

# THE GUNS OF RAYMOND

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Today the Raymond battlefield is a pastoral scene featuring fields of corn, beans, or cotton, somewhat rudely cleft by modern Hwy 18. But on May 12, 1863, these fields were rutted, not plowed, when twenty-five artillery pieces rushed into battery. Most modern accounts of the battle do pay much attention to the “long arm” of artillery, yet on the eventful day of the battle the guns of Raymond made an impression on both the officers and soldiers in the field.

Union Major General James B. McPherson wrote that, “About 11 am, and when within two miles of Raymond, we came upon the enemy, under the command of General Gregg, and 4,000 or 5,000 strong, judiciously posted, with two batteries of artillery so placed as to sweep the road and a bridge over which it was necessary to pass.” The Confederates must have been working hard to attract the attention of the Federals as they marched up the dusty Port Gibson Road, now Hwy 18, from the direction of Utica, because McPherson believed Gregg’s 3,000 troops numbered four or five thousand, and he exaggerated the three Southern cannon to be “two batteries,” or twelve guns.

Union Major General John Logan, who led the Union troops into action, recorded the artillery action from up close. He wrote: “DeGolyer’s [8<sup>TH</sup> Michigan] battery was placed in a position in the road near the bridge, and the whole line ordered to advance into a piece of the timber . . .”

A footsoldier on the front line, Henry Dwight of the 20<sup>th</sup> Ohio, saw the action as only an infantryman could by saying:

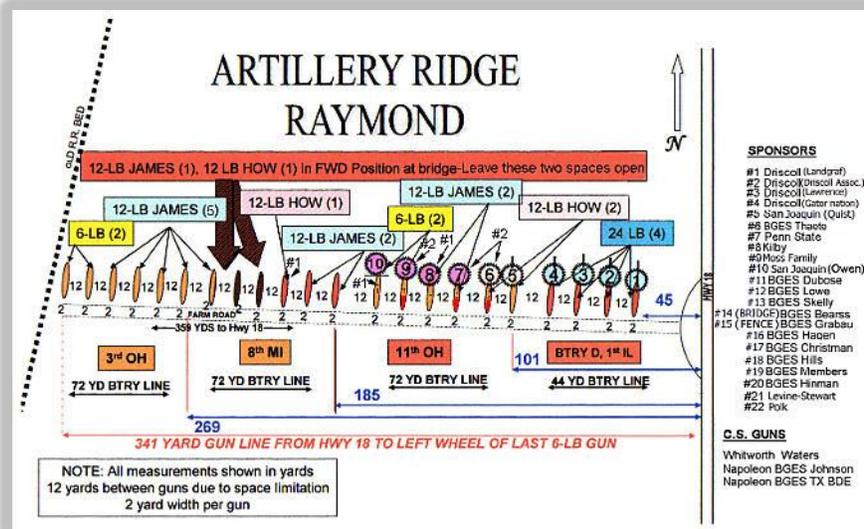
DeGolyer’s battery of artillery, which always marched with us, stopped in the road near the skirmish line, and two of the guns were pointed down the road, in case any inquisitive chap should be coming from the other direction to see what we were about . . . [The] battery was watering its horses so near to the skirmish line that if the infantry was driven back an inch, it would be captured by the swarming rebels long before help could be got from our other brigades . . .

The Confederates, too, wrote about the artillery. Colonel Hiram Granbury, commanding the 7<sup>th</sup> Texas Infantry, vividly remembered:

In the mean time, the enemy had a battery in position about 600 yards in advance of our position, and opened fire on Captain [H. M.] Bledsoe’s battery, then being planted in the field, on the right of the road and little to the rear of my position. Private [D.] Kennedy, of Company H, was wounded in the leg by a shrapnel from the enemy’s battery [and] Pvt. J. L. Galloway, of Company A, was severely wounded in the shoulder by a grape or canister shot, the enemy’s battery having discovered and opened fire on us while forming.

Just as the soldiers of both sides remembered the artillery at the Battle of Raymond in 1863, in 2003 a modern Army artilleryman, Parker Hills, a recently retired brigadier general and then vice president of the Friends of Raymond (FOR) board of directors, spearheaded what many

considered to be an unreachable goal. The plan was to reconstruct all twenty-five cannon, in the correct caliber, and place them in the correct location on the Raymond battlefield. After all, this had never before been done on any Civil War battlefield, where usually one or two cannon represent an entire battery of six guns. And due either to lack of documentation or non-availability of the proper caliber barre,, very often guns of an incorrect caliber were used for battlefield interpretation. To counter the lack of documentation, in 2003, Hills researched and wrote a Raymond artillery study and presented it to FOR board president Dick Kilby. This study identified the number and caliber of guns and their locations on the Raymond battlefield.



