

★ THE U.S. ARMY CAMPAIGNS OF THE CIVIL WAR ★

# THE VICKSBURG CAMPAIGN

NOVEMBER 1862 –  
JULY 1863



Cover: *Detail from* First at Vicksburg—Assault of the 1st Battalion, 13th Infantry, 19  
May 1863 (U.S. Army in Action Series)

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THE  
VICKSBURG  
CAMPAIGN



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by  
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Washington, D.C., 2013





## INTRODUCTION

Although over one hundred fifty years have passed since the start of the American Civil War, that titanic conflict continues to matter. The forces unleashed by that war were immensely destructive because of the significant issues involved: the existence of the Union, the end of slavery, and the very future of the nation. The war remains our most contentious, and our bloodiest, with over six hundred thousand killed in the course of the four-year struggle.

Most civil wars do not spring up overnight, and the American Civil War was no exception. The seeds of the conflict were sown in the earliest days of the republic's founding, primarily over the existence of slavery and the slave trade. Although no conflict can begin without the conscious decisions of those engaged in the debates at that moment, in the end, there was simply no way to paper over the division of the country into two camps: one that was dominated by slavery and the other that sought first to limit its spread and then to abolish it. Our nation was indeed "half slave and half free," and that could not stand.

Regardless of the factors tearing the nation asunder, the soldiers on each side of the struggle went to war for personal reasons: looking for adventure, being caught up in the passions and emotions of their peers, believing in the Union, favoring states' rights, or even justifying the simple schoolyard dynamic of being convinced that they were "worth" three of the soldiers on the other side. Nor can we overlook the factor that some went to war to prove their manhood. This has been, and continues to be, a key dynamic in understanding combat and the profession of arms. Soldiers join for many reasons but often stay in the fight because of their comrades and because they do not want to seem like cowards. Sometimes issues of national impact shrink to nothing in the intensely personal world of cannon shell and minié ball.

Whatever the reasons, the struggle was long and costly and only culminated with the conquest of the rebellious Confederacy,

the preservation of the Union, and the end of slavery. These campaign pamphlets on the American Civil War, prepared in commemoration of our national sacrifices, seek to remember that war and honor those in the United States Army who died to preserve the Union and free the slaves as well as to tell the story of those American soldiers who fought for the Confederacy despite the inherently flawed nature of their cause. The Civil War was our greatest struggle and continues to deserve our deep study and contemplation.

RICHARD W. STEWART  
Chief Historian



# THE VICKSBURG CAMPAIGN NOVEMBER 1862–JULY 1863

## *Strategic Setting*

The campaign for the control of Vicksburg was one of the most important contests in determining the outcome of the Civil War. As President Abraham Lincoln observed, “Vicksburg is the key. The war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket.” The struggle for Vicksburg lasted more than a year, and when it was over, the outcome of the Civil War appeared more certain.

The centerpiece of the Vicksburg campaign was the Mississippi River, just as the great river is the centerpiece of the North American continent. The Mississippi and its tributaries drain over a million square miles of territory in the United States and Canada. These waterways included twenty thousand miles of navigable water, extending from Montana to Pennsylvania and from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico, making possible the large-scale settlement of the west. Between 1810 and 1860, the number of whites residing west of the Appalachians swelled from one million to fifteen million, thanks in large part to the availability of navigable waterways. The black population, mostly slaves, grew from two hundred thousand to over two million, concentrated along the Mississippi. The rivers of the Mississippi basin provided an economic outlet for corn and hogs raised in Iowa and Ohio, as well as the sugar and cotton grown on the great plantations of Louisiana and Mississippi. By 1860, railroads were beginning to penetrate the region, but access to these

western rivers remained vital to the economy of both the Midwest and the Deep South.

When the Civil War started, the Mississippi and its tributaries proved highly important to the conduct of military operations west of the Appalachians. Typically, armies view rivers as obstacles. In the western theater of war, however, the rivers were highways that carried troops, supplies, and firepower. The same steam-powered riverboats that sustained the civilian economy made it possible to mount military campaigns that the bad roads and sparse railroads of the region could never have supported. Riverboats ranged in capacity from 250 to 1,700 tons. (A typical railroad train of the period might carry 150 tons, and a horse-drawn wagon could move only 1 or 2 tons of cargo.) A riverboat of 500 tons could sustain a typical field army for two days. One Mississippi riverboat could move a regiment of infantry; ten boats could transport an entire division. In addition, riverboats could deliver staggering amounts of firepower. The portion of the Union Navy's gunboat fleet supporting the Vicksburg operation typically carried some 200 large-caliber cannon. In comparison, the Union army conducted much of the campaign with 180 pieces of smaller-caliber field artillery.

Although the Mississippi and its tributaries were vital for both civilian and military purposes, access from the river to the shore was not always easy. Through much of its length, the Mississippi is flanked on both sides by low-lying ground, interspersed with swamps and bayous, where dry land is hard to find. However, on the eastern edge of the Mississippi's floodplain stands a line of bluffs extending from Kentucky into Louisiana. At certain points, the winding river runs along the foot of these bluffs providing locations where cargos could move directly between riverboat and high, firm ground. Additionally, these bluffs were the only places where artillery could readily command the river itself. Not surprisingly, the places where the river met the bluffs tended to be important for both commercial and military purposes. In Kentucky, the town of Columbus occupied such a location, as did Memphis, Tennessee. In Mississippi, Vicksburg, Grand Gulf, Rodney, and Natchez all sat on bluffs overlooking the river. Port Hudson and Baton Rouge in Louisiana were similarly situated. Just north of Vicksburg were Snyder's Bluff and Haynes' Bluff, where the navigable Yazoo River met the same line of bluffs. In the course of military operations, Confederate forces used many of these locations to interdict the river with cannon fire. Union forces

wanted the same spots to offload armies, equipment, and supplies. Thus the war for control of the Mississippi was largely a struggle for control of these river-bluff interfaces.

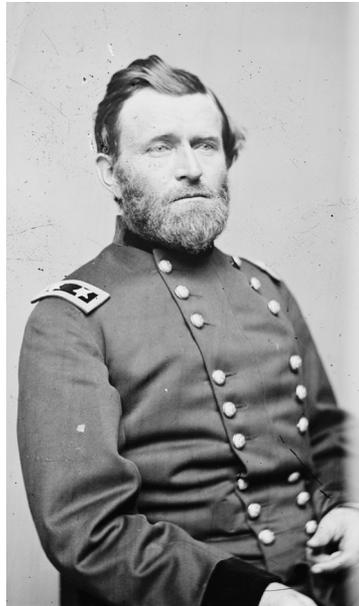
The city of Vicksburg was important for other reasons as well. At the outbreak of the war it was the second largest town in Mississippi (after Natchez) and a trading center of considerable significance. Agricultural products raised in the fertile Yazoo Delta, lying between Vicksburg and Memphis, traveled down the Yazoo to Vicksburg, where they were transferred to larger vessels for transport to New Orleans. Other products arriving in Vicksburg by river were loaded onto trains of the Southern Railroad of Mississippi, which ran eastward to Jackson and Meridian. The thriving city was also home to two foundries capable of producing artillery, ammunition, railroad rail, and steam boilers. As the war closed in, Vicksburg became vital to the Confederacy as an east-west transfer point for agricultural commodities from Louisiana and weapons brought through the Union blockade by way of Texas.

Vicksburg was just as important to the Union war effort as it was to the Confederates. President Lincoln, always concerned about maintaining his political support in the Midwestern states, was fully aware of the Mississippi's importance to the farmers of that region. One of Lincoln's worst fears was that those states might seek an accommodation with the Confederacy if that was the only way they could gain access to the vital waterway. Opening the Mississippi was the most important war aim for many Unionists in the Midwest. The state of Illinois alone provided over 36,000 troops for the campaign to secure Vicksburg.

The struggle to capture Vicksburg in 1863 was the final act of a two-year contest for control of the Mississippi River (*Map 1*). This larger campaign

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General Grant (Library of Congress)





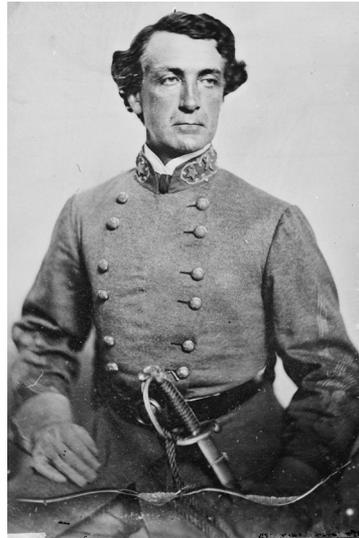
began in September 1861 when Confederate forces under Maj. Gen. Leonidas Polk occupied and fortified the bluffs at Columbus, Kentucky. The first major Union offensive to reopen the Mississippi occurred on the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers in February 1862 when Army forces under Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and Navy gunboats commanded by Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote captured Forts Henry and Donelson. With these bastions under Union control, Foote sent gunboats upstream on both rivers, effectively outflanking the Confederate position at Columbus and forcing its evacuation. In April 1862, Foote's gunboats supported Brig. Gen. John H. Pope's soldiers in the reduction of the Confederate fortifications at New Madrid and Island Number 10 on the Mississippi. The next Confederate positions downstream were Forts Pillow and Randolph, protecting Memphis, Tennessee. The capture of Corinth, Mississippi, by Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck's Union army outflanked these positions and forced their evacuation. Following a last-ditch naval defense of the city on 6 June, Memphis itself fell under Union control.

