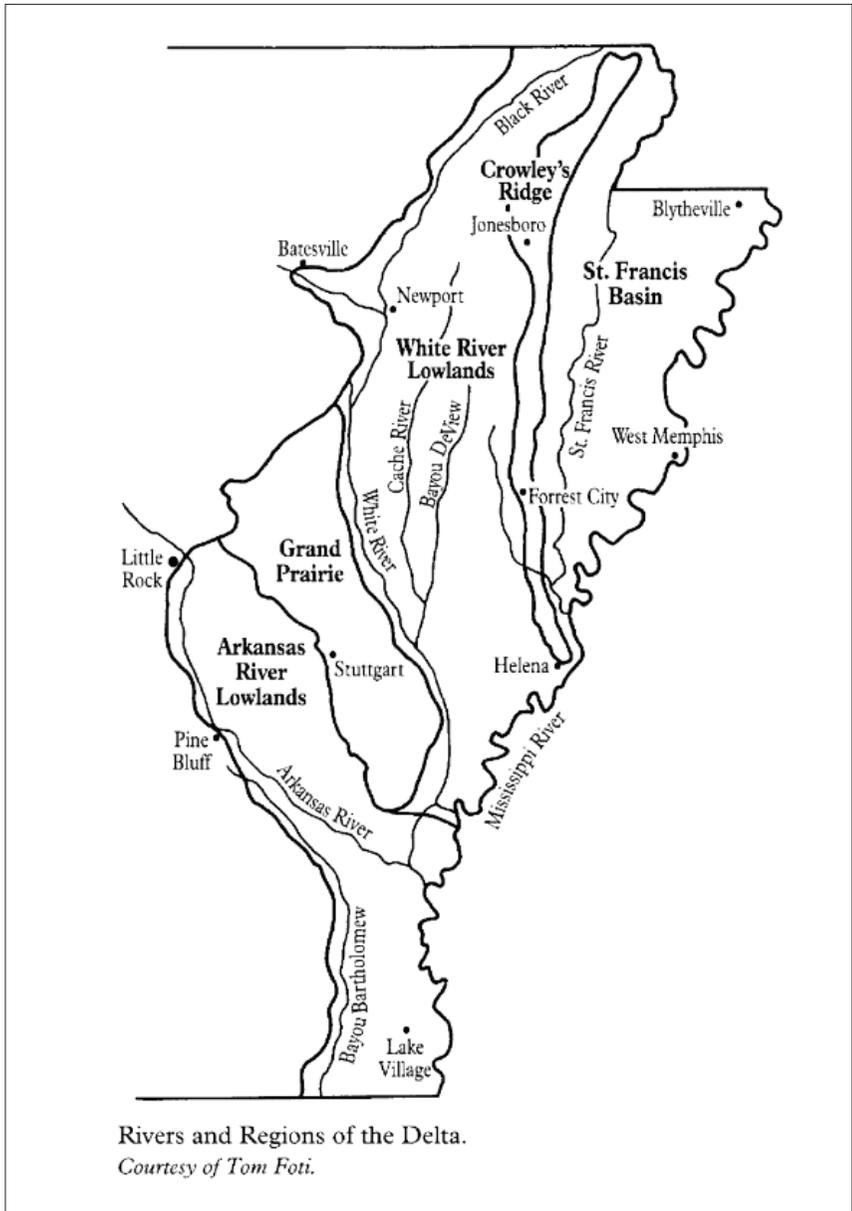


Figure 6: Rivers and Regions of the Arkansas Delta. Reproduced from Jeannie Whayne and Willard B. Gatewood, eds., *The Arkansas Delta: Land of Paradox* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), 52. Copyright by the University of Arkansas Press, 1993.

these units to rendezvous with Gen. Lucius “Marsh” Walker’s 1,462-man cavalry division, which had already been operating near Helena.³⁵

What happened next became a small-scale version of Burnside’s notorious “Mud March” in Virginia earlier that year. On June 22, Price and Marmaduke began their move south, and two days later, heavy rains transformed the roads on their route to mud and the creeks in their path to torrents. The rain fell incessantly for four days, and three different streams—now all overflowing their banks—mired the Confederate advance. One officer summed up their predicament on the banks of the first river: “It is utterly impossible to get my train across....The mud is so deep...that mules cannot stand up.”³⁶ Price dispatched engineers ahead to construct bridges across the other two streams, but floods swept away the bridges before the infantry could cross. Predictably, Fagan’s brigade faced similar difficulties on its journey eastward. One of his soldiers later wrote:

It is useless to tell...anything of the hardships of our marches through the...swamps, no one but an actual participant, can picture anything like the reality. It was mud & water all the time from “knee” deep up to the arm pits. It would not be surprising if the number of sick from exposure on this trip will equal that of the killed and wounded in the fight.³⁷

Unbeknownst to them, the exasperated Confederates were slogging their way through an area modern geographers call the Grand Prairie, a subregion of the Mississippi Alluvial Plain that is covered with a fertile topsoil (**Figure 6**). Beneath that topsoil, however, lay a deep layer of dense, silty clay that drains poorly. This makes the Grand Prairie ideal for rice cultivation, but not for marching, especially after heavy rains.³⁸ Then, after traversing the Grand Prairie, the soldiers had to march through the White River Lowlands (**Figure 6**). Even today, much of the Lowlands remains undeveloped because it is so prone to flooding. The White, Black, Cache, and L’Anguille rivers, as well as Bayou DeView, regularly inundate this region, which is also susceptible to backwater flooding from the Mississippi. The Lowlands’ chief waterway, the White River, originates in the Ozark Plateau of Northwest Arkansas, where the water runs clear. Clearer streams scour deeper channels, and, thus, by the time the White reaches the Delta, it runs lower than most of the region’s other rivers, including the Mississippi. Consequently, Mississippi floods have been known to extend as far as forty miles up the White, saturating

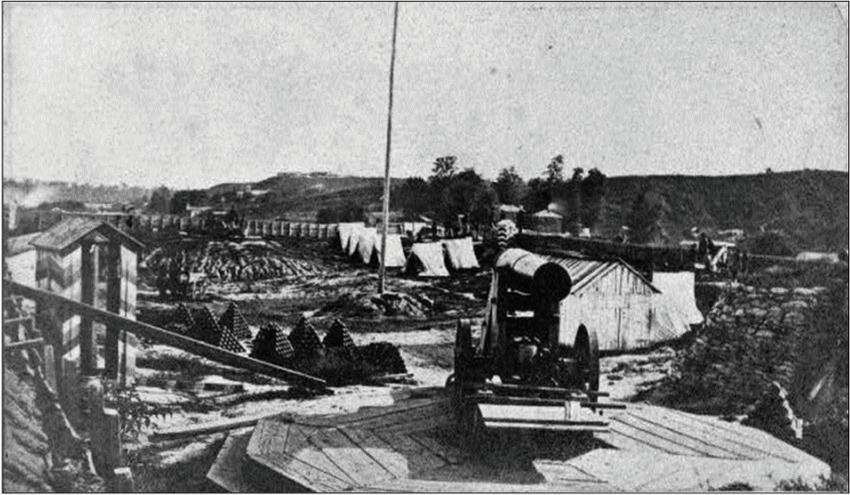


Figure 7: Fort Curtis, Helena, Arkansas, 1863. Courtesy of The Arkansas History Commission.

its lowlands and transforming them into a sizeable swamp.³⁹ When the rebels marched through the lowlands in the summer of 1863, they were precisely that. As one cavalryman recalled, “The entire country between Jacksonport and the Mississippi river became one vast lagoon streaked innumerable by now swimming streams and bottomless bayous.”⁴⁰

On July 1, a frustrated Holmes, who accompanied Fagan’s column, informed Price:

I deeply regret the difficulties that cause the delay in your march. I have used every precaution to prevent a knowledge of our approach reaching the enemy, and have what I believe to be certain information that I had succeeded up to the night before last. I fear these terrible delays will thwart all my efforts.