A key part of the Artillery Study was this diagram showing the proposed location of the guns on Artillery Ridge.

Armed with this knowledge, Hills knew that the artillery interpretation at Raymond could be done accurately. He also believed that it could be done completely because the previous year the Vicksburg National Military Park had begun to replace its almost 100-year-old cast iron replica cannon carriages with newer and sturdier aluminum carriages. Thus, there was a surplus of old iron carriages. Of course, the irreplaceable original iron or bronze cannon barrels had to remain in Vicksburg, so new barrels would have to be procured.

Hills, who had for years conducted military training exercises in Vicksburg National Military Park and had assisted with some park preservation and interpretation projects, formally requested that the iron carriages, which had been broken into pieces for delivery to a scrap iron smelter, be donated to FOR to help with the interpretation of the Raymond battlefield. Vicksburg Park Historian Terry Winschel heartily agreed that this was a far better fate for the old carriages than being melted down, and Park Superintendent Bill Nichols graciously approved the transfer.

FOR, which qualified as a non-profit organization for historical preservation, was given permission to haul away the broken pieces of almost forty cast iron carriages and wheels. President of the FOR board of directors Dick Kilby, vice-president Parker Hills, and board member Alan Polk, using privately-owned farm trucks and trailers, travelled to Vicksburg on October 17, and again on November 21, to pick up tons of cast iron carriages and wheels that would be the basis for the future artillery display at the Raymond battlefield. FOR board member John Barber lent a hand, and the first few tons of iron were picked up and taken to

Raymond and securely stored at the Raymond bio-lake at dusk on a chilly Friday afternoon in November, 2003. After several trips by FOR volunteers over the ensuing months to pick up carriage parts on small trailers, it was obvious that outside help was needed to get the tons of iron moved. Hills approached a friend, Mac Johnson, a senior vice-president of Yates Construction in Byram, Mississippi, for help. Yates provided a lowboy tractor trailer, and the driver, Cohn Livingston, and Hills delivered the final ten carriages to Raymond on April 25, 2008.



Broken cannon carriages and wheels were picked up and taken to the Raymond bio-lake for storage. Cast iron is difficult to weld, and broken wheels posed a particularly difficult challenge.

*photos by Parker Hills*

Meanwhile, work on the carriage restoration had already begun. The cannon carriages and wheels needed a great deal of work, and FOR had searched for a welder who was willing to take on the specialized task of welding cast iron. Finally, in 2005, welder Jim Dansby accepted the challenge and went to work on the first guns for the Raymond battlefield.



Welder Jim Dansby working on a cannon wheel in his shop in Richland, MS. He delivered the first restored carriage to Raymond in 2005. The original paint formula for the carriages had been researched, and Dansby had the paint mixed as prescribed. As luck would have it, the chemical composition of the yellow ochre in the paint had changed since 1863, and the resulting pale green, rather than olive drab, can be seen below.

*photos by Parker Hills*



The next step was to raise the funds for this project. The cost to restore a carriage was \$1,000, multiplied by 25 for the guns on the battlefield, plus a 26<sup>th</sup> cannon destined for the Raymond Town Square. Then there was the matter of cannon barrels. Hills learned that a welder in Vicksburg, Jeff Dickerson, was making cannon barrels for an annual “cannon pumpkin shoot” in the Midwest, so Dickerson was asked if he could build barrels for Raymond. The answer was positive, and sketches and dimensions for the various caliber guns needed at Raymond were provided. The cost per barrel was negotiated to \$1,500; thus, the total cost of a cannon would be \$2,500, and the project cost would be around \$65,000. Hills, now board president of FOR, proposed that cannon sponsors provide the funding.

*Below: Restored cannon and barrels stored at the Raymond bio-lake, awaiting their final positioning on the Raymond battlefield on property yet to be acquired*  
*photo by Parker Hills*



Parker Hills, Tom Hughes, and Alan Polk paint a newly-delivered 12-pounder howitzer cannon barrel made by Jeff Dickerson of Vicksburg.  
*photo by Carol Hills*

The first cannon was placed at the Raymond Walking Trail in 2005, followed by a second and third at the old Fourteenmile Creek bridge. In June of 2006, Hills led a corporate leadership tour for a group based out of Chicago, IL, and the participants were walked to the two guns at the old bridge. There the \$2,500 cost of sponsorship was mentioned; also that the donor would be recognized by a stainless steel plaque on the gun. Immediately, Dennis Driscoll of Safety Harbor, FL, volunteered to sponsor the first cannon, and the ice was broken. In subsequent tours over the next four years, Dennis went on to sponsor all of the guns of Battery D, 1<sup>st</sup> Illinois Light Artillery, which are the first four 24-pounder howitzers on the east end of the Artillery Ridge gun line.

