



AMERICAN
BATTLEFIELD
TRUST ★ ★ ★

July 2023

Dear Patriotic Friend,

As you have likely heard me say before, battlefield preservation is like putting together a thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle. It takes patience and time ... and a lot of luck and hard work. Piece by piece, parcel by parcel, until it slowly comes together.

Just like a jigsaw puzzle, every piece is critical. And if a piece is lost, it leaves a hole that jeopardizes the entire picture.

And also like an in-process puzzle, it can drive me crazy when there are unprotected tracts in the middle of a battlefield — it can take years or even decades for those tracts to become available. And then when they do, we have to hope and pray that the seller is willing to listen to our offer ... and that they won't be seduced by the well-financed developers and real estate brokers working on behalf of data warehouses and solar farm companies who are looking to buy up everything in sight.

To put things bluntly, we are facing unprecedented, generational threats to our mission to preserve hallowed ground. And quite frankly, we need heroes.

Today, we have an opportunity to save nearly 32 acres of battlefield land at Chickasaw Bayou and Champion Hill in Mississippi.

And I can tell you that these tracts are the very definition of puzzle pieces. The project we have before us includes purchasing twelve individual parcels — each a small piece of the puzzle — that dot these battlefields and help fill in the gaps of the Vicksburg Campaign's story.

My friend, stringing together a dozen parcels and a half dozen willing sellers at Champion Hill and Chickasaw Bayou is no easy feat. We're dotting every "i" and crossing every "t" to be able to pull off this win for battlefield preservation and add significant acreage of preserved land at both of these battlefields.

The total value for all these parcels is more than \$2.1 million. That's far more than we could normally afford, but we've applied for federal and state grants — some have already been awarded, and some are still pending — that could help get us over the finish line. If we are able to secure these grants, the Trust would still need to come up with an additional \$327,825 to close the deal. That means that **every dollar you can contribute is multiplied by \$6.50!**

Now, I don't presume to think that raising any amount is easy...



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But make no mistake: if we don't do this now, we might *never* have the opportunity again.

Take a look at the maps I've enclosed, and you'll see how each and every parcel is needed to fully save these battlefields. All the areas in blue and brown have been saved, parcel by parcel, piece by piece. When we saved our first tract of land at Champion Hill, it seemed like a drop in the bucket, and today, thanks to the commitment of generous members like you, we are filling in the gaps and creating open vistas of battlefield for all future generations to experience.

The battlefields I'm writing about represent some of the most significant battles in the Civil War. As you know, the Vicksburg Campaign is often called one of the turning points, if not *the turning point*, of the Civil War.

The Mississippi River provided the primary conduit for supplies and communication heading north or south, and the Confederate hold on Vicksburg allowed the passage of goods from west to east.

To Confederate President Jefferson Davis, Vicksburg was the "*nailhead that holds the South's two halves together.*" While President Abraham Lincoln remarked: "*Vicksburg is the key! The war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket.*"

But the fall of Vicksburg wasn't accomplished in a single battle. It took a bloody campaign. And one could say, it began at the **Battle of Chickasaw Bayou**, also called the Battle of Walnut Grove, where General William T. Sherman attempted to defeat Confederate forces led by Generals John C. Pemberton and Stephen D. Lee.

As part of the Federal forces under General Ulysses S. Grant marched south down the Mississippi Central Railroad in December 1862, Sherman's men made an attack on the Confederates at Chickasaw Bayou, Mississippi.

Despite the importance of their mission, neither artillery bombardment nor infantry attack could dislodge the Confederate forces from their defenses. Union soldiers suffered a staggering 1,776 casualties compared to 207 on the Confederate side.

Sherman then attempted to lead a Union advance against the Confederates at nearby Drumgould's Bluff on December 31, 1862, but heavy fog interfered with his plans, and he called off the attack.

Though the resounding Confederate victory at Chickasaw Bayou effectively thwarted the Union's first overland attempt to capture Vicksburg, the Union's fortunes changed in a few months, as the Vicksburg Campaign heated up. By the spring of 1863, the heart of the campaign was at **Champion Hill**.

Historians far and wide acknowledge Champion Hill as *the* most decisive battle of *the* most crucial campaign in *the* most important theater of the Civil War.

Our good friend Terry Winschel, author and retired Chief Historian at Vicksburg National Military Park, has called Champion Hill "*the largest, bloodiest, and most significant action of the Vicksburg campaign.*"

My colleague, the Trust's own Chief Historian Garry Adelman, rightly sums up the Vicksburg Campaign as "the fight that cut the Confederacy in two." And it is impossible to understand the Vicksburg Campaign if you do not understand the Battle of Champion Hill.



Chickasaw Bayou was the scene of an attack on the Confederates by General William T. Sherman.



Sketch of Chickasaw Bayou and Vicksburg Bluffs

In 2007, the Trust purchased an easement directly from the Champion family — the reason it's called Champion Hill. And then as you'll no doubt remember, in 2021, the Champion family gave us the extraordinary opportunity to purchase the 144 acres of land outright, as well as an additional 354 acres of family-owned land nearby.

This year, as we honor the 160th anniversary of the Battle of Champion Hill, we have the opportunity to add another 20 acres to this significant battlefield park.

