

The Siege of Jackson

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Throughout the war, Jackson, Mississippi, had been a strong point for the Confederate army. Its position on the Mississippi River had made it a major transportation center for the army. Not only was Jackson the state capital of Mississippi, it was also a major manufacturing center supplying textiles and machinery. During the war, these facilities were naturally converted into war production.

In early May, 1863, General Grant decided it was time to occupy Jackson. He ordered Major General James B. McPherson to

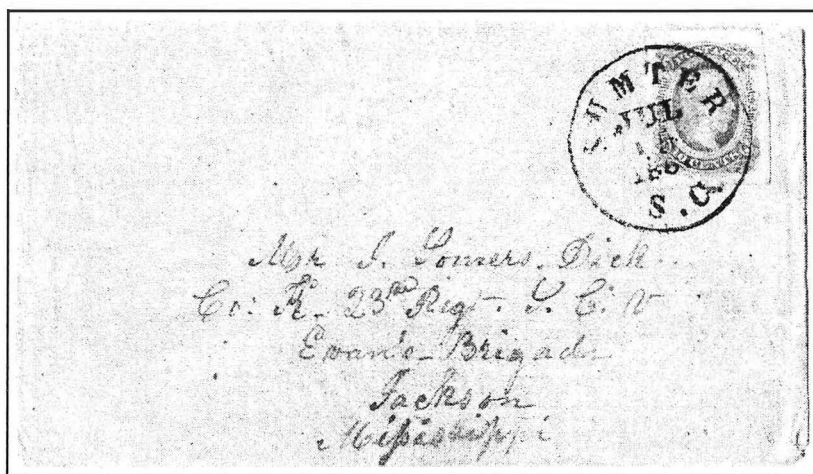


Figure 1. Envelope posted from Sumter, S.C., on July 15, 1863, to Mr. I. Somers Dick, Co. K. 23rd Regt., S.C.V., Evans Brigade Jackson, Mississippi. Mr. Dick was among the troops defending Jackson. The cover is franked with an Archer & Daly type A (Scott #11).

overtake the city. With his command he marched on the city on May 15 and occupied it with little resistance. General Sherman ordered General Mower to be military governor of Jackson and proceeded to destroy all facilities that could benefit the war effort. With the discovery of a large supply of rum, it was impossible for Mower's brigade to keep order among the mass of soldiers and camp followers, and many acts of pillage took place. General Grant left Jackson on the afternoon of the 15th and proceeded to Clinton. On the morning of the 16th he sent orders for Sherman to move out of Jackson as soon as his destruction was complete. Sherman marched almost immediately clearing the city by 10 a.m. By nightfall on May 16, Sherman's corps had reached Bolton, Mississippi and the Confederacy had reoccupied what remained of Jackson. Jackson had been destroyed as a transportation center, her war industries were crushed and most importantly the Confederate concentration of men and materials aimed at saving Vicksburg were scattered to the winds.



Figure 2. A pair of local printing 5¢ typographs (Scott #7) are cancelled here with a straight line JACKSON marking. Jackson was one of only a few towns to use a straight line postmark. The cover is addressed to Mrs W.H. Carter, Walnut Cove, N.C.

On July 4, 1863, General Sherman received word that Vicksburg had been occupied. This battle was decisive in the war but Sherman allowed his 46,000 men no time to celebrate. He ordered his men to turn and return to Jackson which by then had been refortified by Confederate soldiers. The return to Jackson would not be as easy as its first occupation.

On July 8, 1863, General Johnson sent his Confederate forces a telegram that was read to all his men. "Fellow Soldiers: An insolent foe, flushed with hope by his recent success at Vicksburg, confronts you, threatening the people, whose homes and liberties you are here to protect, with plunder and conquest. Their guns may even now be heard at intervals as they advance. This enemy is at once the mission and duty of you brave men to chastise and expel from the soil on Mississippi."

On July 9, General Sherman established his headquarters in Clinton and began the development of a plan to reoccupy Jackson. The next day's advance toward the city was evidence the return to Jackson would be difficult. For the next six days, the battle for Jackson was fierce. The union troops positioned their heavy armor to lob shells directly into the city. This was maintained throughout the attack.

After a failed last attempt to capture Sherman's supply train by General Jackson, General Johnson ordered a pullout of the Confederate troops on the morning of July 16, 1863. The last to leave Jackson were the engineers who, before putting the torch to the three bridges, planted a number of unexploded shells in the roads. As a gift to the occupying troops, these shells were the civil war version of the 20th century anti-personnel mines. They were successful in slowing the advance as one shell detonated killing one and wounding several men in Brig General Joseph Lightburn's brigade.

For the city of Jackson, the war was over but the hardships had just begun. On July 21, Mayor C.H. Manship of Jackson and a committee of citizens approached General Sherman. Manship

appealed for help in feeding the civilian population. He pointed out that the countryside for a radius of 30 miles was devastated and about 800 women and children would probably perish unless they received relief.

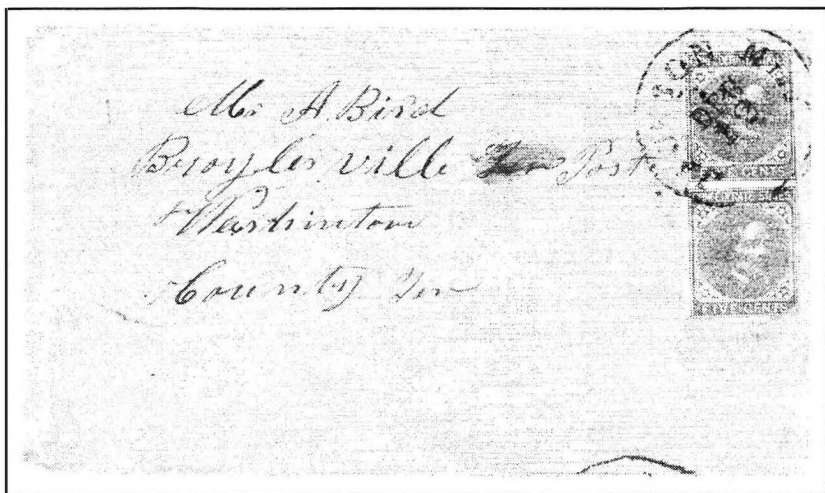


Figure 3. A vertical pair of the local printing typographs (Scott #7) tied by the circular Jackson handstamp.

After receiving Grant's approval, Sherman provided the committee with 200 barrels of flour and 100 barrels of salt pork, upon their pledge that it would not be provided to the Confederate soldiers and that it be solely used for charity. Sherman also set up a trading post that would allow the citizens the ability to trade cotton, corn and produce, for provisions, clothing and family supplies.

On July 23, Sherman's army marched out of Jackson having carried out their assignment at a very small cost — 129 killed, 752 wounded and 231 missing. On the 25th Sherman disbanded his army and resumed his command of the 15th corps, later to be called to action in his dreadful march through Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. The following day, Jackson was once again occupied by Confederate troops though little remained for their use.