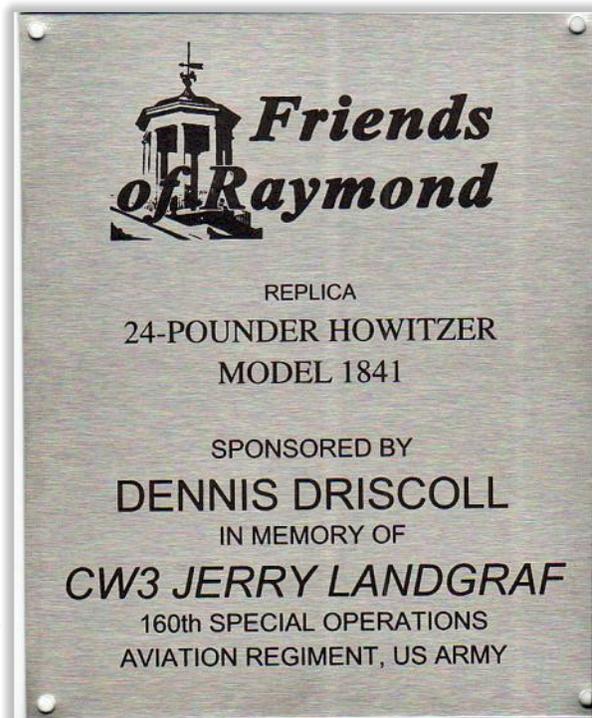


Twenty-four pounder howitzers on Artillery Ridge gun line. *photo by Mike Green*



Parker Hills and the late Dennis Driscoll at the Friends of Raymond cannon sponsor dedication ceremony on May 11, 2013.

*photo by Carol Hills*



Plaque for the first cannon sponsored by Dennis Driscoll, honoring CW3 Jerry Landgraf, who was killed in a helicopter crash on May 20, 1988.

Everyone wants to be part of a winning team, and once the first gun was sponsored and the results could be seen, the task of fund-raising became much easier. In 2009, Hills spoke to the San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table in Fresno, CA, and in January of 2010 the group sent the funds to sponsor a 12-pounder howitzer at Raymond. In October of 2010 Hills and Terry Winschel led a Vicksburg Campaign tour for Penn State University, and following the suggestion of group leader of Dr. Carol Reardon, the participants immediately agreed to sponsor a 12-pounder James rifle.



Penn State Vicksburg Campaign tour, Raymond, October 15, 2010, led by Terry Winschel and Parker Hills. The group sponsored a 12-pounder James rifle on Artillery Ridge.  
*photo by Mary Jane Stout*

The twenty-second day of June, 2012, was a landmark day for the cannon project. While leading a Gettysburg tour for the Blue and Gray Education Society in Chatham, VA, General Hills was presented with a check for \$27,000 to sponsor the remaining cannon needed at Raymond.



Members of the Blue and Gray Education Society at the Mississippi Monument, Gettysburg National Military Park, on June 22, 2012. Parker Hills was presented with a check for \$27,000 for the completion of the Friends of Raymond cannon project. BGES Executive Director Len Riedel presented the check.

*photo by Lee McDowell*

Of course, FOR needed to acquire the necessary property on which to place the guns, but that was always part of the plan. The Confederate three-gun position was secured in 2006, and the three carriages were put into battery on Park Day, April 1, 2006. The barrels would come later.



The first Confederate gun was placed in front of the old Magna Plant on Park Day, April 1, 2006. Initially the gun was seated atop buried cinder blocks to prevent settling, and later the blocks were replaced by reinforced concrete pads.

*photo by Carol Hills*

The "off color" of the first gun, due to a chemical change in the old Civil War paint formula, was corrected on the afternoon of Park Day, April 1, 2006.

*photo by Carol Hills*



Custom-made reinforced concrete pads, three per cannon, were back-breakingly put into position at Artillery Ridge on Friday, April 9, 2010, by Parker Hills and Terry Winschel. The Google Earth mapping tool, a hand-held GPS, and a 30-foot tape measure were used to determine the exact position of the pads.

The first ten of the 22 Union guns went into battery on Artillery Ridge on Park Day, April 10, 2010, and five barrels were placed on the carriages. Five more barrels were placed on the carriages on a “Mini-Park Day” held on September 25, 2010.



Custom-made concrete pads with 1/2" steel rebar reinforcement were made by Paul Gore of Clinton, MS, and were put into position to accept the carriages. These blocks prevented the iron wheels from settling into soft, acidic soil.