As it turned out, Holmes’s fears were justified—nature had blown the Confederates’ cover.⁴¹

Meanwhile, Gen. Benjamin Prentiss (of Shiloh’s “Hornet’s Nest” fame) commanded the 4,100-man federal garrison at Helena, and he set out to use the surrounding landscape to his defensive advantage. Previous Yankee garrisons had already established suitable defenses prior to Prentiss’s arrival, but the general supervised their improvement. An earthen redoubt called Fort Curtis, which

was equipped with several large siege guns, guarded the western edge of town (**Figure 7**).⁴² Several hundred yards to the west of Fort Curtis stood four prominent hills—the foothills of Crowley’s Ridge—which, according to one soldier, were “divided by numerous deep and narrow gorges, where in many places a man could only walk with difficulty.”⁴³ These gorges, the product of years of erosion of the ridge’s loess cap, shielded the town’s western approaches.⁴⁴ Prentiss, however, had no intentions of relying solely on Helena’s natural defenses. Under his supervision, Union troops and former slaves leveraged the terrain to their advantage by building batteries on the peaks of the hills, each armed with two guns and protected by earthen walls, sandbags, and a series of connecting rifle pits. The Federals labeled the batteries, from north to south, A, B, C, and D (**Figure 8**). Cavalry, rifle pits, and additional batteries protected the flanks of this western line of defense.⁴⁵

To further fortify the garrison, the defensive-minded Yankees felled trees in the ravines and roads leading into town. The trees, which included oak, hickory, American beech, sugar maple, yellow poplar, and other hardwoods that grew atop Crowley’s Ridge, “made a most excellent abatis.”⁴⁶ Helena’s troops loathed the hard work required to secure their post, but they continuously bragged about its natural and constructed defenses. One soldier insisted:

This is a very well fortified place and...the country in the rear of town is a continuation of hills which are the most natural fortifications I have ever seen. On many of them, we have Batteries planted and rifle pits dug so it seems as though every avenue into the town is so commanded as to make it impossible for a rebel army to get in here.⁴⁷

Another boasted:

[F]ifty thousand men could not take this town by attacking it. in the rear, the batteries command the whole country around. the country is very rough and hilly in the rear of the town, and no artillery can be brought against it.⁴⁸

The Federals also utilized their natural riverside location to bolster the defenses on the east side of town. When Adm. David Dixon Porter heard rumors in mid-June that the Confederates were advancing on Helena, he sent three gunboats there. Only one, the USS *Tyler*, would be present during the July 4 battle, though by most counts, it played an important part in the engagement.⁴⁹

Rumors of an impending Confederate attack circulated in Helena throughout the spring of 1863.⁵⁰ Prentiss, however, was not convinced that an attack was imminent until June 25—just as swollen creeks and muddy roads impeded the Confederate approach. Accordingly, for a week before the battle, he issued orders that the “entire garrison should be up and under arms at 2.30 o’clock each morning.” On July 1, Prentiss learned that Confederate forces had congregated about fifteen miles from Helena. To his soldiers’ dismay, he cancelled the garrison’s scheduled Fourth of July celebration as a precautionary measure.⁵¹

Two days later, the Confederates finally converged on the outskirts of town. After trudging through mud and fording flooded streams, the tired and dispirited rebels had at last reached their objective. The natural environment, though, had prevented them from doing so according to schedule. One rebel soldier later recognized the costs of the delays:

There had been heavy rains which made the roads impassable and corduroy roads had to be constructed the entire way; this with the building of bridges across all swollen streams delayed the movement so much that the enemy learned of our coming and had ample time to prepare for our reception.⁵²

Gen. Holmes concurred. “Price was unavoidably four days behind time in consequence of high water and bad roads,” he lamented, “which gave the enemy ample time to prepare for me.” Nevertheless, the Confederate generals moved forward with their plans. On July 3, Holmes briefed his subordinates on Helena’s defenses, which were stouter than he had originally believed them to be. “[T]he place was very much more difficult of access,” he declared, “and the fortifications very much stronger, than I had supposed before undertaking the expedition, the features of the country being peculiarly adapted to defense, and all that the art of engineering could do having been brought to bear to strengthen it.”⁵³

Faulty intelligence, poor reconnaissance, and the Federals’ strategic use of the environment had placed the rebels in a precarious position before the first shots were fired. Still, Holmes stayed committed to the attack. He called for a three-pronged assault against heavily fortified, entrenched federal positions on high ground. Marmaduke’s cavalry would attack battery A on the north end of town, Price’s division would capture battery C in the center, and Fagan would assault battery D in the south (**Figure 8**).

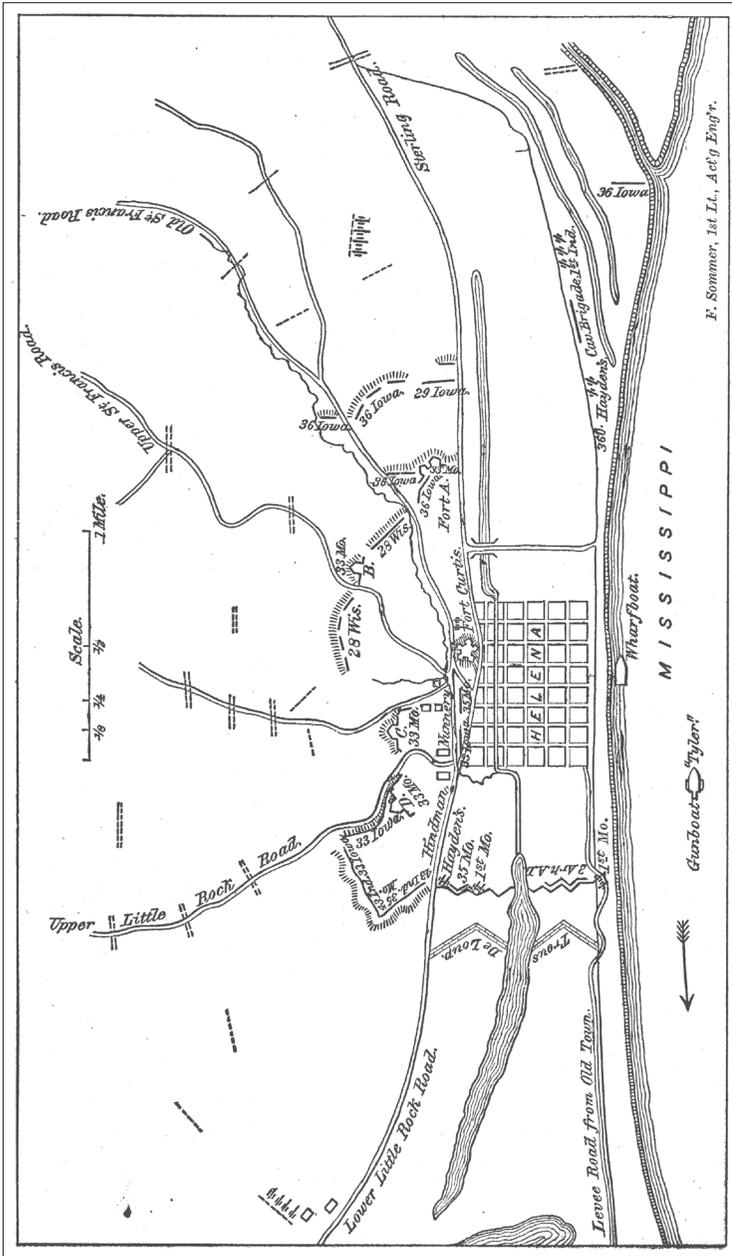


Figure 8: Attack on Helena, Arkansas. Reproduced from U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ser. 1, vol. 22, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1888), 394. Cornell University/Hathi Trust Digital Library, <<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924077699704>>.

Walker's cavalry, which had been picketing Helena's approaches for several weeks, would protect Marmaduke's left flank and, after battery A was captured, "enter the town and act against the enemy as circumstances may justify."⁵⁴

As the Confederates moved into position the night before the battle, they unexpectedly found their paths blocked by felled timber. Below battery D, Fagan observed that the road was "completely filled with felled timber, the largest forest growth intermingling and overlapping its whole length, while on either side precipitous and impassable ravines were found running up even to the very intrenchments of the enemy." Fagan's predicament was not unique. Federal abatis mired the advance of all three rebel columns and forced them to abandon their artillery and ammunition trains before the battle had even commenced. By the time they reached their attack positions, most of the Confederates were exhausted from the long night's march through deep ravines and thick timber. They also lacked artillery support.⁵⁵

In order to achieve coordination, Holmes ordered the Confederate attack to begin on the morning of July 4 at "daylight," a vague time designation that had disastrous consequences. Price misinterpreted Holmes's order to mean "sunrise," so upon reaching the base of the hill below battery C, he halted his men until then. While Price's men dallied, Fagan and Marmaduke launched their assaults at first light, thus ending any possibility of a synchronized attack. The Confederates' poor coordination allowed the Federals manning the four batteries and the gunboat *Tyler* to concentrate their fire on whichever point the Confederates threatened, a luxury that had devastating effects on the rebel assailants.⁵⁶