Meanwhile, another Union offensive opened against the lower Mississippi. In April 1862, Flag Officer David G. Farragut brought elements of the Western Gulf Blockading Squadron into the mouth of the river. This flotilla ran past Forts Jackson and St. Philip, defeated a Confederate naval force, and captured New Orleans, the largest city in the Confederacy.

The naval battles of New Orleans and Memphis destroyed most of the Confederacy's naval power on the western rivers. The Confederates lost all fourteen of their rams, twenty of twenty-five gunboats (converted commercial vessels), and six of the seven ironclads either built or under construction. Henceforth, the Confederates would have to rely almost exclusively on shore batteries to challenge Union control of the waterways.

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*General Smith* (Library of Congress)



By the summer of 1862, Vicksburg was the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi, with five batteries of artillery overlooking the channel. On 18 May, Farragut's ships approached Vicksburg from below. He demanded the surrender of the city, which the Confederate commander, Brig. Gen. Martin L. Smith, curtly refused. Farragut immediately withdrew, only to return several weeks later with 3,200 Army troops under the command of Brig. Gen. Thomas Williams. On 1 July, Farragut linked up with Navy Flag Officer Charles H. Davis and a flotilla of gunboats that had come down from Memphis. At this point in time, Union forces controlled the entire Mississippi River except for a two-mile stretch along the Vicksburg batteries. The naval vessels opened a bombardment of the city, while Williams' troops attempted to dig a canal across the peninsula opposite Vicksburg to allow boats to bypass the Confederate batteries. The canal failed, and falling water levels threatened to strand Farragut's ocean-going vessels. The arrival of a lone Confederate ironclad, the *Arkansas*, persuaded Farragut to seek the safety of deeper waters downstream, carrying Williams' troops with him. Davis and his gunboats also departed, heading back to Memphis. The Union armies in the region, preoccupied first with efforts to capture Chattanooga and later by the Confederate counteroffensive into Tennessee and Kentucky, had nothing left with which to threaten Vicksburg. Thus, with the departure of Davis and Farragut, the Confederate defenders of Vicksburg gained a timely reprieve.

In September 1862, Confederate troops and slaves brought in from surrounding farms and plantations began digging fortifications on Vicksburg's landward side. Maj. Samuel H. Lockett, an 1859 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, laid out the fortifications using the hilly, ravine-cut terrain to best advantage. What Lockett created was not a continuous reinforced parapet, but rather a system of nine major fortifications commanding the roads and the railroad entering Vicksburg from the east. Rifle pits (infantry fighting positions) linked the major forts, creating a defensive line nine miles long, extending from the Mississippi above Vicksburg to the river below the town. Union engineers later described it as "rather an intrenched camp than a fortified place, owing much of its strength to the difficult ground, obstructed by fallen trees in its front. . . ." In addition to the landward fortifications, the Confederates strengthened the river defenses, which ultimately totaled thirteen batteries mounting thirty-seven large-

caliber cannon, plus thirteen lighter field artillery pieces to repel amphibious landings.

In the autumn of 1862 Vicksburg became the second most heavily fortified city in the Confederacy. Only the Confederate capital at Richmond, Virginia, was more strongly guarded. Not everyone, however, was impressed by this “Gibraltar of the West.” Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston sagely noted in his postwar memoirs that the extensive fortifications came at a price:

The usual error of Confederate engineering had been committed there. An immense intrenched camp, requiring an army to hold it, had been made instead of a fort requiring only a small garrison. In like manner the water-batteries had been planned to prevent the bombardment of the town, instead of to close the navigation of the river to the enemy; distributed along a front of two miles, instead of being so placed that their fire might be concentrated on a single vessel.

Whatever its merits or deficiencies as a fortified position, Vicksburg commanded only a few miles of the Mississippi River. To block Union access to the Yazoo River, the Confederates established batteries for nine large guns at Snyder’s Bluff north of Vicksburg. Downstream from Vicksburg, 244 miles away by the winding Mississippi, they fortified the town of Port Hudson, Louisiana, perched on top of an eighty-foot bluff on the east bank overlooking the river. In September 1862, at the same time that Major Lockett was laying out the works at Vicksburg, Confederate troops under Brig. Gen. William Beall began the construction of a four and one-half mile fortified line on Port Hudson’s landward side. The line was strongest on the southern end, the most likely direction for a Union ground attack—Baton Rouge, occupied by Union troops, was only twenty-five miles away in that direction. Facing the river were nine batteries containing nineteen large-caliber guns. Maj. Gen. Franklin Gardner assumed command of the post in December 1862, and presided over the influx of troops to the strongpoint. In March 1863, the Confederate garrison in and around Port Hudson reached peak strength of over five brigades and 20,000 troops.

The river batteries at Port Hudson had an advantage over those at Vicksburg. Any Union boats attempting to pass the batteries at Vicksburg would be traveling with the current, nearly doubling their speed. At Port Hudson, the Union vessels would be

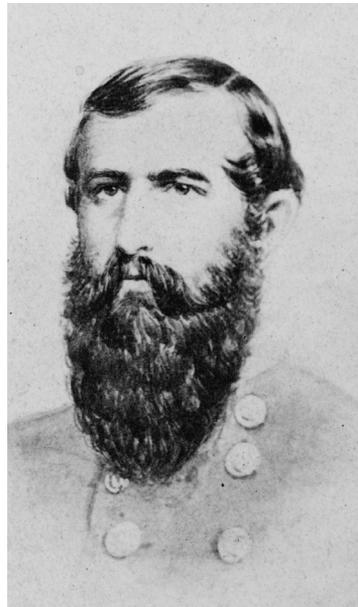
plodding upstream against the current, greatly prolonging their exposure to fire from the shore.

In July 1862, the Confederates controlled only the river immediately in front of Vicksburg; however, by December they controlled 244 miles of the great river, thanks to the batteries at Vicksburg and Port Hudson. This stretch of river includes the mouths of the Big Black River in Mississippi and, most importantly, the Red River in Louisiana. With the Red River secure, the Confederates possessed an excellent east-west link binding Louisiana and Texas to the rest of the Confederacy.

In October 1862, the Confederate War Department established a new geographical command, the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana, incorporating both Port Hudson and Vicksburg. Authorities in Richmond selected Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton to command this vital department. Pemberton was a rather unusual choice for such an important position. A Pennsylvanian by birth, he was an 1837 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy who had spent most of his career, including the Mexican War years, as a staff officer. In 1848, he married the daughter of a prosperous Norfolk, Virginia, businessman. When Virginia seceded from the Union in 1861, Pemberton was torn between his own family's loyalty to the Union and his wife's staunch support of Virginia. Lacking any strong political convictions of his own, he ultimately resigned from the U.S. Army and accepted a commission as a major in the Confederate army. Two days later Pemberton received a promotion to the rank of brigadier general, perhaps as a result of his father-in-law's influence. In January 1862 he became a major general, despite having had no combat experience in the present conflict. After a somewhat turbulent stint

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*General Pemberton*  
(Library of Congress)



in the Department of South Carolina and Georgia, Confederate President Jefferson Davis promoted Pemberton to the rank of lieutenant general and sent him west to command the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana.

From the beginning, Pemberton perceived his mission to be strictly the defense of his department, primarily the retention of Vicksburg and Port Hudson. Accordingly, he pressed ahead with the construction of fortifications already underway, and directed that supplies be stockpiled in Vicksburg sufficient to maintain a force of 17,500 men for five months. As a department commander Pemberton saw his role to be that of a manager of resources, dispatching subordinate commanders to handle local threats while he remained at headquarters.