*photo by Parker Hills*



The concrete pads were carefully dug to ensure that the guns were level. Once the trail pad and two wheel pads were in place, the gun was lowered into position.

*photo by Carol Hills*



The first gun, a 24-pounder howitzer, was carefully set atop the pads using a front-end loader.

*photo by Carol Hills*



Lowering the boom or installing an 800-pound cannon barrel on “Mini Park Day.”

*photo by Carol Hills*

The final Artillery Ridge cannon was put into position on a blazing hot day, September 6, 2012. Upon completion of the project, Mayor Isla Tullos came out to celebrate with the crew. A cold bottle of champagne was popped to mark the end of a project that had spanned almost ten years.



Celebrating putting the final gun into position on Artillery Ridge, September 6, 2012. *Front:* Ernest Scott, boom operator; Brig. Gen. Parker Hills, USA (Ret.) *Rear:* Brian Dunn, welder; Capt. Oliver Shearer, USN (Ret.); Mayor Isla Tullos, Raymond, MS. *photo by Carol Hills*

There are always loose ends to a project, and the construction of the barrel for the Confederate Whitworth 12-pounder breech-loader required both a machinist and a welder, taking both \$3,500 and more time. The barrel, which has an operational breech, was finally installed on November 13, 2016.



Confederate gun position with the Whitworth in foreground. The carriage was put into position on Park Day, April 1, 2006, and the barrel was finally completed and installed on November 13, 2016. Patience is indeed a virtue, as is perseverance. The Whitworth was sponsored by Doug Waters of Carrollton, TX.

*photo by Parker Hills*



Carol Hills poses with the Whitworth breech open.

*photo by Parker Hills*

With all the cannon in place on the Raymond battlefield, two essential elements of the artillery story were still missing, which were a limber and a caisson. A limber with one ammunition chest was pulled by six horses, and was attached to a cannon to pull the gun. A second limber with six horses pulled a caisson, which had two ammunition chests. Thus, a complete fire unit had one cannon, four ammunition chests, two limbers and one caisson. Raymond needed a complete fire unit to tell the artillery story.

The answer to the limber challenge was provided when Hills took a group from California and Oregon to the Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville battlefields in April 2012. There, at a historic battlefield stop entitled Hazel Grove on the Chancellorsville battlefield, stood an impressive display of both limbers and caissons. So, the need for \$3,500 to build a limber at Raymond was mentioned. The group answered the challenge; donated the funds, and Hills and retired Navy Captain Oliver Shearer of Raymond worked with welder Brian Dunn of Raymond. In May of 2013, the Raymond battlefield interpretation was enhanced with a new limber.



Members of the Bramon Brigade on April 29, 2012, at the site where Brig. Gen. William Barksdale's Mississippi Brigade opposed the Federal crossing of the Rappahannock River (in the background) on December 11, 1862. Gary Bramon of Novato, CA, who founded the brigade, is at far left.

*photo by Parker Hills*

The artillery limber, completed in May 2013, with the caisson and two Confederate 12-pounder Napoleons in the background. The limber was sponsored by the Bramon Brigade of Novato, CA.

*photo by Parker Hills*



Cast aluminum artillery interpretive markers for both the Union and Confederate guns were installed on the battlefield in March of 2013, and two months later in May of 2013, Hills led the McMillan Brigade, named for its founder, Wallace McMillan of Jackson, MS, on a tour of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. Once again, advantage was taken of the Hazel Grove artillery display at Chancellorsville, and the need for a caisson at Raymond was mentioned. But since a caisson has two ammunition chests and a spare wheel, it was a more complicated build than a limber, and the estimated cost was \$5,000. As hoped, the group accepted the challenge and donated the funds. The construction of the caisson by Brian Dunn understandably took a bit longer than did the limber, but it was completed in early 2016. On May 5, 2016, the caisson was formally dedicated to the late Wallace McMillan in a ceremony on the Raymond battlefield.



The McMillan Brigade at Gettysburg, March 2010. Former FOR board member, the late David "Burley" Barton, is shown second from left.

*photo by Wallace McMillan*



Wallace McMillan (center) shields his eyes as he spots rounds for his artillery crew in the snow at Gettysburg, March 2010.

*photo by Parker Hills*

The guns may not boom on the Raymond battlefield as they did on that twelfth day of May in 1863, but they now stand as silent sentinels of the battle that was fought along Fourteenmile Creek. Visitors to the Raymond battlefield can now stop; ponder; remember, and honor the soldiers, both Blue and Gray, who served there in 1863.

"End of Day at Artillery Ridge"  
July 2, 2021  
*photo by Eric Bobo*