As daylight arrived, the Confederates emerged from the brush and attacked the entrenched bluecoats. "[A]mid the leaden rain and iron hail," they climbed up the hills, which were "so steep the men had to pull themselves up by the bushes." One rebel soldier recalled that "the hills and hollows running parallel to [the federal] works...compelled us to charge over the hills exposed to a deliberate and murderous fire. Then to make the matter worse the timber had been felled in such a manner as to make it next to impossible to pass over this ground at all."⁵⁷

After several hours of intense combat, neither Fagan's infantry nor Marmaduke's cavalry had reached their objectives, but remarkably,

Price's troops managed to seize battery C. A few minutes later, however, the scene at battery C became chaotic. In the words of Holmes, who entered the captured battery, "Everything was in confusion, regiments and brigades mixed up indiscriminately" as the rebels struggled to secure their position, advance against the Federals, and shield themselves from the Union bombardment. Adding to the chaos, Holmes then ordered one of Price's battalion commanders to attack Fort Curtis. The general's order, which violated the chain of command, had disastrous consequences. The other Confederate officers in the vicinity saw the advance on Fort Curtis and, believing that a general attack had been ordered, instructed their men to charge the fort. The dashing rebels, who immediately became the target of Fort Curtis, the batteries, the USS *Tyler's* guns, and a hail of enfilading rifle fire, were either captured or massacred. Shortly thereafter, Holmes ordered a general retreat.⁵⁸

The Helena campaign was a disaster for the Confederates, due in no small part to their commander's blunders. And yet, Holmes should not shoulder all of the blame. The unpredictable forces of nature, as well the Federals' strategic use of the natural environment, played a decisive role in the campaign's outcome. Those involved in the battle understood this fact. Reflecting on the battle the following month, one Union soldier wrote:

[I]t was not alone the bravery of our men that saved Helena. It was the defences & the manner in which the troops were disposed in readiness for any emergency & the untiring vigilance which prevented the enemy from gaining a foothold.⁵⁹

Tellingly, a defeated Confederate offered similar analysis:

The facts can be summed up in very few words. We were badly whipped [*sic*]—not from any want of bravery on the part of men or officers, but the natural position together with the "fortifications" around the place would have defied almost twice our numbers.⁶⁰

In the summer of 1863, nature molded the actions and intentions of both armies and played a fundamental part in a campaign that ensured federal control of the Mississippi River, preserved the Union foothold in eastern Arkansas, and allowed the Federals to capture Little Rock only two months later. Eastern Arkansas's built *and* natural environments proved pivotal in making all of this possible.

Class Activity

By examining three primary sources produced by soldiers who fought in the Helena campaign, students can discover the natural environment's central role in an important Civil War engagement. In the process, they also can learn how to do environmental history. **Appendix A** provides a list of discussion questions that students should ponder before viewing the sources. The questions assess for understanding of the sources reproduced in **Appendix B** (questions 1-4), **Appendix C** (questions 5-6), and **Appendix D** (question 7). They progress from lower-level comprehension to higher-order analysis and evaluation, so they should be answered in the order in which they are listed.

Appendix B contains excerpts from the letters of Charles Musser, a Union soldier who served in the 29th Iowa Infantry Regiment at Helena in the winter and spring of 1863, and then participated in the July 4 engagement. Musser dutifully describes his perceptions of and interactions with eastern Arkansas's natural environment, as well as the federal troops' efforts to leverage that environment as a crucial ally before the battle. The post-battle reminiscence of William Bull is reprinted in **Appendix C**. Bull, a Confederate artilleryman in the 3rd Field Battery Missouri Artillery, details the natural obstacles that mired the rebel assault on Helena. Musser's letters and Bull's diary have been edited for length and content in order to highlight nature's part in the Helena campaign, but the soldiers' misspellings and grammatical errors have been preserved so that students can read their original words. Finally, **Appendix D** is a map of the Helena battlefield sketched by William Vermilion, another Union soldier who fought at Helena. Because Vermilion's map highlights the town's topographical features and natural defenses, students should ascertain that the troops themselves recognized nature's key role in the campaign. Students should refer to the maps in **Figure 5**, **Figure 6**, and **Figure 8** as they examine the sources in **Appendix B**, **Appendix C**, and **Appendix D**. Additionally, questions 8-9 should be answered using all three sources.

After analyzing the three primary sources, students should read Linda Nash's seminal "The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency?" (question 10). This three-page article, which appeared in a 2005 issue of *Environmental History*, can be accessed via

JSTOR, ProQuest, or a similar online database.⁶¹ Wading into the heated debate over whether historians should assign “agency” to nature, Nash urges caution since, unlike humans, nature does not act with intention. A honeybee, for instance, can build a hive, but it cannot envision how its hive will look before completion. The bee simply builds. A human architect, on the other hand, can imagine the particulars of her house before constructing it. Nevertheless, Nash stresses that nature is not simply an object to be acted upon. Similarly, human ideas and actions do not occur in a vacuum. Rather, human agency emerges out of and exists in specific environments. Nash contends that when we look at history’s human and environmental components, “what we often uncover is not merely the way that nature influences and constrains human *actions*, but also the way that particular environments shape human *intentions*.” In the end, she suggests, we should strive to write history that presents humans not as the “motor of history but as partners in a conversation with a larger world, both animate and inanimate, about the possibilities of existence.”⁶² Nash’s article should help students define environmental history and prompt them to think more broadly about what it contributes to our study of the past.

The final two questions (11-12) should be answered using the primary sources in **Appendix B**, **Appendix C**, and **Appendix D** and Nash’s article. They are open-ended questions written to inspire a spirited class debate about the parameters, merits, and potential pitfalls of environmental history.

Conclusion

The American Civil War and, more specifically, the 1863 Helena campaign, cannot be understood without some consideration of the ways in which soldiers manipulated, and were shaped by, their natural environment. Historians have proven that nature played an important, sometimes paramount, part in the conflict, and the Helena campaign offers a vivid illustration of that fact. And yet, the natural environment alone did not determine the outcome of the Helena campaign. Other variables, including the decision-making of such individuals as Theophilus Holmes, Benjamin Prentiss, Charles Musser, and William Bull, were also consequential.⁶³ Nature was but one actor in the Helena story, albeit a crucial one.

Still, an environmental interpretation of the Helena campaign is instructive because, as historian Paul Sutter writes, it demonstrates that “battlefield tactics and outcomes are not merely the products of military minds and soldierly actions but also of the dynamics of weather, terrain, soil type, disease, and other nonhuman entities and forces.”⁶⁴ This, ultimately, is environmental history’s most important contribution to our understanding of the Civil War and the past generally. In the words of Brian Drake, environmental history “might not have the potential to transform Civil War studies in the way that social histories have,” but it “*can* tell us many things we didn’t know before and can also allow us to reassess some things we *thought* we knew.”⁶⁵ This makes it worthy of your attention, and your students’ attention.

Notes

A portion of this essay was reprinted with the permission of the *Essential Civil War Curriculum*, Virginia Center for Civil War Studies, Virginia Tech University, <<http://www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com>>. The author wishes to thank Daniel E. Sutherland, Matthew M. Stith, and Alan Thompson for reading drafts of this article and providing invaluable advice. He also expresses gratitude to Judkin Browning for his helpful comments and suggestions at the 2016 Society of Civil War Historians conference.

1. Several of Burnside’s subordinates, including William B. Franklin, William F. “Baldy” Smith, Joseph Hooker, John Newton, and John Cochrane, opposed their commander’s proposed offensive (and, in the case of Newton and Cochrane, deliberately sought to sabotage it). Yet other Union officers, including George G. Meade, Montgomery Meigs, and John F. Reynolds, supported the plan. A. Wilson Greene, “Morale, Maneuver, and Mud: The Army of the Potomac, December 16, 1862 – January 26, 1863,” in *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Decision on the Rappahannock*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 171-227; Daniel E. Sutherland, *Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville: The Dare Mark Campaign* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 83-92.

2. Alfred Davenport, *Camp and Field Life of the Fifth New York Volunteer Infantry (Duryee Zouaves)* (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1879), 365; Charles S. Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journals of Colonel Charles S. Wainwright, 1861-1865*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 158.

3. Harold A. Winters, "The Battle That Was Never Fought: Weather and the Union Mud March of January 1863," *Southeastern Geographer* 31, no. 1 (May 1991): 31-38; Sutherland, *Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville*, 90.

4. Robert Goldthwaite Carter, *Four Brothers in Blue: A Story of the Great Civil War from Bull Run to Appomattox* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 227.