Picture it in your mind ... 7:00 a.m. on the clear morning of May 16, 1863 ... A brigade of Alabamans stretching west, along a ridge. A brigade of Georgians running south along the Jackson Road to the all-important Crossroads formed by the intersection of the Jackson, Middle, and Ratliff Plantation roads.

Whichever army controlled the Crossroads controlled the battlefield, and the army that controlled the crest of Champion Hill, just 800 yards to the north, controlled the crossroads.

The bloodshed began when two Federal divisions, part of Grant's Army of the Tennessee, advanced toward the Hill. With a mighty cheer, the men in Union blue slammed into the Confederates along the ridge and drove them back, fighting their way toward the Crossroads.

Confederate General John C. Pemberton ordered his finest combat division into action to check the Federal advance and secure the Crossroads. The Rebel Yell echoed above the din as battle-hardened Missourians and Arkansans launched a vicious counterattack, rolling across the vital Crossroads and re-taking the crest of Champion Hill.

The Southerners' great surge, which threatened to split Grant's army, was finally brought to a halt by the arrival of fresh Union troops and the withering fire of massed batteries. In seven or eight hours of some of the hardest fighting of the entire War, described as "*wild confusion and panic*," the Union army suffered nearly 2,500 casualties while the Confederates lost almost 4,300 men, resulting in the Southerners' retreat.

The twin Union victories at Champion Hill and nearby Big Black River Bridge the next day forced the Confederates into a doomed position inside the fortifications of Vicksburg.

While the Civil War raged on, the fall of Vicksburg was a turning point from which the Confederacy never fully recovered.

Looking back today, you and I recognize the significance of this moment, and of this land. We know it is sacred soil where men in blue and gray alike spilled blood and performed acts of valor. But 160 years ago, things were different.

As soon as the smoke cleared, families (many who had lost everything) pulled on their boots and got back to doing what they had done before — farming and caring for their families. Over the next 160-odd years, tracts were divided up and sold to willing buyers who may have built houses, or strip malls, or commercial warehouses with little to no regard for the history of the land or the Civil War.

Our job — the mission you and I share — is to put the pieces of our history back together so that we can study and learn about the sacrifice, courage, and valor that shaped and defined this country. And so that you and



©Mike Taplacido | American Battlefield Trust
Union troops fought off the Confederate forces at Champion Hill and moved on to the Crossroads.



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Chickasaw Bayou and Champion Hill are an important part of the Vicksburg Campaign.

I, our children and grandchildren, and all future generations can walk this hallowed ground.

Today, we have the opportunity to put some of these pieces back together and save **six new parcels** at Champion Hill that **total 20 acres**. These tracts are contiguous, making it a remarkable opportunity to preserve this historic land. More importantly, each of them is a critical **“missing piece”** adding to the 1,223 acres that you have already helped to save at Champion Hill. You could consider it a feather in your cap to help save this additional 20 acres for all time with your gift today!

At **Chickasaw Bayou**, we have the chance to save **11 acres** divided into **eight parcels** with eight different owners. Getting all the sellers on the same page and getting all to agree to sell would seem nearly impossible.

But somehow, we have done it, and we cannot lose this opportunity! Every owner is now at the table and ready to sell. We just need to raise the last \$327,825 to seal the deal here, and at Champion Hill. **Your generous gift today will be matched \$6.50-to-\$1, multiplying your battlefield-saving impact!**

Yet, cost is only part of the equation.

By acquiring this land right now, you are ensuring that future generations will be able to come to Champion Hill and Chickasaw Bayou (as well as battlefields all across America) and learn in an exceptional outdoor classroom.

Thanks to you, individuals of all ages can experience the chills you and I so often feel at such an historic place ... hear the distant echoes of drums beating and shots fired ... spend time reflecting on all that took place ... and, hopefully, come away more informed citizens.

As I hope my letter to you has made clear, by helping to acquire these essential pieces of land from the Vicksburg Campaign, you're protecting a place not only where American history was made ... you're safeguarding a place where America itself was made.

That's why I again ask you — indeed, urge you — to please send your gift, knowing this is our once-in-a-generation opportunity to buy, and protect forever, almost **32 acres** of the remaining pieces of the Vicksburg Campaign.

But please, I must ask you to hurry. No deal is done until the papers are signed and the money accounted for.

Please know in advance, my friend, that I am deeply humbled by your tremendous dedication to the essential mission of the American Battlefield Trust. Thank you for sharing so much of your own success in our crucial work of battlefield preservation, work that is more important right now than it has ever been before. Thank you!



With warmest regards,

David N. Duncan

David N. Duncan
President

P.S. Just like a jigsaw puzzle, every piece of battlefield land at Chickasaw Bayou and Champion Hill is critical to telling the full story of the Vicksburg Campaign and the Civil War. And if any piece is lost, it leaves a hole that jeopardizes the entire picture. Please consider sending your gift today and see every dollar matched **\$6.50-to-\$1** to save 12 parcels that add up to nearly 32 acres of prime, unprotected battlefield land at Chickasaw Bayou and Champion Hill. Do it in honor of the 160th anniversary of the fall of Vicksburg so that for the next 160 years, future generations will have you to thank for this extraordinary gift you are giving to protect America and its history.