Two organizational complications made Pemberton's job more difficult. First, Pemberton's department was itself part of the larger Department of the West, commanded by General Johnston. But Pemberton's orders told him to report directly to the War Department, not through Johnston, thus muddling the chain of command. Secondly, the western boundary of Pemberton's department was the Mississippi River itself. He had no authority over the troops on the far bank. It is an axiom of war that one should not place a unit boundary along a route that the enemy might use as an avenue of attack, because the seams between units are commonly the weakest points of a defensive line. In this case the seam was the Mississippi River itself. This boundary between Pemberton's Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana, to the east of the river, and the Department of the Trans-Mississippi, to the west, had already served as an enemy avenue of attack and would almost certainly be threatened again. Nor could Pemberton expect much help from the hard-pressed Confederates on the far side of the river. The governor of Arkansas, weary of seeing troops from the Trans-Mississippi go east, never to return, had already threatened to secede from the Confederacy if the government in Richmond failed to protect his state.

Ultimately, Pemberton's department would contain 43,000 troops organized into five divisions. The division commanders were General Smith, who had defended Vicksburg against Farragut's incursion in 1862, Maj. Gens. John H. Forney, William W. Loring, and Carter L. Stevenson, and Brig. Gen. John S. Bowen. Four of the five were graduates of the U.S. Military Academy, the exception being Loring who had risen from the ranks to become

a colonel in the prewar Army. For most of the campaign, there were no corps headquarters in Pemberton's department. In fact, his forces did not constitute a clearly organized field army, nor did Pemberton see himself as an army commander, during much of his tenure in department command.

Pemberton's chief adversary in the unfolding contest was Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. The contrast between the two men was striking. Grant came from humble origins. Born and raised in rural Ohio, he graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1843, served with distinction in the Mexican War, and married the daughter of a slave-owning Missouri farmer. His career went downhill from there. The tedium of peacetime service and the long separations from his family left him bored, depressed, and lonely. He acquired a reputation as a heavy drinker. Finally, he resigned his commission in 1854. Grant tried his hand at farming and real estate, without much success. The outbreak of the Civil War found him working as a clerk in his father's Galena, Illinois, leather goods store.

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*General Stevenson*  
(Library of Congress)



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*General Bowen*  
(Battles and Leaders of the  
Civil War)



From that point on, Grant's rise to prominence was rapid. He began his Civil War career in June 1861 as a colonel commanding a regiment of Illinois volunteers. From there he rose through progressively larger commands, gaining valuable experience at each level. By February 1862, he commanded a corps-size force in the capture of Forts Henry and Donelson, which brought him to national prominence and earned him a promotion to the rank of major general and command of the Army of the Tennessee. Modest, quiet, and unpretentious, Grant won the respect of his troops and his superiors alike. President Lincoln was pleased to have a general who was more interested in taking the fight to the enemy than in self-promotion: "What I want, and what the people want, is generals who will fight battles and win victories. Grant has done this and I propose to stand by him." Unlike most of his counterparts, Union or Confederate, Grant always based his plans on what he could do to the enemy, rather than worrying about what his enemy might do to him. This mindset got Grant into trouble on several occasions, most notably at Shiloh in April 1862, when a Confederate army under General Albert Sidney Johnston surprised Grant's army in its camps and nearly drove it into the Tennessee River. Unperturbed, Grant rallied his troops, brought up reinforcements, and commented, "Not beaten yet. Not by a damn sight." Most generals would have retreated after such a mauling. The next day Grant counterattacked at dawn and drove the Confederates from the field.

Most importantly, Grant was one of the first Union generals to recognize the fact that the Civil War could not be won simply by outmaneuvering the enemy or occupying a few vital centers. Shiloh taught Grant that the conflict would not end until the Confederate armies were beaten into submission. He believed in seizing the initiative and never relinquishing it, giving his opponents no opportunity to rest or reconstitute. Grant would be a dangerous opponent indeed for the inexperienced Pemberton.

### *Operations*

Grant's Army of the Tennessee was a seasoned force consisting largely of veteran troops accustomed to marching and fighting as a unit. Grant's principal subordinates were Maj. Gens. William T. Sherman, John A. McClernand, and James B. McPherson. Sherman

and McPherson were both U.S. Military Academy graduates. McClernand was a political general—a Democratic politician from Illinois who was instrumental in maintaining that state’s support of Lincoln’s war efforts. McClernand, anxious for an independent command, successfully lobbied with the Lincoln administration for permission to raise his own “Army of the Mississippi,” which McClernand would lead in a separate campaign to open the river. Upon obtaining the authorization he desired, McClernand went back to Illinois to raise the troops. General Halleck, no friend of political generals, promptly assigned the new recruits to Grant’s army.

The man who would become Grant’s naval partner in the campaign for Vicksburg, R. Adm. David D. Porter, assumed command of the Mississippi River Squadron in October 1862. Porter controlled approximately fifty-eight combat vessels, including thirteen ironclads, thirty-four “tinclads” (commercial vessels fitted with light armor and artillery pieces), two “timberclads,” and six rams. His force also included thirteen mortar boats, each of which mounted a single 13-inch siege mortar firing a 200-pound shell. Moreover, Farragut’s Western Gulf Blockading Squadron maintained a presence below Port Hudson with its seagoing ships. In addition to the Navy’s combat vessels, the river carried a sizeable fleet of Army transports and hospital boats. Thus Grant was assured of ample supply and overwhelming fire-power any time his army had access to navigable water. Grant and Porter formed an effective team, despite the fact that neither held command authority over the other. By this point in the war Grant knew what the Navy could reasonably be asked to do, and Porter knew what type of support the Army needed. Grant planned the campaigns, but Porter had veto power over all river-related operations.

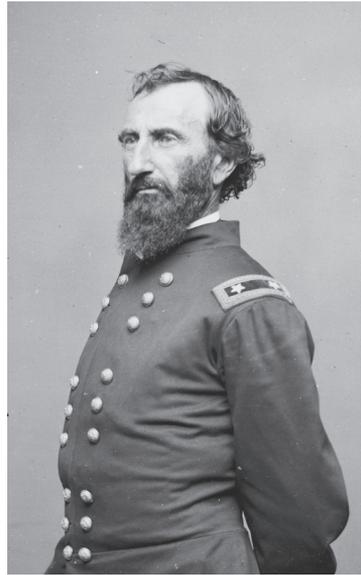
### **GRANT’S FIRST OFFENSIVES**

Ironically, Grant’s first deliberate offensive in the direction of Vicksburg took place well inland, far from the Mississippi River and Porter’s gunboats. Experience in the war so far had shown that the most economical way to eliminate a Confederate river fortress was to outflank it from the landward side rather than assaulting it directly. Accordingly, in November 1862, Grant began preparations for an advance from western Tennessee toward Jackson, Mississippi, which, if successful, would force the evacuation of Vicksburg, just as earlier offensives had outflanked Columbus,



*General Sherman*  
(Library of Congress)

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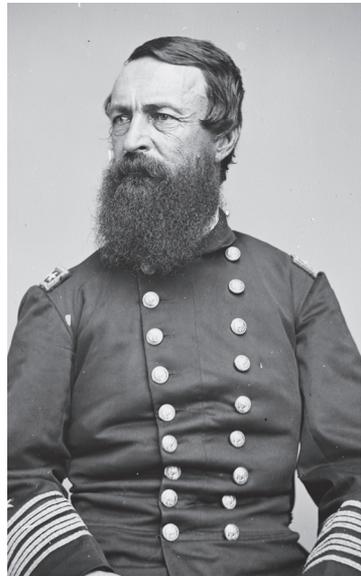
*General McClelland*  
(Library of Congress)

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*General McPherson*  
(Library of Congress)



*Admiral Porter*  
(Library of Congress)



Kentucky, and Memphis, Tennessee. There was one major difference: whereas his earlier operations had followed the course of the Tennessee River and could readily be supported by riverboat, Grant's proposed thrust into the heart of Mississippi would have to rely upon railroad and wagon haul for logistical support. Ultimately, this would prove to be the undoing of the expedition.

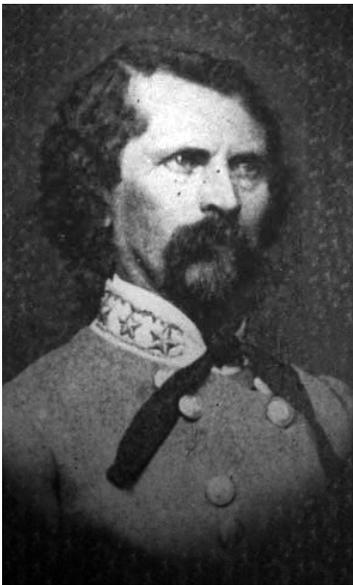
The Union offensive began on 26 November 1862. Forty-five thousand troops, organized into three "wings," advanced from western Tennessee into northwestern Mississippi. The main body advanced from Grand Junction, Tennessee, and marched along the Mississippi Central Railroad. In order to supply his force, Grant established a railhead at Holly Springs, Mississippi, and had his troops strip the countryside of provisions as they advanced. To meet this threat, Pemberton assembled 30,000 troops and directed them to prepare defensive positions along the Tallahatchie River. But when Grant's army reached the Tallahatchie on 2 December, and prepared to give battle, the Confederates were gone. A force of 7,000 Union troops from the Department of the Missouri, under the command of Brig. Gen. Alvin P. Hovey, had crossed the Mississippi from Helena,

Arkansas, and conducted a raid deep behind Pemberton's line. On 30 November, Pemberton had ordered his troops to abandon their positions on the Tallahatchie and fall back to the Yalobusha River fifty miles to the rear.

