



Chicago's Battery Boys: The Chicago Mercantile Battery in the Civil War's Western Theater

Richard Brady Williams

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The Chicago Mercantile Battery was organized in 1862 by a group of prominent Chicago merchants. As part of Maj. Gen. John McClelland's 13th Corps, the battery participated in the long and arduous Vicksburg campaign. The artillerists performed well everywhere they were tested, including Chickasaw Bluffs, Port Gibson, Champion Hill, Big Black River, and the siege against Vicksburg. Ancillary operations included the reduction of Arkansas Post, the capture of Jackson, and others. During the siege of Vicksburg on May 22, 1863, Captain Pat White and his "Battery Boys" took part in the bloody attack against the 2nd Texas Lunette, pushing a one-ton field piece up a ravine to fire point blank within the shadows cast by the enemy's fortifications. (White and five of his artillerists would eventually receive the Medal of Honor for their valor that day.)

After Vicksburg fell, the Chicago battery transferred to New Orleans for service under Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Banks, who was preparing an invasion along the Red River into Texas. At Sabine Crossroads (Mansfield) on April 8, 1864, the "Battery Boys" were overrun by the enemy and nearly wiped out. In addition to the killed and wounded, two dozen gunners were shipped off to a Southern prison. Letters from the Battery Boys broke the wall of silence Banks had erected and alerted the country to the disaster his army had suffered in Louisiana. Swift retribution against White's cannoneers followed.

Richard Brady Williams' *Chicago's Battery Boys: The Chicago Mercantile Battery in the Civil War's Western Theater* sets forth in stunning detail the magnificent history of this long-overlooked artillery outfit. Based upon years of primary research and a wealth of archival documents, this study features more than 100 previously unpublished wartime letters, diaries, and other eyewitness reports that enrich our understanding of who these men were and what they endured for the cause of liberty and the Union. Williams skillfully weaves these contemporary accounts around a powerful narrative that will satisfy the most discriminating Civil War reader. This revised paperback edition features three dozen previously unpublished photographs of artillerists who served as "Battery Boys."

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