5. Greene, "Morale, Maneuver, and Mud," 202.

6. United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 vols. in 128 parts (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Ser. 1, vol. 21, p. 752 (hereafter cited as *OR* with all references to Series 1 unless otherwise noted); Winters, "The Battle That Was Never Fought," 31.

7. A. Wilson Greene cleverly described Burnside's predicament as being "hampered by faithless subordinates, an insipid superior, and meteorological misfortune." Greene, "Morale, Maneuver, and Mud," 217.

8. The best general analysis of Burnside's "Mud March" is Greene, "Morale, Maneuver, and Mud." The best environmental interpretation is Winters, "The Battle That Was Never Fought." Winters later expanded his analysis in Harold A. Winters et al., *Battling the Elements: Weather and Terrain in the Conduct of War* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). Other important works that consider the Mud March include Sutherland, *Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville*, 78-92; George C. Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 408-426; and William Marvel, *Burnside* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 200-217.

9. Brian Allen Drake, "New Fields of Battle: Nature, Environmental History, and the Civil War," in *The Blue, the Gray, and the Green: Toward an Environmental History of the Civil War*, ed. Brian Allen Drake (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 3. For a list of prominent works of environmental Civil War history, see note 19.

10. *Ibid.*, 2. Scholars are divided on the definition of "nature," especially humans' place within it. Some argue that humans are a part of nature and thus cannot be separated from it, while others assert that because humans have altered the natural environment so significantly throughout history, there is little that is "natural" in nature anyway, so it is futile to try to remove humans from the equation. While these arguments have merit, for the sake of clarity, my definition of "nature" does not include humans. Rather, like Lisa M. Brady, I define nature as "the nonhuman physical environment in its constituent parts or as a larger whole." Moreover, I use "natural environment" and "environment" as synonyms for "nature." Lisa M. Brady, *War Upon the Land: Military Strategy and the Transformation of Southern Landscapes During the American Civil War* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 12-13.

11. Scholars are also divided on the question of whether nature has "agency." I am persuaded by Linda Nash, who contends we should be careful about assigning "agency" to nature because, unlike humans, nature does not act with intention. Linda Nash, "The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency?" *Environmental History* 10, no. 1 (January 2005): 67-69.

12. Drake, “New Fields of Battle,” 3.

13. For the “history as onion” analogy, I am indebted to Edward L. Ayers, who shared the idea at the 2006 Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History at the University of Virginia, entitled “American Civil War: Origins and Consequences, Battlefields and Homefront.” Ayers may have been inspired by the 2001 DreamWorks animated film *Shrek*, in which the main character muses that “ogres are like onions” because they “both have layers.”

14. Drake, “New Fields of Battle,” 2.

15. Incidentally, environmental historians recently have begun highlighting the Civil War in the West. See, for example, Megan Kate Nelson, “Indians Make the Best Guerrillas: Native Americans and the War for the Desert Southwest, 1861-1862,” in *The Civil War Guerrilla: Unfolding the Black Flag in History, Memory, and Myth*, ed. Joseph M. Beilein, Jr. and Matthew C. Hulbert (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 99-122. See also Nelson’s forthcoming *Path of the Dead Man: How the West was Won—and Lost—during the American Civil War*.

16. Jack Temple Kirby, “The American Civil War: An Environmental View,” online essay for the National Humanities Center, July 2001, <<https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nattrans/ntuseland/essays/amcwar.htm>>.

17. Kenneth W. Noe, “Fateful Lightning: The Significance of Weather and Climate to Civil War History,” in *The Blue, the Gray, and the Green: Toward an Environmental History of the Civil War*, ed. Brian Allen Drake (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 16.

18. For a fascinating examination of Civil War armies’ mass consumption of trees (and its environmental impact), see Megan Kate Nelson, *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 103-159.

19. Environmental Civil War history is a rapidly growing field. The best succinct survey of the field is Drake, “New Fields of Battle,” 1-15. For a longer historiographical review, see Lisa Brady, “From Battlefield to Fertile Ground: The Development of Civil War Environmental History,” *Civil War History* 58, no. 3 (September 2012): 305-321. Important works that have appeared since the publication of Brady’s historiographical essay include Kathryn Shively Meier, *Nature’s Civil War: Common Soldiers and the Environment in 1862 Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Brian Allen Drake, ed., *The Blue, the Gray, and the Green: Toward an Environmental History of the Civil War* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015); Matthew M. Stith, *Extreme Civil War: Guerrilla Warfare, Environment, and Race on the Trans-Mississippi Frontier* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2016); and Adam H. Petty, “Wilderness, Weather, and Waging War in the Mine Run Campaign,” *Civil War History* 63, no. 1 (March 2017): 7-35. See also Judkin Browning and Timothy Silver’s forthcoming *The Civil War: An Environmental History*, as well as Kenneth W. Noe’s forthcoming book on weather and the Civil War.

20. Paul S. Sutter, “Waving the Muddy Shirt,” in *The Blue, the Gray, and the Green: Toward an Environmental History of the Civil War*, ed. Brian Allen Drake (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 227. In using this expression—a

clever play on the Republicans' proclivity for "waving the bloody shirt" in post-Civil War politics—Sutter is actually critiquing environmental historians who doggedly insist that scholars include the natural environment in their histories simply because "nature matters." Sutter challenges environmental historians to move beyond this assertion to show that "environmental history is not merely a subdiscipline that seeks to give 'agency to nature,' but one that by pointing out how entangled human actions have been with non-human entities and forces, actually offers a fundamental challenge to the still dominant notions of *human* agency."

21. W. A. Jenkins, "A Leaf From Army Life" [Read December 8, 1887], in *Military Essays and Recollections, Papers Read Before the Commandery of the State of Illinois, Vol. III, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, Vol. 12 (1899; Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1992), 444. Jenkins served as a lieutenant colonel in the 5th Kansas Cavalry during the battle of Helena.

22. In 1860, Helena's population included 1,024 whites and 527 blacks, making it slightly less than half the size of Little Rock, Arkansas's state capital. United States Bureau of the Census, *The Statistics of the Population of the United States From the Original Returns of the Ninth Census, (June 1, 1870)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872), 87.

23. There are no book-length studies of the Helena campaign. Scholarly works that consider it in some detail include Edwin C. Bearss, "The Battle of Helena, July 4, 1863," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 20 (Autumn 1961): 256-297; Albert Castel, *General Sterling Price and the Civil War in the West* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), chapter 8; Warren E. Grabau, *Ninety-Eight Days: A Geographer's View of the Vicksburg Campaign* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), chapter 40; Gregory J. W. Urwin, "A Very Disastrous Defeat: The Battle of Helena, Arkansas," *North & South* 6 (December 2002): 26-39; G. David Schieffler, "Too Little, Too Late to Save Vicksburg: The Battle of Helena, Arkansas, July 4, 1863" (M.A. thesis, University of Arkansas, 2005); Mark K. Christ, *Civil War Arkansas, 1863: The Battle for a State* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), chapter 4; Mark Christ, "The Battle of Helena," *Blue & Gray* 32, no. 4 (2016): 6-23, 42-47; Thomas W. Cutrer, *Theater of a Separate War: The Civil War West of the Mississippi River, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), chapter 12; and G. David Schieffler, "Civil War in the Delta: Environment, Race, and the 1863 Helena Campaign" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, 2017).

24. For a list of recent works of environmental Civil War history, see note 19.

25. On June 9, 1863, Gen. Sterling Price wrote Gen. Theophilus Holmes that "were a movement conducted with celerity and secrecy... I entertain no doubt of your being able to crush the foe" at Helena. *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 2, p. 863.

26. Grabau, *Ninety-Eight Days*, 477; Hubert B. Stroud, s.v. "Crowley's Ridge," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, <<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=12>>; Thomas Foti, "The River's Gifts and Curses," in *The Arkansas Delta: Land of Paradox*, ed. Jeannie Whayne and Willard B. Gatewood (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), 32.

27. Hubert B. Stroud, s.v. "Crowley's Ridge." See also Hubert B. Stroud and Gerald T. Hanson, *Arkansas Geography: The Physical Landscape and the Historical-Cultural Setting* (Little Rock, AR.: Rose Publishing Company, 1981).

28. Jodi Morris, "On High Ground: A Natural History of Crowley's Ridge," *Craighead County Historical Quarterly* 44 (October 2006): 28.

29. M. Jeff Thompson, *The Civil War Reminiscences of General M. Jeff Thompson*, ed. Donald J. Stanton, Goodwin F. Berquist, and Paul C. Bowers (Dayton, OH: Morningside, 1988), 187; Galway, "The Mississippi Expedition; Great Preparations Made for 'Opening the River'—Incidents of a Journey from La Grange to Newbern, &c.," *The New York Times*, 4 December 1862.