Grant, confronted with an opponent who would not stand and fight, and concerned for the safety of his lengthening supply line, directed Sherman to take one division back to Memphis, gather more troops there, and mount a river borne attack against Vicksburg itself while Grant advanced to the Yalobusha. Grant reasoned that Pemberton lacked the strength to fight both threats simultaneously and that one prong or the

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*General Van Dorn*  
(National Archives)

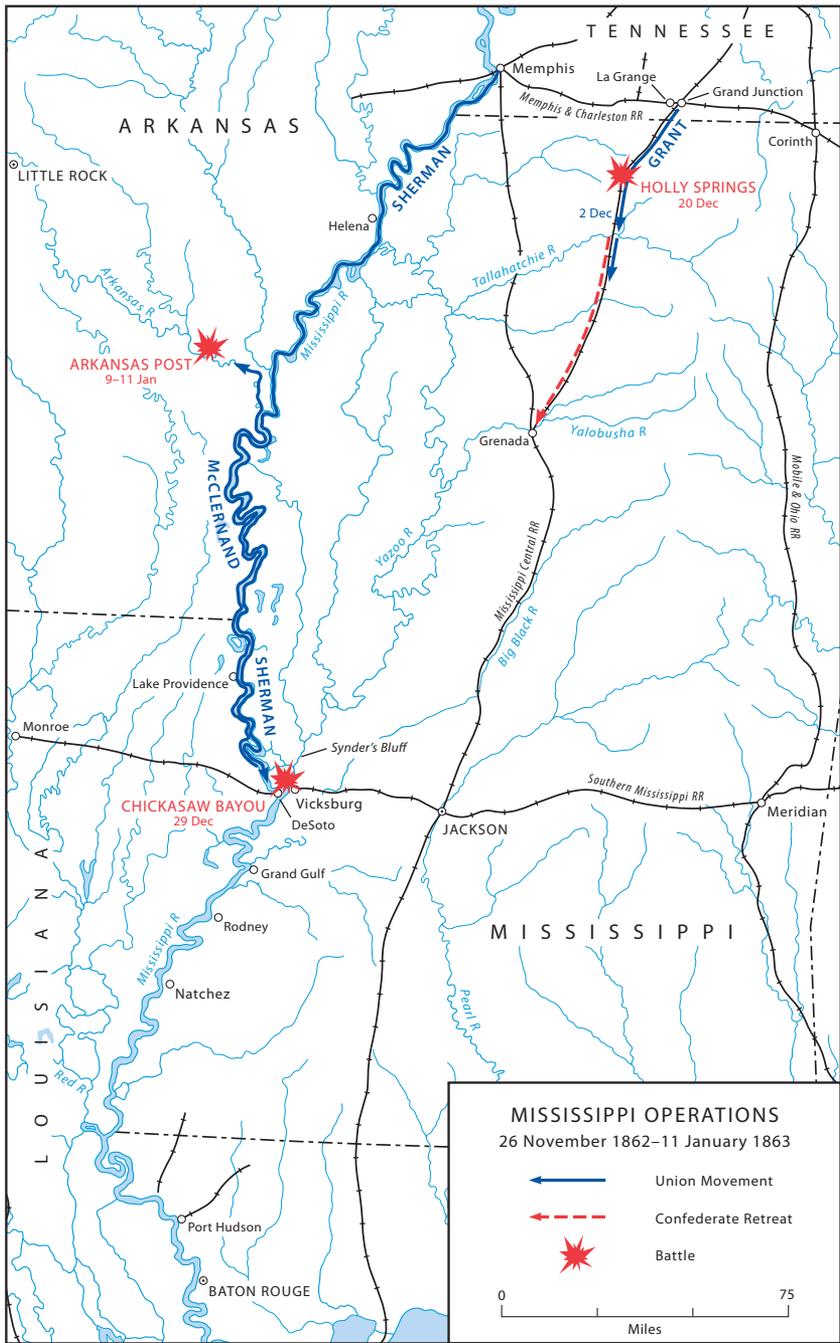


other was bound to puncture any Confederate defense. But Grant was never able to mount an attack on the Yalobusha river line. On 20 December, Confederate cavalry raiders under the command of Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn captured the Union army's main logistical base at Holly Springs. Meanwhile, another body of cavalry raiders led by Brig. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest attacked the railroads deep in the Union rear. Grant had no other option but to break off his offensive and withdraw (*Map 2*).

The raid on Holly Springs was noteworthy for a number of reasons. It was the only time during the Civil War in which a cavalry action decided the outcome of a campaign. It also marked the last occasion during the struggle for Vicksburg in which Confederate forces managed to seize the initiative on a large scale. From Holly Springs until the ultimate surrender of Vicksburg, Grant acted and Pemberton reacted.

Meanwhile, Sherman proceeded with his river borne operation. At the very least, Sherman hoped to secure a lodgment and logistical base somewhere near Vicksburg to re-provision Grant's main body when it would march south from the Yalobusha. At best, he hoped to capture Vicksburg itself. In either case, time was of the essence. Not only did Sherman believe he needed to force a landing quickly to relieve the pressure on Grant, but he wanted to attack before McClernand returned from Illinois to stage his own offensive on the Mississippi. As a result, Sherman's embarkation from Memphis was a hurried and haphazard affair. To augment the division he had brought back from the Tallahatchie, Sherman hastily assembled two more divisions from the forces in and around Memphis and impetuously threw the combined force onto transports. In the words of one newspaper correspondent, "companies were separated from their regiments, and officers from their companies; batteries were on one boat and caissons belonging to them on another; and the horses and artillerymen on still another." Escorted by gunboats from Porter's squadron, the convoy pulled out from Memphis on 20 December, the same day as the raid on Holly Springs. On its way downstream Sherman's expedition picked up an additional division from the Department of the Missouri as it passed Helena, Arkansas.

The massive convoy of sixty transports, plus its gunboat escorts, could not pass unnoticed. On 24 December, a Confederate observation post near Lake Providence, Louisiana, spotted the armada and telegraphed the news to DeSoto, across the river from



MAP 2

Vicksburg. The Vicksburg garrison quickly manned its defenses. Sherman, recognizing that the heavy batteries at Vicksburg made an attack on the town itself impractical, directed his force to turn up the Yazoo River and debark at some plantation landings ten miles northwest of Vicksburg.

On the morning of 26 December, twelve of Porter's gunboats led the convoy into the Yazoo, clearing "torpedoes" (mines) and proceeding upstream to bombard Snyder's Bluff as a diversion. Meanwhile, the transports carrying Sherman's four divisions began nosing into the riverbank near the point where Chickasaw Bayou flows into the Yazoo. As the troops disembarked, Sherman paid the price for the haste with which he had loaded his force at Memphis. Confusion reigned, with "companies seeking their regiments, officers seeking their companies; men hunting for missing horses; wagoners seeking their teams, and everybody looking for something which could not be found." Moreover, Sherman had unknowingly landed his force on what was virtually an island, bounded on one side by the Yazoo and by lakes and bayous on the other three. Two miles of bottomland stood between the riverboats and the high, dry ground of the bluff line. It took two days for the Union force to sort itself out, reconnoiter usable approaches, and push aside the Confederate obstacles and skirmish lines that sprang up along the way. Finally, by nightfall on 28 December, Sherman's four divisions, totaling 30,000 men, closed in on Chickasaw Bayou where it flowed sluggishly along the base of the bluffs.

The Confederates had not been idle. General Smith, commanding the Vicksburg garrison, had 6,500 troops on hand when news of Sherman's approach first arrived. All but 1,000 of these marched out of Vicksburg and manned defenses along Chickasaw Bayou, under the tactical command of Brig. Gen. Stephen D. Lee. Pemberton—no longer threatened by Grant—rushed reinforcements by rail from the Yalobusha line to Vicksburg. Pemberton himself arrived on 26 December, the day Sherman's force landed. By the time Sherman's troops were in position to cross the bayou and assault the bluffs, Pemberton had 15,000 men waiting to meet them.

