

## **Vicksburg and the Richmond Bread Riot**

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The week of March 31-April 6, 1863 saw action on both the war and the home fronts. The Federals planned operations near Vicksburg, Mississippi and evacuated Jacksonville, Florida. Later in the week, President Lincoln visited the Army of the Potomac. In civilian life, a mob of Richmond, Virginia citizens began the Richmond Bread Riot, in which participants plundered several shops, while in Pennsylvania four members of the Knights of the Golden Circle, a pro-Southern organization, were arrested.

In Mississippi, General Ulysses S. Grant continued his latest campaign against the southern positions protecting Vicksburg. He had begun a winter campaign in 1862, but it proved fruitless. Grant next plan was to order troop under General John McClernand to skirt the enemy's defenses by marching west of the Mississippi River from Milliken's Bend to New Carthage, a point south of Vicksburg. Because of heavy rain during the winter campaign, the levees on the Mississippi River had overflowed, making it extremely difficult for the Union army to move via this route. The Federals had to wait for the water to recede in order to use the roads along these channels. On April 4, the Yankees skirmished with Confederates outside of Richmond, Louisiana, as they continued their movement from Milliken's Bend. McClernand's troops fought several minor engagements over the next ten days as they struggled southward.

On March 31, while Grant was preparing his movement south of Vicksburg, Union troops evacuated the city of Jacksonville, Florida, which they had occupied earlier in the month. Prior to the evacuation several small skirmishes had been fought in the vicinity. During their withdrawal, the Federals burned a portion of the town. Union forces would return to Florida in

greater force the following year.

On April 2, 1863 a riot broke out in Richmond, Virginia, most likely due to shortages of different food items. Known as the "Richmond Bread Riot," a mob of hungry citizens ransacked stores, taking bread and other items. Newspapers reported the incident, stating that the mob consisted of "three thousand hungry women" who were armed with weapons and desperate for food. While that number may have been exaggerated, the Confederate leadership was concerned. President Jefferson Davis implored the crowd to disperse, and ultimately ordered militia to arrest some of the mob's leaders.

The next day, April 3, 1863, a group of four men were arrested in Reading, Pennsylvania. These men were allegedly part of a pro-Southern organization, known as the Knights of the Golden Circle. The arrests created an uproar in Pennsylvania, and eventually led a group of citizens to attempt to break these men out of jail.

On April 4, President Lincoln prepared to visit the headquarters of the Army of the Potomac. The First Lady was present with Lincoln and they were furnished with very simple accommodations. They traveled by boat to Fredericksburg and met with General Joseph Hooker. Newspaper accounts gave citizens a glimpse of Lincoln's itinerary. He was to review the Federal cavalry on the 5<sup>th</sup>, but due to a snowstorm, it was delayed until the following day. Lincoln was also presented with a sword and sash in a formal ceremony. Confederate forces on the opposite side of the Rappahannock River responded with a review of their own, undertaken within sight of the Union Army. Lincoln's visit to the army was a great success, improving the soldiers' morale as they prepared for their next campaign against Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