30. William L. Shea and Terrence J. Winschel, *Vicksburg is the Key: The Struggle for the Mississippi River* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 28; Edwin C. Bearss, *Decision in Mississippi: Mississippi's Important Role in the War Between the States* (Jackson, MI: Mississippi Commission on the War Between the States, 1962), 146. On April 17, 1861, almost three weeks before Arkansas officially seceded from the Union, the Confederate War Department asked Arkansas Governor Henry Rector for permission to construct a defensive battery at Helena to obstruct a possible Union invasion of the South via the Mississippi. *OR*, vol. 1, pp. 685-686, 689.

31. On the Army of the Southwest's remarkable march to Helena, see William L. Shea and Earl J. Hess, *Pea Ridge: Civil War Campaign in the West* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 284-306; William L. Shea, "A Semi-Savage State: The Image of Arkansas in the Civil War," in *Civil War Arkansas: Beyond Battles and Leaders*, ed. Anne J. Bailey and Daniel E. Sutherland (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 85-100; and Robert G. Schultz, *The March to the River: From the Battle of Pea Ridge to Helena, Spring 1862* (Iowa City, IA: Camp Pope Publishing, 2014).

32. A. F. Sperry, *History of the 33d Iowa Infantry Volunteer Regiment, 1863-6*, ed. Gregory J. W. Urwin and Kathy Kunzinger Urwin (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 14.

33. *OR*, vol. 41, pt. 2, p. 714; "Down the Mississippi; A Group of Rebel Prisoners The Shores of the Great River Passing Fort Pillow Memphis Arrival at Helena Preparations for the Vicksburgh Wounded, &c. Literary," *The New York Times*, 23 January 1863. Helena, like most places in the Mississippi Valley during the Civil War, was a disease-ridden place. Rhonda M. Kohl has shown that the soldiers stationed in Helena between July 1862 and January 1863 were much more likely to die of typhoid, intestinal disease, and malaria than were their Union counterparts elsewhere. However, because Kohl's study ends in January 1863, she does not consider the role of disease in the summer 1863 Helena campaign. My research suggests that because sickness plagued both the Union and Confederate armies during the campaign, it disadvantaged neither side more than the other and thus did not decisively influence its outcome. See Rhonda M. Kohl, "'This Godforsaken Town': Death and Disease at Helena, Arkansas, 1862-63," *Civil War History* 50, no. 2 (June 2004): 109-144.

34. Schieffler, "Too Little, Too Late to Save Vicksburg," 7-42; *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 2, pp. 867-868, vol. 22, pt. 1, p. 407.

35. *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 1, p. 409, vol. 22, pt. 2, p. 877; Urwin, "A Very Disastrous Defeat," 29.

36. *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 2, p. 886. On the disastrous Confederate march toward Helena, see *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 1, p. 409, vol. 22, pt. 2, pp. 886-899; Letter from William H. H. and J. S. Shibley to Parents, 28 June 1863, in *The Civil War Letters of the Shibley Brothers, William H. H. and John S., to Their Dear Parents in Van Buren, Arkansas*, ed. Ruie Ann Smith Park (Fayetteville, AR: Washington County Historical Society, 1963), Letter No. 40; and William M. McPheeters, *I Acted from Principle: The Civil War Diary of Dr. William M. McPheeters, Confederate Surgeon in the Trans-Mississippi*, ed. Cynthia DeHaven Pitcock and Bill J. Gurley (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 35-37.

37. Letter from David W. Moore to Mother, 28 July 1863, as quoted in in Mark K. Christ, "'We Were Badly Whipped': A Confederate Account of the Battle of Helena, July 4, 1863," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 69 (Spring 2010): 49-50.

38. On the characteristics of the Grand Prairie and its soil, see Stroud and Hanson, *Arkansas Geography*, 19; Guy Lancaster, s.v. "Grand Prairie," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, <<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2996>>; United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, "'Stuttgart' the Arkansas State Soil," <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/ar/programs/?cid=nrcs142p2_035042>; and Paul B. Francis, s.v. "Soils," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, <<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=5141>>. In 1997, the Arkansas General Assembly designated the Grand Prairie's soil, which scientists label the Stuttgart soil series, the official state soil of Arkansas. David Ware, s.v. "Official State Soil," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, <<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=3191>>.

39. Foti, "The River's Gifts and Curses," 43-44.

40. John N. Edwards, *Shelby and His Men: Or, The War in the West* (Cincinnati, OH: Miami Printing and Publishing Company, 1867), 164.

41. *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 2, p. 899.

42. Fort Curtis was not, as the name implies, a military administration center. Rather, it was a mostly subsurface structure containing two powder magazines and a well. On the surface, it was equipped with several large siege guns, the exact locations and specifics of which have been disputed. Archaeological research conducted in the late 1960s revealed that the fort was equipped to hold four 24-pound Barbette guns, one in each corner, with three additional guns mounted somewhere along the fort's outer walls. Joshua Underhill, who visited the fort in November 1863, said it was "a pretty substantial fortification" occupying "one city square" and armed with "large guns," the largest being a 42-pounder. Burney McClurkan, "Archeological Investigation at Fort Curtis, Helena, Arkansas," *Phillips County Historical Quarterly* 6 (June 1968): 3-7; Christopher Morss, ed., *A Civil War Odyssey: The Personal Diary of Joshua Whittington Underhill, Surgeon, 46th Regiment, Indiana Volunteer Infantry, 23 October 1862-21 July 1863* (Lincoln Center, MA: Heritage House Publishers, 2000), 16.

43. Sperry, *History of the 33d Iowa Infantry Volunteer Regiment*, 37.
44. Hubert Stroud, s.v. "Crowley's Ridge."
45. On Helena's natural defenses and the federal efforts to leverage them to their advantage, see Urwin, "A Very Disastrous Defeat," 27; Lurton Dunham Ingersoll, *Iowa and the Rebellion: A History of the Troops Furnished by the State of Iowa to the Volunteer Armies of the Union, Which Conquered the Great Southern Rebellion of 1861-5* (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott, 1866), 616; and *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 1, pp. 387-388.
46. William Bull, a Confederate soldier who participated in the July 4 attack on Helena, wrote that a series of "heavily wooded" hills stood between Gen. Sterling Price's column and the hill on which Battery C was located. Although these hills were not as steep as those on which the federal batteries were located, they "had been covered with heavy timber" whose "branching limbs [were] allowed to lie where they fell. This made a most excellent abatis." "Part I: Reminiscence and Diary of William Jeffery Bull," in *Missouri Brothers in Gray: The Reminiscences and Letters of William J. Bull and John P. Bull*, ed. Michael E. Banasik (Iowa City, IA: Camp Pope Bookshop, 1998), 57. On the hardwood trees of Crowley's Ridge, see Stroud and Hanson, *Arkansas Geography*, 19, 29; and Stroud, s.v. "Crowley's Ridge."
47. Letter from William F. Vermilion to My Darling [Mary Vermilion], 4 June 1863, in *Love Amid the Turmoil: The Civil War Letters of William and Mary Vermilion*, ed. Donald C. Elder III (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 123.
48. Letter from Charles O. Musser to My Dear Parents, 8 May 1863, in *Soldier Boy: The Civil War Letters of Charles O. Musser, 29th Iowa*, ed. Barry Popchock (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1995), 51.
49. Letter from David D. Porter to U. S. Grant, 18 June 1863, in *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 8, ed. John Y. Simon (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), 390; United States War Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. and index (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1894-1922), Ser. 1, vol. 25, p. 227 (hereafter cited as *ORN* with all references to Series 1 unless otherwise noted). The Tyler's executive officer later claimed to have fired 413 rounds during the battle, killing or wounding about six hundred men. Prentiss was so impressed by the Tyler's contribution that he recommended its commander, James M. Pritchett, for a promotion following the battle. Most of the previous scholarship on the Helena campaign has highlighted the Tyler's important, if not decisive, role in the battle. However, Steven W. Jones argues that the Tyler's shells were more psychologically overwhelming to the rebels than they were physically devastating. *ORN*, vol. 25, p. 229; *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 1, pp. 391-392; Steven W. Jones, ed., "The Logs of the U.S.S. Tyler," *Phillips County Historical Quarterly* 15 (March 1977): 23-38.
50. See, for example, *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 2, p. 317; Letter from Benjamin M. Prentiss to U. S. Grant, 25 April 1863, in *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 8, ed. John Y. Simon (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), 106; *OR*, vol. 24, pt. 3, p. 445, vol. 22, pt. 1, pp. 387-388, vol. 22, pt. 2, p. 352;

and John S. Morgan, "Diary of John S. Morgan, Company G, Thirty-Third Iowa Infantry," *Annals of Iowa* 13 (January 1923): 492.