Sherman planned a three-pronged assault for 29 December. The division under Brig. Gen. George W. Morgan was to make the main effort with three brigades, crossing Chickasaw Bayou on an existing causeway bridge and on a pontoon bridge to be laid the night before. Supporting Morgan on the left was Brig. Gen.

Frank P. Blair's brigade of Brig. Gen. Frederick Steele's division. On Morgan's right the divisions of Brig. Gens. Morgan L. Smith and Andrew J. Smith were to ford the bayou and fix the enemy in their front. The infantry would have to attack with limited artillery support because of the restricted fields of fire on the floodplain. The massive guns on Porter's gunboats, two miles to the rear, were of no use whatsoever.

The attack began to unravel even before it got underway. Troops assigned to emplace the pontoon bridge for General Morgan's division discovered that some of the components had been left behind in Memphis, and then in the darkness they proceeded to place the bridge on the wrong body of water. By the time their error was discovered, dawn broke and Confederate fire prevented the emplacement of the bridge on Chickasaw Bayou. The loss of this bridge reduced Morgan's assault force from three brigades to one.

Nonetheless, General Morgan ordered the attack. A single brigade, under the command of Col. John F. DeCoursey, crossed Chickasaw Bayou on the causeway bridge and pushed onto the upward-sloping ground beyond. Lee's brigade of Confederates stopped DeCoursey with fire from the front and both flanks. Blair's brigade, which assaulted to the left of DeCoursey, met a similar fate. "All formations were broken; the assaulting forces were jammed together," Morgan reported. To Morgan's right, Brig. Gen. John M. Thayer's brigade of Steele's division attempted to force a crossing of the bayou, but in the confusion only one regiment actually made it into the fight. When Thayer saw DeCoursey and Blair retreating across the causeway bridge, he recognized that "it was nothing but slaughter to remain," and he too withdrew.

The fixing attack on the right side of the Union line fared no better. Just one brigade from General Morgan Smith's division managed to engage the enemy in force. A few elements crossed Chickasaw Bayou only to be pinned down on the far bank by fire from Brig. Gen. Seth Barton's Confederate brigade. The survivors huddled behind the protection of the bayou's bank until nightfall, when they withdrew.

Although Sherman's force outnumbered the Confederates by two to one, the assault of 29 December never had much of a chance to succeed. Due in part to the nature of the terrain and in part to confusion in the Union ranks, only four of Sherman's ten

brigades were fully engaged. This fraction could not prevail against a stout Confederate defense.

Sherman did not immediately abandon the expedition. In conjunction with Porter, he laid plans for a surprise assault against Snyder's Bluff to be launched in the early morning hours of 31 December. Heavy fog forced the cancellation of this enterprise. Only then did Sherman acknowledge defeat and order a withdrawal from the Yazoo.

The battle at Chickasaw Bayou was a costly one for Union forces. Casualties totaled 208 killed, 1,005 wounded, and 563 missing. The Confederates reported 57 killed, 120 wounded, and 10 missing. But even if Sherman had succeeded in crossing Chickasaw Bayou and storming the bluffs beyond, he would have been in a precarious position. Grant, with the main force, was no longer advancing for a linkup. Pemberton could have turned his full weight to eradicating whatever lodgment Sherman might have been able to establish.

An irate McClernand met Sherman's convoy when it sailed down the Yazoo and out into the Mississippi. McClernand had returned from Illinois to Memphis only to discover that the troops he had raised for his own expedition had been diverted by Grant and Sherman. By virtue of seniority of rank and the president's authorization for an independent river campaign, McClernand assumed command of Sherman's expeditionary force, which he renamed the Army of the Mississippi and organized into two corps, commanded by Sherman and Morgan.

The Army of the Mississippi's first and only operation was not on the Mississippi at all. It took place on the Arkansas River, well upstream from Vicksburg. On 5 January 1863, McClernand led his army on sixty transports upstream toward a Confederate fort twenty-five miles up the Arkansas. This position, called Arkansas Post, was a strongly fortified camp with three heavy guns overlooking the river. It also served as a base of operations for Confederate raiders harassing Union transports on the Mississippi. The Confederate garrison numbered 4,900 when McClernand's force arrived on 9 January. Porter's gunboats shelled the post that day and the next, silencing the three guns. Meanwhile, McClernand's troops landed three miles downstream from the fort and began working their way toward the enemy stronghold. On 11 January, McClernand launched a ground assault against the battered fort. Hard fighting ensued, but as the Union troops

reached the main parapet white flags appeared spontaneously along the Confederate defenses. Confronted by the collapse of part of his line, the Confederate commander, Brig. Gen. Thomas J. Churchill, surrendered the fort and 4,791 troops. Another sixty Confederates died in the fighting, with an additional seventy-three wounded and eighty missing. McClernand's forces lost 134 killed, 898 wounded, and 29 missing. On Porter's ironclads, six sailors died and twenty-five were wounded.

Relishing his first victory in independent command, McClernand intended to continue up the Arkansas River to Little Rock and beyond. When informed of these plans, Grant vetoed them and directed McClernand to return to the Mississippi. McClernand disputed Grant's authority, asserting that the Army of the Mississippi was independent of Grant's department. When McClernand appealed to Washington, Halleck backed Grant and instructed Grant either to relieve McClernand or to take command of the riverine force himself. Grant opted for the latter. "Two commanders on the same field are always one too many," he observed. On 30 January 1863, Grant's headquarters issued a General Order announcing that Grant assumed command of the river borne army and that Grant's headquarters would be "with the expedition." He brought with him much of the force from western Tennessee. The Army of the Mississippi was absorbed into Grant's Army of the Tennessee. Grant organized his enlarged command into three corps—the XIII Corps under McClernand, the XV Corps under Sherman, and the XVII Corps under his young protégé, McPherson. (Another corps, the XVI, remained in Tennessee.) Grant assembled his command at two bases, Milliken's Bend and Young's Point, on the west bank of the Mississippi a few miles upstream from Vicksburg. Thus, almost by accident, the main effort in the contest for Vicksburg shifted to the Mississippi River.

## THE BAYOU EXPEDITIONS

Grant's immediate problem was to get his army out of the malarial floodplain and up onto the bluffs on the east side of the river. A direct assault on Vicksburg itself was not feasible given the vulnerability of steam-powered riverboats to artillery fire. The Vicksburg batteries blocked the Mississippi downstream, and the guns on Snyder's Bluff prevented any movement by boat upstream on the Yazoo. Accordingly, Grant sought some means to bypass

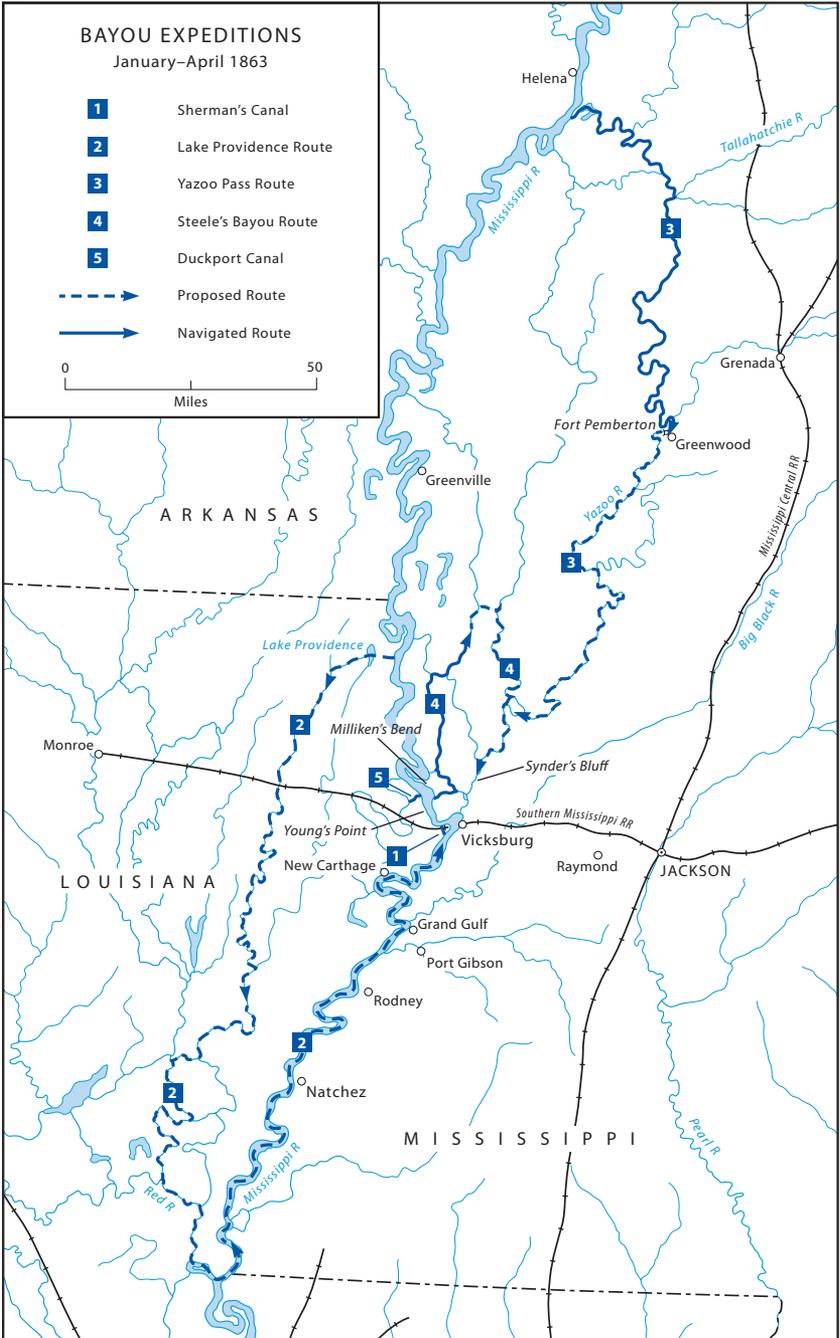
one or the other of those fortified places, allowing his army to reach the bluffs either north or south of Vicksburg.