51. *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 1, pp. 387-388.

52. "Part I: Reminiscence and Diary of William Jeffery Bull," in *Missouri Brothers in Gray*, 54.

53. Letter from Theophilus H. Holmes to Jefferson Davis, 14 July 1863, in the Correspondence of General T. H. Holmes, 1861-1864, Records of the War Department, Collection of Confederate Records, Record Group 109, National Archives and Records Administration; *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 1, p. 409.

54. *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 1, pp. 409-410.

55. *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 1, p. 424; Schieffler, "Too Little, Too Late to Save Vicksburg," 56-64.

56. *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 1, pp. 410, 413.

57. *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 1, pp. 424, 431; Letter from William H. H. and J. S. Shibley to Parents, 23 July 1863.

58. It is important to note that it was Gen. Mosby Monroe Parsons (one of Sterling Price's brigade commanders), not Holmes, who described the incident at battery C in his battle report. However, Holmes did admit that most of his loss in prisoners "resulted from not restraining the men after the capture of Graveyard Hill from advancing into the town, where they were taken mainly without resistance." *OR*, vol. 22, pt. 1, pp. 421-422, 410-411.

59. Letter from John A. Savage, Jr. to Hon. T. O. Howe, 20 August 1863, Frederick C. Salomon Papers, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Research Center, Madison, Wisconsin.

60. Letter from David W. Moore to Mother, 28 July 1863.

61. Linda Nash, "The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency?" 67-69.

62. *Ibid.*, 68, 69.

63. I am persuaded by military historian Harold Winters' contention that "one makes a mistake by becoming deterministic regarding geography and the outcome of battles and wars. But when considered along with all the other variables and human decisions involved, there are occasions when physical or cultural environmental factors are paramount in the success or failure of soldiers, armies, and their commanders." Winters, "The Battle That Was Never Fought," 37.

64. Sutter, "Waving the Muddy Shirt," 227.

65. Drake, "New Fields of Battle," 3.

Appendix A

Discussion Questions

1. What aspects of nature did Charles Musser comment on between January and June 1863? List examples.
2. In Musser's view, how did the environment of eastern Arkansas compare to that of his home state of Iowa? Did this influence Musser's view of soldiering? If so, how?
3. How did Musser view the environment of eastern Arkansas? For example, did he view it as a nuisance? As something to be utilized? As something to be celebrated?
4. How did nature influence life in Helena between January and June 1863?
5. What different aspects of nature did William Bull comment on in his diary? List examples.
6. How did Bull view the environment of eastern Arkansas? For example, did he view it as a nuisance? As something to be utilized? As something to be celebrated?
7. What natural features did William Vermilion include on his map of the Helena battlefield? List examples. What might these suggest about Vermilion's understanding of the Helena campaign?
8. How did Union and Confederate soldiers seek to alter eastern Arkansas's natural environment before and during the 1863 Helena campaign? List examples.
9. How did nature influence the 1863 Helena campaign?
10. What is historical "agency?" Does Linda Nash believe the natural environment has agency? Why or why not?
11. After reading Charles Musser's letters, William Bull's diary, and Linda Nash's article, how would you define environmental history?
12. Is environmental history worth considering? Why or why not? What place, if any, should the natural environment occupy in the stories we tell about the past?

Appendix B

A Union Account

Excerpts from the Letters of Charles O. Musser, 29th Iowa Infantry, in *Soldier Boy: The Civil War Letters of Charles O. Musser, 29th Iowa*, ed. Barry Popchock (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1995). Permission granted by the University of Iowa Press.

On board the Steamer *Henry Clay*, Helena, Arkansas, January 26th/1863

Dear Father....it rains nearly all the time here. the river is very high and still rising. we expect to have a pretty rough time going down the river. the country is very very flat and swampy here, easily overflowed by high water....

Camp of Fisks Brigade, near Helena, Ark, Feb. 3rd, 1863

Dear Father....there is a greatt deal of Sickness in our regiment, and...[it is] increasing. there are about 30 thousand troops encamped in and around Helena, and i can say without exagerating that there is buried fourty men every day and some times more....nobody lives here but negroes and soldiers. the citizens have nearly all left. i would not live here if i owned the whole State of Arkansas. we have read of Helena [that] it is one of the dirtiest holes on the river. mud is knee deep there all the time....

[undated letter fragment, probably February 3, 1863]

....there is nothing in the Vegetable line more than potatoes here....beef is scarce. what we get is poor. it takes two men to hold them [the cattle] up while one knocks them down....the talk is now that we will stay here until Spring. if So, our regt will Soon...[regain] their health when the measles stop their course.... (Feb 4th) This morning, it is cold and frosty. the ground is frozen on the top. the boys gather around the camp fires. the large log fires feel very comfortable to Stamp around. the quartermaster issues rations of Whiskey: now one gill a day, half gill in the morning, and the same in the evening with quinine in it. it is issued by order of Col. Benton....

Camp Near Helena, Ark, Feb the 17th

Dear father and mother...funerals occur very often. I have witnessed five funerals to day. they are So frequent that we are geting used to it. in my last [letter], i Spoke of the health of the regt as improving, but the deaths do not Seem to lessen much, if any. it has been Cloudy all day, and it is raining now. it rains often here—every other day at least....this country is not worth fighting three days for. i would not give forty acres of prairie in Iowa for the whole State of Arkansas. i have heard of the Arkansas traveler. if he traveled through this part of the State in the rainy Season of the year, he must have been very near done and gone up traveling through the mud. Six mule teams mire Sometimes in the Streets of Helena. it takes four mules to haul an empty ambulance in the Streets. we are camped on

tolerable good ground for this region. we are handy to the woods but the water is very poor here—not as good as the Mississippi water....

Helena, Arkansas, April 14th/63

Dear Father...If you had only one acre of timber Such as I have Seen down here, you would not want for fenceing for many years....

Camp of 29th Iowa, Helena, Ark, Apr. 18th/63

Dear Father...the Scorching rays of the Sun comes right Strait down in earnest. we have to retreat to our tents in the heat of the day. the health of our regiment is very good. we have become hardened to the climate of the South, but we have had a Sorrowful time in becomeing So climated. it has cost us over one hundred and twentyfive valuable lives. the widows and orphans they have left almost makes a person Shudder to think....

On Guard at Head Quarters, Fisks Brigade, Helena Arkansas, April 24th, 1863

Dear Sister Hester...a person that is any ways dangerously wounded down here is almost sure to die. the climate is Such that a wound does not heal quick....

Camp of the twenty-night Iowa, Helena, Arkansas, April 29th, 1863

My Dear Father & Mother...I think we are doomed to Stay at this miserable town of graves and Sutler Shops all Summer. i would rather run the risk of one battle than stay here through the hot months of august and september....

Camp Curtis, Helena, Arkansas, May 8th, 1863

My Dear Parents...It is not known how strong the enemys force is. we have been expecting an attack for Some time. but now we do not fear any force that the enemy can bring against us. the town is now strongly fortified. there are several distinct forts all connected by rifle pits. fifty thousand men could not take this town by attacking it. in the rear, the batteries command the whole country around. the country is very rough and hilly in the rear of the town, and no artillery can be brought against it. The weather is geting very warm. the river is begining to rise again slowly....

Camp Curtis, Helena, Ark, May 25th, 1863

Dear Father...why need a person be so fearfull of the Small Pox? I have been in small Pox Hospitals and among it many a time since i come in the army, and we have never lost one man out of our regiment by that disease. i was vaccinated while at Schofield Barracks, St. Louis. our whole regiment was at the same time Vaccinated....

[undated letter fragment, probably June 1863]

...The general health of our regiment is not so good as it has been...the sick list is daily increasing. the disease most prevalent here among the troops is the camp Dysintery, more comonly Known among the boys as the *Arkansas quick step*. It causes the death of many a poor fellow. the water is so very bad here....

Camp Curtis, Helena, Ark, June 6th/63

Dear Sister Hester...the sick list is growing rapidly. we are preparing to move our camp on the riverbank [to] where we will have fresh air all the time and better water. the Mississippi water is the best watter we can get down here, and that is bad enough at best....

Helena, Arkansas, June the 12th/63

Dear Father...there is nothing going on around here, only the fortyfying of the place. it would take a large number of troops to take this place. we have a line of batteries and rifle pits all round town, and all the roads are blocked up by the falling of heavy timber....

Helena, Arkansas, June 24th, 1863

Dear Sister [Hester]...I am Still well and harty as ever. we are now encamped on the river bank about one mile from our old camp. here we have quite a pleasant camp—allways a cool breaze from the river...I would like to be at home to eat some of them Strawberries. there was a few here, but they are gone long ago (nearly six weeks). wild fruit is not very plenty here. there is some Black berries and Dew Berries, but we have little time to look for such things....

Helena, Arkansas, July 6th, 1863

Dear Father:... We have had a desperate and bloody battle. it was fought on the 4th day of July, the day of american independence. We have won a great victory and have lost but few men on our side. rebel loss is, as near as i can learn, killed 650, Wounded 900, prisoners 1,000. the attack was comenced on the town at 4 O.Clock in the Morning and continued untill 10 1/2 O.Clock. it was a Sharp and blood battle....

I will now give you some particulars of the battle. we had been expecting an attack in the town for some time. I was on picket the third of July. we was told to Keep a watchfull eye, for the enemy was within a Short distance of town, and we would be attacked early in this morning. about two o'clock in this morning, we heard a few Shots fired on our picket line, and in about an hour it was increased considerable all along the line, except at one place where our batteries had the complete range. all of the available force at the port was brought out Just at daylight, and about that time a very heavy fog rose and all was dark. the rebs took advantage of the time and posted their troops to the best advantage all along our lines.

we had not long to wait for the ball to open. as Soon as the fog began to clear away, the rebs came on with a yell and charged on to battery C, the middle of our line, and was repulsed with great loss. Again they charged on the battery, and again they were driven back with great loss. [They were repulsed] the third time also... the fourth time, they were more successfull. they drove our boys out of the battery and took posession of it, but their Stay was but Short. the rest of the batteries got range of them, and the gun boats also began to shell them. Oh, what Slaughter and bloodshed. they were mowed down by hundreds by the grape Shot and Shell. It makes the cold chills run over me as i think of the dreadfull Scene i witnessed on the battlefield: men lying in heaps in some of the ravines, four and five deep.

...while this was going on at that battery, Marmaduke tried our right wing. our regiment was in the lead there all the time and fought like veterans but not without loss. it was a Sharp contest, but our boys drove the rebels before them and made many a poor rebel bite the dust. pretty Soon there was a great cheer arose all round the line. the enemy was...retreating. while the fighting was going on, there was a continuous roar of artillery and musketry.... We just mowed them down like grass. the hillsides were swarming with them. they had three times our number but all of no avail.

I was not with our regiment; when i retreated from the picketline, i joined the 28th wisconsin untill the battle was over. we were in the rifle pits and within good gunshot of the enemy. I will not say that i Killed any, but i saw many a reb fall headlong down the hills by the fire of our small party that was posted at the nearest point to the enemy. two of the Wisconsin boys and myself were each occupying a stump all the time while the battle raged near the rifle pits.... the rest of the Wisconsin boys were in the pits close by. we had fired all of our Cartridges away, and one of the boys Started for summere, when a rebel bullet Struck the poor fellow, and he fell pierced to the brain. the other one thus Started on the same errand, and a ball Struck him on the top of the head, stunning him Slightly. he got up and got the amunition, and we kept up the fire untill the rebs began to retreat then.

you ought to have seen and heard the cannonading. it was awfull to hear. then is when the Slaughter was the greatest. Our regiment had driven the enemy off on our right, and we had in our front....Killed, and Wounded, and taken prisoners half of the rebel force.

I have Spent Several fourths of July but never celebrated it with so much fire works before. I would not have missed that day for Six months wages. i have escaped with out a scratch.

The rebels, when they charged,...gave some of the most unearthly yells i ever heard, and when they were repulsed, our boys cheered, yess, real genuine yankee cheers—none of your rebel yells. I saw three rebel Officers ride along their lines, waive their swords, and order their men to “form [and] Charge on that battery, you cowardly h—d hounds.” but they never all left their tracks.

lead rained around us like hail, but we lost but few. but the enemy lost half as many men as we had in our whole command. in the afternoon after the battle, thirty of us was four hours burying the rebels that our regiment Killed, and there was over one hundred men detailed to bury the rebel dead yesterday, all day. and there has been over one hundred more found in the woods around town. Some were Killed three miles from town by the shells from the old gunboat *Tyler*. Five companies of the 43rd Indiana captured one whole rebel regiment, and about twenty five of the 33rd Iowa captured 60 of the rebs. and at another time Some rebs, two or three hundred in number, blundered into a ravine, and before they knew it, they were flanked and had to come right out to the battery and Surrender. our boys are still finding dead and wounded in the bushes. they left all of their wounded and sent a flag of truce to Surrender them into our hands, for they could not take care of them. *Our regiment did not take more than two prisoners, and none if us were taken.* we were detailed as SharpShooters and had no chance to

take prisoners, but nearly all of the rebs that they shot were shot in the head and breast—all mortal wounds.

...it was a very exciting fourth of July celebration we had here. And the news came today that Vicksburg is in our possession and 22,000 prisoners taken. it is sayed that the rebs offered to give up on the 3rd, but General Grant wanted to take it on the fourth, and he refused to take it untill the next day, which was the fourth. Rebellion is Knocked in a Cocked hat in the west....

There was no commander, no officer here that day. every man fought. every man was as good as a Brigadier General. When the news of the capture of Vicksburg came to town, there was the loudest cheering you ever heard. everbody was wild with excitement. if the rebs had a come in then, we would have fought to the last Hurrah for the fourth of July celebration at Vicksburg and Helena. It was worth all the Suffering i have seen. [I] would go into it again with a good will....

Appendix C

A Confederate Account

Excerpt from “Part I: Reminiscence and Diary of William Jeffery Bull,” in *Missouri Brothers in Gray: The Reminiscences and Letters of William J. Bull and John P. Bull*, ed. Michael E. Banasik (Iowa City, IA: Camp Pope Bookshop, 1998), 54-60. Permission granted by Camp Pope Bookshop.

It was decided by the superior officers to make an attack on Helena, Arkansas, in the hope of capturing the place and relieving Vicksburg, which place was being sorely pressed. It was thought if we could get possession of Helena we could interfere with the navigation of the Mississippi River by the Federals to such an extent that they would be compelled to send a large force from in front of Vicksburg to dislodge us, thereby raising the siege of that place.

We commenced the movement from Little Rock about June 1, '63. We crossed the White River at Jacksonport and marched through the bottoms from there to Helena. We found this a most difficult task. There had been heavy rains which made the roads impassable and corduroy roads had to be constructed the entire way; this with the building of bridges across all swollen streams delayed the movement so much that the enemy learned of our coming and had ample time to prepare for our reception and in order to make it as warm as possible had received heavy reinforcements....

Living in swamps and drinking swamp water made a great many of our men sick. I had camp sickness for a week and could eat nothing. We finally reached a camp on July 3d about 5 miles from Helena where arrangements were completed for the attack which was to be made the following day. It was decided that we would be unable to use our artillery on account of the topography of the country about Helena but volunteers were called for from the members of our battery to go in with the infantry and serve any guns that might be captured. I was one of the thirty-two volunteers, and...we marched that night with the infantry five miles to the position from which we were to attack at day light the following morning.

Parsons's Brigade was assigned to the center position and ordered to assault Grave Yard Hill. We arrived at our post in the investing line several hours before the time for the assault. The intervening time was spent by most of the men in speculations and jests as to the results of the coming battle and by others in giving messages for loved ones in the event of accidents. I was so weak and worn out by my sickness and long march that I threw myself on the ground and was immediately in a sound sleep and when called to take my place in line, did so feeling greatly refreshed.

I had standing next to me a man named Hagerman [or Hagan]. While we were waiting for the report of a gun on the extreme right of our line, which was to be the signal for a general charge, he talked to me and I found him greatly disposed. He said he had never felt before in going into battle as he felt then. That he could not shake off the feeling that he was going to be shot and would like to make an

agreement with me, that if either were shot the other would take care of him. I said I would agree to that and tried ineffectively to cheer him up. Our conversation was interrupted by the signal gun and the order to charge.

The fortifications of the enemy, consisting of well built forts and rifle pits connecting them, were along a very high ridge in rear of and encircling the city of Helena. To reach this ridge it was necessary to pass over three steep and high hills, but not so high as the ridge upon which the fortifications were located. The hills in front of the works had been covered with heavy timber, this had been cut and the trees with their branching limbs allowed to lie where they fell. This made a most excellent abatis....