The weather quickly compounded Grant's difficulties. Heavy rains began to fall, and by 20 January the back swamps covering much of the floodplain were full of water. Then the Mississippi began to rise, breaching levees and flooding much of the remaining dry ground. The flooding continued for nearly three months. A representative of the Sanitary Commission described the scene: "The lower Mississippi was on a rampage, and was all over its banks. It was shoreless in some places, and stretched its dull, turbid waste of waters as far as the eye could reach. . . ." Dry ground was at a premium, with scarcely enough room for Grant's men to pitch their camps. At Young's Point, the only ground available was the levee along the river. Disease broke out in the sodden camps and mortality rose. According to the Sanitary Commission agent: "For miles, the inside of the levee was sown with graves. . . . In most cases the poor fellows had been wrapped in their blankets and buried without coffins. . . . In places the levee was broken or washed out by the waters, and the decaying dead were partially disinterred."

As if oblivious to the suffering of his men, Grant proceeded with his efforts to outflank Vicksburg. Since maneuver by marching was clearly out of the question, Grant sought ways to maneuver by boat. Between late January and early April, Grant initiated five different projects designed to get around Vicksburg. Some of these expeditions ran concurrently, and although none succeeded, they certainly illustrate Grant's tenacity of purpose (*Map 3*).

The first of these projects was a renewed attempt to cut a canal across the peninsula opposite Vicksburg, which would have allowed transports to bypass the batteries and land below the town. Labor details from Sherman's XV Corps began digging a canal sixty feet wide, six feet deep, and over a mile long, with the hopes that when water was allowed into the ditch the river itself would scour out a permanent navigable channel. Work continued throughout February, with runaway slaves and two steam dredges augmenting Sherman's men. Then on 7 March, the river broke through the dam at the upper end of the ditch driving out the work details. A Confederate artillery battery, sited below Vicksburg to fire along the length of the canal, eventually put an end to all work.

Meanwhile, McPherson's XVII Corps began another project far upstream at Lake Providence, Louisiana. The plan here was to



**MAP 3**

breach the levee separating Lake Providence from the Mississippi, allowing the Mississippi's waters to flood a network of swamps, bayous, and rivers leading ultimately to the Red River, which emptied into the Mississippi far below Vicksburg. Work began on 3 February, and the Mississippi duly flooded the backcountry, but McPherson's men found the task of cutting a passage through the cypress swamps to be insurmountable. They labored on through February and March before the project was abandoned.

On the same day that work began at Lake Providence, engineers cut the levee at Yazoo Pass even farther upstream. The intent was to admit the waters of the Mississippi into the tributaries of the Yazoo, creating a navigable passage that would allow troops to land above the batteries at Snyder's Bluff. In this case, the engineering concept was sound and a feasible route created, only to be frustrated by Confederate countermeasures. A Union flotilla of ironclads, gunboats, and transports successfully navigated the breach and threaded its way through 200 miles of narrow waterways to the vicinity of Greenwood, Mississippi. There it encountered a fortified Confederate position, Fort Pemberton, manned by troops under General Loring. On 11 March, Union ironclads engaged the Confederate position but could not silence the heavy guns emplaced there. For the next three weeks the Union gunboats and troops drawn from Arkansas and from McPherson's corps tried in vain to silence or capture Loring's position. On 5 April, the expedition gave up and steamed back north.

The fourth experiment was actually Admiral Porter's idea. On 14 March, supported by troops from Sherman's XV Corps, Porter took five gunboats into the Yazoo and then up Steele's Bayou with the expectation that he would find a navigable route through a tangle of swamps and bayous that would actually take him back out to the Yazoo above Snyder's Bluff. The torturous route might just have been feasible until Confederate patrols dropped trees into the channel ahead. When the Confederates began to drop trees behind him, Porter gave up and backed his way out of the trap.

These failures did have one positive effect—they lulled the Confederates into a false sense of security. Pemberton was undoubtedly well aware that Northern newspapers, appalled at the disease and suffering in the Union camps and by the string of failed expeditions, were clamoring for Grant's removal. He became inured to news of Union troops probing here and there in the Mississippi floodplain. Such threats took a long time to

unfold, so there was no need for Pemberton to make rapid decisions. Moreover, other than sending troops to assist Loring in defeating the Yazoo Pass expedition, Pemberton had to do very little to thwart Grant's plans. There was no need for Pemberton to show any initiative—Grant was apparently wrecking the Army of the Tennessee all on his own.

Grant had one last bayou expedition up his sleeve. By digging a three-mile canal between the Mississippi and Big Bayou at Duckport, Louisiana, he hoped to open a navigable route to New Carthage, bypassing the guns at Vicksburg. Troops from McClernand's and Sherman's corps began work on 31 March, and on 13 April the waters of the Mississippi were admitted into the canal. The first vessels were using the new route when, on 18 April, the Mississippi receded rapidly. The Duckport canal dried out within a week. The failure of this particular project was of little consequence, however, for the Duckport canal was in reality just one nonessential component of a larger, more daring enterprise—the movement by land of Grant's entire main body down the Louisiana side of the Mississippi River.

#### OUTFLANKING VICKSBURG

On 31 March, the same day that work began on the ill-fated Duckport canal, the lead elements of McClernand's XIII Corps left their camps at Milliken's Bend and headed south. McClernand's orders were to open the road to New Carthage on the west bank of the Mississippi. As they marched, the troops "corduroyed" the muddy roads by laying timber across impassable sections, and bridged innumerable low spots still covered by water. Their route was a circuitous one, following the banks of Roundaway Bayou as it looped its course well west of the Mississippi. McClernand reached New Carthage with his advance party on 6 April, the four divisions of the XIII Corps following one by one. As McClernand's troops cleared the camps at Milliken's Bend, McPherson's XVII Corps took their place, ready to march south in turn. Sherman's XV Corps remained behind, guarding the base of operations north of Vicksburg. (*See Map 4.*)

Here Grant used his three corps commanders to the best advantage. The battle-hardened political general, McClernand, had many faults but timidity was not one of them. Grant could count on him to press the march along. Grant himself, characteristically, accompanied the lead corps where he could keep an eye

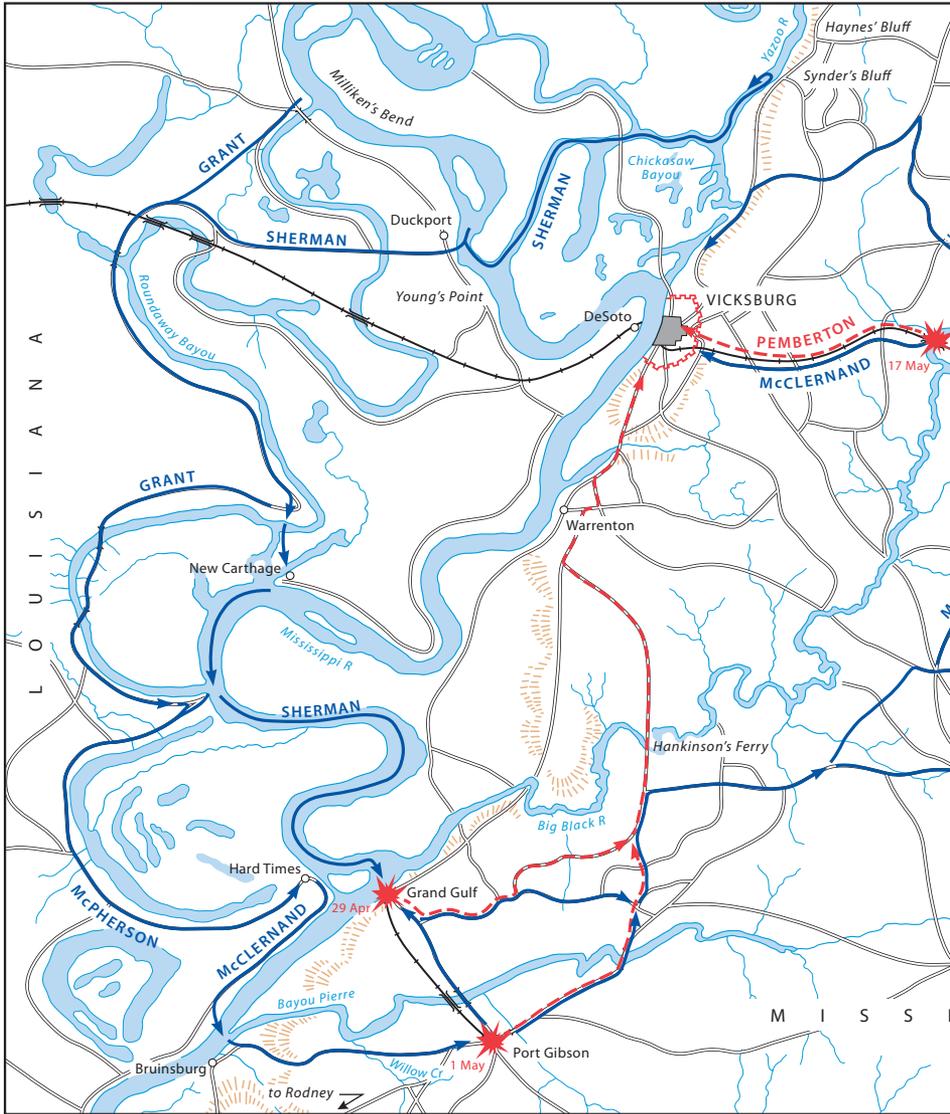
on the wily politician in uniform. McPherson, the young, bright, but inexperienced protégé, occupied the middle of the line of march where there were unlikely to be any unpleasant surprises. Sherman, Grant's most trusted subordinate, commanded the rear guard in what amounted to an independent mission.

With his army slowly gathering on the west bank of the Mississippi below Vicksburg, Grant needed transports to cross the river and gunboats to protect the crossing operations. On the night of 16–17 April, Admiral Porter made good those requirements. About 2115 that evening, a force of seven ironclads, one ram, three transports, and one tug left its anchorage near the mouth of the Yazoo and headed downstream with eighteen barges lashed to the sides of the vessels. The barges carried coal for the ironclads and supplies for Grant's army in addition to protecting the hulls of the boats they were attached to. A nineteenth barge, carrying ammunition, was cut loose to drift downriver unattended when none of the boats' captains would consent to tow it. At 2310, Porter's flagship, the ironclad *Benton*, silently rounded the bend above Vicksburg and drifted down on the town followed by five more ironclads and then the transports. The seventh ironclad brought up the rear. Confederate sentinels on the shore opened fire with their muskets, alerting the artillerymen of the river batteries. Bonfires were lit

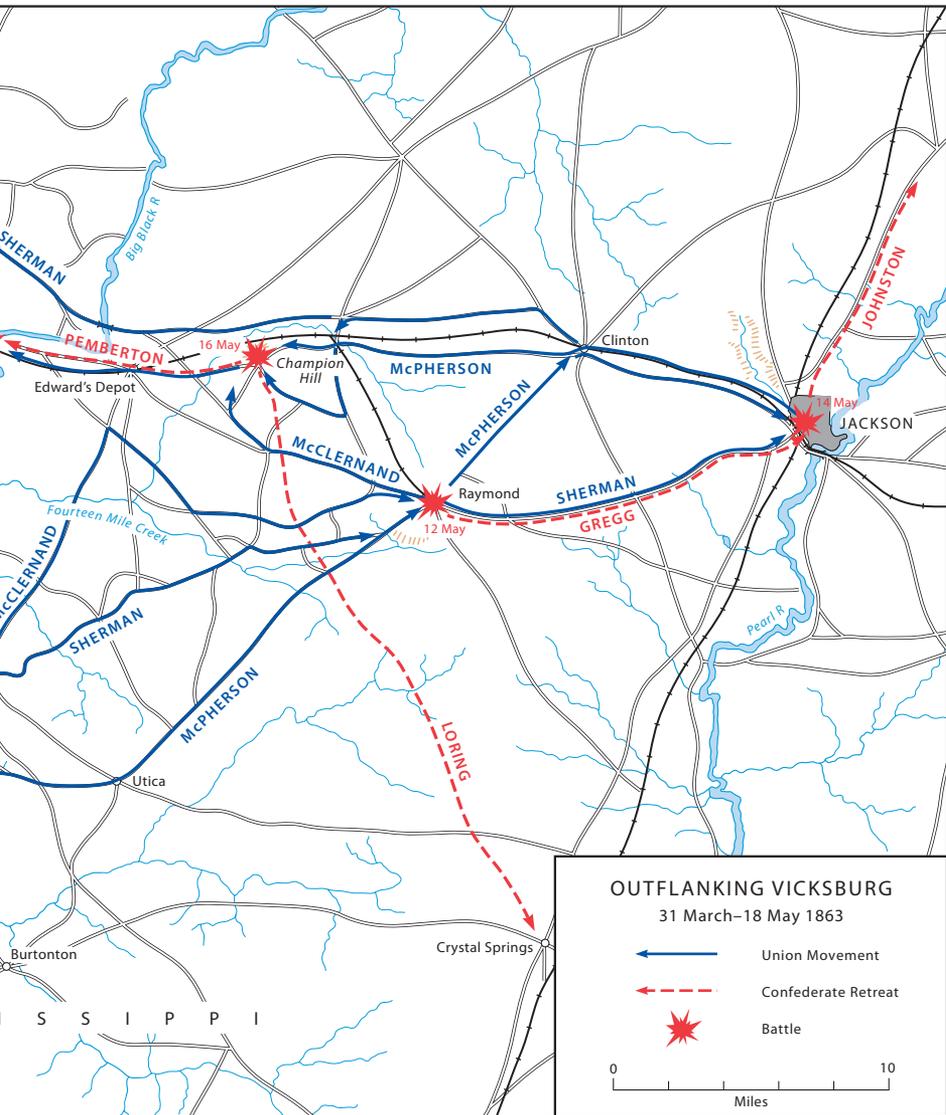
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*Admiral Porter's fleet running the rebel blockade of the Mississippi at Vicksburg, 16 April 1863 (Library of Congress)*





MAP 4



SHERMAN

Big Black R

Clinton

Edward's Depot

16 May

Champion Hill

McPHERSON

JOHNSTON

JACKSON

Fourteen Mile Creek

Raymond

SHERMAN

McCLERNAND

12 May

LORING

Crystal Springs

Burtonton

Utica

Union

Pearl R

**OUTFLANKING VICKSBURG**  
31 March–18 May 1863

← Union Movement

← Confederate Retreat

★ Battle



S S I P P I

and six minutes later the first cannon opened fire on the Union flotilla. Guns on the ironclads thundered back at the shore batteries. For the next two hours cannon flashed and shells filled the air as Porter's flotilla ran the two-mile gauntlet of batteries. An observer in Vicksburg reported, "It was the grandest spectacle of my life . . . our batteries were in full play, blazing away at the line of gunboats making their way past them and giving shot for shot. . . . The whole landscape was as light as day. . ." An observer on Grant's headquarters boat, anchored on the far side of the DeSoto peninsula, recalled: "Shells were flying in every direction. With their burning fuses they made their circles, dropping down out of the sky like stars of the first magnitude, now and then . . . bursting in mid-heaven with a million scintillations of light."

Some of the Union pilots lost their bearings in the smoke and confusion of battle. Vessels spun end-for-end in the treacherous eddies, and there were collisions among the boats. The formation fell apart as vessels groped their way individually downstream. One transport lost power when a shell severed its steam line, and was taken under tow by an ironclad. A second transport, disabled and set on fire by shells, was abandoned. It burned to the waterline. Surprisingly, this transport and one coal barge were the only vessels lost. Personnel losses came to only twelve wounded, with no fatalities. At 0200, the flotilla cleared Vicksburg and the guns fell silent. Porter was below Vicksburg in force.

On 22 April, six unarmed transports, manned largely by Union volunteers, attempted to repeat Porter's feat. The Confederate gunners, untouched by return fire, did somewhat better on this occasion. They sank one of the transports and six of twelve barges. Nonetheless, Grant now had the naval force he needed, both gunboats and transports, to cross the river.