At the command to charge we made a rush over the top of the first hill, down its opposite side and on to the near side of the next hill where we were halted, in comparative safety, to rest and correct our formation which had become disordered in getting over the felled timber and by the shots of the enemy which was poured upon us from small arms and artillery from the time we appeared on the top of the hill until we were under the protection of the next hill. We did not know the fate of individuals at the time but the gaps in our reformed lines showed the fire had been very disastrous. The dead body of my comrade Hagerman was afterwards found just where he first got under fire, which seemed to confirm, what many believe, that we sometimes have a premonition of approaching death.

After a few minutes rest we were ordered to rush the next hill and then the third and then the fort which was captured. By this time the men of the different companies had become inextricably mixed. I found myself with the infantry and went with them far down into the grave yard, which was located on a ridge running at right angles to the one upon which the forts were located and was being swept by a cross fire of shot and shell from the forts both to the north and to the south of us.

I saw Col. [James D.] White, who commanded one of the regiments of our brigade and seeing none of our battery boys around asked him if he knew where they were. He said he thought they had stopped at the captured fort. While I was talking to him he was shot in the arm. I immediately ran the gauntlet back along the ridge and arrived at the fort uninjured.

I found that an effort had been made to use two pieces of artillery which had been captured but it was found they had been rendered unserviceable by the Federals before abandoning them by "shorting" them—that is by ramming a solid shot into the bore without any powder behind it....

The other commands, comprising our army, failed to capture the position they attacked and fell back. Many of our brigade (Parsons) continued the charge into the town of Helena where they were cut off and captured. The remnant of Parsons's Brigade, and some of [Dandridge] McRae's Arkansas Brigade, who had joined us, concentrated in a hollow in front of the captured fort and held it until ordered out by Gen'l Price. Notwithstanding, the fire of the entire Federal line and of the Gun Boat *Tyler*, which was lying in the river, was concentrated upon that point.

To prevent a charge upon our position we kept up a steady fire. A few of us battery boys got together and would follow one after the other in firing over the top of a stump which stood on the brow of the hill. Just ahead of me was a man named [W. G.] Farris. While in the position to fire, a Federal minnie ball passed

through his left hand and lodged in his breast. As he fell back, Bob Young and I caught him and started with him to the bottom of the hill where, we were told, there was a spring.

When we had gotten about half way down the hill there was a rush made by the entire force we had left in front of the fort. We were thrown down and then learned that Gen'l Price had sent in orders for the men to get out as quickly as possible to avoid capture. Young and I went back to our wounded comrade and offered to assist him but he said he could go no further and urged us to leave him and save ourselves by immediate flight. This we reluctantly did.

I was so weak I made slow progress and Young soon left me. Frequently I fell down and would have to rest and must have been killed or captured but for the fact that the enemy seemed not to know, for a long time, that we had fallen back. I finally reached a point of comparative safety where our field hospital had been established and to my amazement found my wounded comrade there, he having gotten out more quickly than I.

Seeing he was in a very bad way I went to an ambulance and asked for some whiskey for him. I was given half a tin cup full but when I took it to him he said he was a son of a preacher and no amount of persuasion would induce him to drink it. So I drank it and it did me much good.

We were urged to hurry on to camp as quickly as possible as an attack from the enemy was momentarily expected. As I started off, fearing in my weakened condition it would be impossible for me to walk the five miles to camp, Harvey Salmon our Brigade Ordnance Officer rode up and seeing my condition gave me his horse to ride to camp. I have ever since had a great fondness for him for his kindness on that occasion.

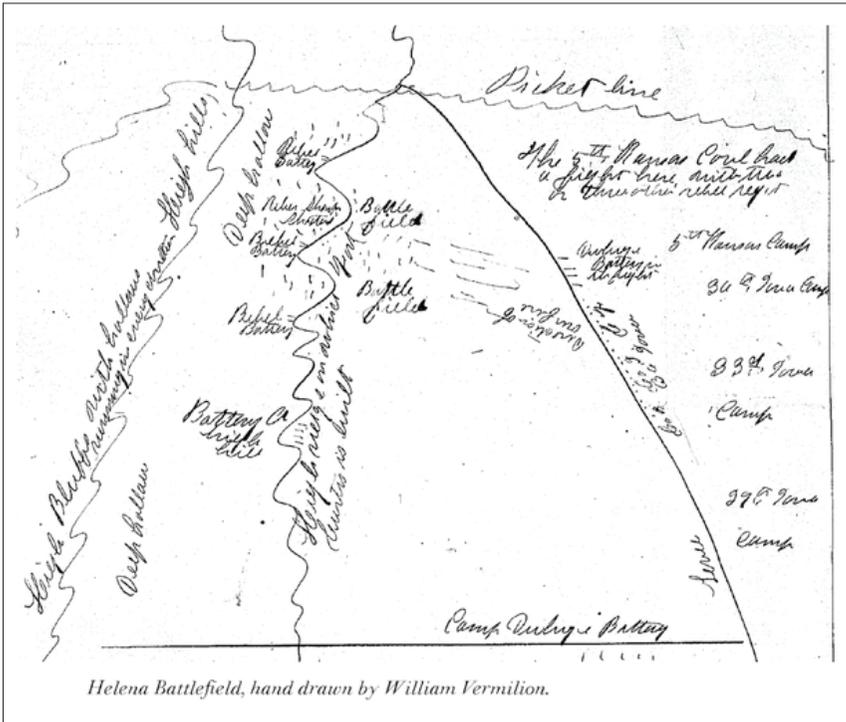
Farris could not be moved from the field and died in a few days from the effects of his wound. Parsons's Brigade suffered terribly in the battle, losing 800 out of 1,800 in killed, wounded, and missing. Out of our 32 battery boys we had 12 casualties.

Our army returned to Little Rock the way we had come. We marched leisurely, no attempt being made by the Federals to follow us. The cavalry under Gen'l's [Lucius Marsh or Marshall] Walker and [John S.] Marmaduke remained in the vicinity of Jacksonport. We were greatly distressed to learn that Vicksburg surrendered on the day we made our attack on Helena.

Appendix D

Battlefield Map Primary Source

“Helena battlefield, hand drawn by William Vermilion” (of the 36th Iowa Infantry Regiment), in *Love Amid the Turmoil: The Civil War Letters of William & Mary Vermilion*, ed. Donald C. Elder III (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 161. Permission granted by the University of Iowa Press.



Discover Asia

The Dream of East Asia

The Rise of China, Nationalism, Popular Memory, and Regional Dynamics in Northeast Asia

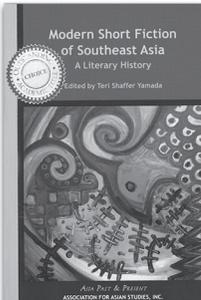


John Lie

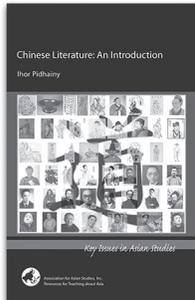
ASIA
SHORTS

NEW! 2018 Book Release
available now at: bit.ly/AASPubs

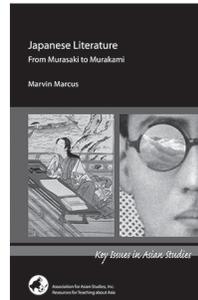
Presenting a framework for understanding contemporary Northeast Asia, focusing on the countries that comprise our conventional understanding of what we call East Asia



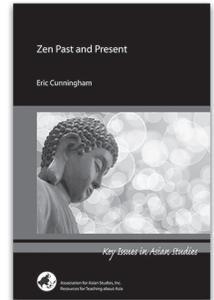
↑ Surveys the historical and cultural significance of modern short fiction in Southeast Asian nations



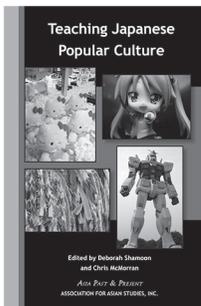
↑ An introduction to Chinese Literature from oracle bones to the internet



↑ An introduction to the literature of Japan that traces its origins in the seventh century and explores a literary legacy



↑ A concise but comprehensive survey of the history of Zen Buddhism



↑ A theoretical engagement with pedagogy of Japanese popular culture



↑ Innovative, unique teaching resource journal published three times a year

ORDER NOW
bit.ly/AASPubs

Up to 20% discount
for AAS Members



**Association for
Asian Studies
PUBLICATIONS**