Few on the Confederate side realized that the strategic situation had changed dramatically with the running of the Vicksburg batteries. Pemberton reported to the Confederate War Department only that he was now cut off from the Trans-Mississippi Department. He did not appreciate the fact that Grant was in a position to cross the river and outflank Vicksburg. Back in Virginia, the Union Army of the Potomac was preparing for another offensive against Richmond; therefore nobody in the Confederate capital paid much attention to events on the far-distant Mississippi River.

Within his own department, other Union activity drew Pemberton's attention away from the Mississippi River and Grant's march down the far bank. On 2 April, Steele's division of Sherman's XV Corps landed at Greenville, Mississippi, well north of Vicksburg, and for the next three weeks raided and devastated the rich Yazoo Delta, with little opposition from the Confederates. And on 17 April, Col. Benjamin H. Grierson rode south from La Grange, Tennessee, at the head of 1,700 cavalymen on a daring raid that carried them through the length of eastern Mississippi. Cutting telegraph wires, tearing up railroad track, and confiscating livestock, Grierson's raiders spread panic and confusion throughout the state. Eluding the cavalry and infantry forces Pemberton sent to trap him, Grierson rode into Union lines at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on 2 May.

Back at his headquarters in Jackson, Pemberton was clearly off-balance. He reported to Richmond that the "enemy is constantly in motion in all directions." Regarding the Union movement on the far side of the Mississippi, he wrote: "Also reported, but not yet confirmed, movement under McClernand, in large force, by land west of river and southward. Much doubt it." Moreover, by sending off his cavalry in its futile pursuit of Grierson, Pemberton deprived himself of his most important means of reconnaissance. At the very time that Grant was deciding where to make his crossing of the Mississippi, Pemberton was operating in the dark.

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*Colonel Grierson*  
(Library of Congress)



In choosing a landing place on the east bank, Grant naturally preferred a spot where the Mississippi flowed along the base of the bluffs lining the eastern edge of the floodplain. The next such spot below Vicksburg was Grand Gulf, some thirty miles distant by road. However, Grand Gulf was defended by two fortified batteries, containing eight heavy artillery pieces. Manning the post was the division under General Bowen, perhaps the most capable of Pemberton's subordinates. Grant and Porter reconnoitered the position by boat and decided that the batteries could indeed be

silenced and a landing carried out. Meanwhile, McClernand moved his corps southward to a staging base at Hard Times, Louisiana, just upstream from Grand Gulf. McPherson moved south to the same point with two of his divisions. Finally, on 29 April, the date scheduled for the crossing attempt, Sherman staged yet another diversion at Snyder's Bluff just to keep the Confederates guessing.

At 0730 on 29 April, Porter's seven ironclads pulled away from Hard Times, followed by six transports carrying 10,000 men from McClernand's corps. The ironclads ran downstream past the Grand Gulf batteries, firing volleys as they went, and then came about, bows in the current for better control, to silence the Confederate guns. There then ensued a brutal, close-range artillery duel lasting five hours. The ironclads pounded the fortified works with 2,500 rounds, silencing some, but not all, of the Confederate guns. The Confederates, who suffered only three killed and nineteen wounded, gave better than they got, scoring over 200 hits on the ironclads, killing eighteen and wounding fifty-seven. Among the wounded was Admiral Porter. Clearly, the unarmored transports carrying troops had no chance of making a landing. At 1300, Porter called off the bombardment and the boats returned to Hard Times. Porter displayed some irritation toward the Army in the congratulatory order he issued subsequently to his men: "Those who have shared in the engagement of the 29th of April may always speak of it with honest pride. It is not our fault that the enemy's guns and munitions of war are not in our hands. Ours is the duty to silence batteries; it cannot be expected that we shall land and take possession."

Undeterred by this setback, Grant and Porter looked for another option. Learning that evening of a plantation landing at Bruinsburg, ten miles below Grand Gulf, Grant marched his men past Grand Gulf on the Louisiana side of the river while, under cover of darkness, Porter ran the ironclads and transports past the damaged Confederate batteries without further loss.

General Bowen telegraphed news of the Grand Gulf engagement to department headquarters at Jackson while the bombardment was still in progress. At last, Pemberton began to perceive the significance of recent events. In response to Bowen's pleas for reinforcement, Pemberton called back the troops engaged in the futile pursuit of Grierson. Additionally, he ordered two brigades to march from Vicksburg toward Grand Gulf. Pemberton had three Confederate divisions in and around Vicksburg. Given the magnitude of the threat, he would have been well-advised to

leave a few brigades in Vicksburg and rush the three divisions to Bowen's support. Pemberton's response was both too little and too late.

On the morning of 30 April, Union transports and gunboats nosed into the plantation landing at Bruinsburg and the troops of McClernand's XIII Corps began going ashore. There was no opposition at the riverbank, but the tactical risks were nonetheless great. As at Chickasaw Bayou the preceding December, the landing took place on the floodplain. A mile of low ground stood between McClernand's troops and the bluffs. Moreover, his initial force of 17,000 men was significantly smaller than the army Sherman brought ashore at Chickasaw Bayou. If the Confederates reached the bluffs before McClernand did, this operation could fail too. But the Confederates offered no resistance at Bruinsburg. By evening, McClernand was up on the bluffs pushing inland while the boats began bringing in the two divisions of McPherson's XVII Corps. Perhaps the Confederates can be excused for not having defenses in place at Bruinsburg—not even Grant knew he was going there until the evening before the troops went ashore.

In one of the most eloquent passages of his memoirs, Grant describes his sentiments upon achieving the landing at Bruinsburg:

I felt a degree of relief scarcely ever equalled since. Vicksburg was not yet taken it is true, nor were its defenders demoralized by any of our previous moves. I was now in the enemy's country, with a vast river and the stronghold of Vicksburg between me and my base of supplies. But I was on dry ground on the same side of the river with the enemy. All of the campaigns, labors, hardships and exposures from the month of December previous to this time that had been made and endured, were for the accomplishment of this one object.

General Bowen, the Confederate commander at Grand Gulf, possessed the only force in a position to contest Grant's movement inland. Not knowing exactly where Grant would land, he posted a brigade on each of two roads running from the Bruinsburg area to Port Gibson. A third brigade camped north of Port Gibson while a fourth remained in reserve at Grand Gulf. At least Bowen enjoyed the advantage of defensible terrain. The ground south and west of Port Gibson was a jumbled mass of ridges and steep ravines. In Grant's words, "the country in this part of Mississippi stands on

edge, as it were.” The ridgetops were cleared and under cultivation, but the ravines were choked by cane and vines. Troops could move and deploy on the ridgetops, but movement through the ravines was very difficult.

Having reached the top of the bluffs at Bruinsburg on the evening of 30 April, the aggressive McClernand kept his troops moving inland after night fell. The landing would not be secure until the Union forces got clear of the tangled terrain along the river and reached Port Gibson. A Union brigade commander observed, “The road over which we marched passed through a country much broken by gorges and ravines, and thickly covered with tall timber, underbrush, and cane, so peculiar to the Southern country.”

Shortly after midnight, McClernand’s advance elements on the Rodney–Port Gibson road encountered Brig. Gen. Martin E. Green’s brigade while still a few miles short of Port Gibson. When daylight came, McClernand brought two of his divisions into line (Brig. Gen. Eugene A. Carr and General Hovey, commanding) with a third (General Andrew Smith) in reserve. He sent his fourth division, commanded by Brig. Gen. Peter J. Osterhaus, along a farm road leading off to the left toward the Bruinsburg Road, where Brig. Gen. Edward D. Tracy’s brigade, recently arrived from Vicksburg, awaited them.

On the Rodney Road, there was scarcely room for three divisions to deploy along the narrow ridgetops. Attempts to outflank Green’s brigade by working through the vegetation-choked ravines proved difficult, so McClernand finally resorted to an artless but powerful frontal attack. Green’s heavily outnumbered men resisted stoutly, even launching a counterattack against the blue hordes, but in the end were driven from their position. Bowen pulled them out of the fight and sent them to the rear to reorganize, for Green had bought time for two more Confederate brigades to take position on the Rodney Road. One of these was Brig. Gen. William E. Baldwin’s brigade that had marched in from Vicksburg, and the other was Col. Francis M. Cockrell’s brigade from Grand Gulf. Rather than placing these troops on a ridgetop where they could be swept by Union artillery fire and where they would be silhouetted against the sky to Union troops advancing out of the ravines, Bowen placed Baldwin astride the Rodney Road in the low ground along Willow Creek, with Cockrell on his left flank.

As he closed in on the new Confederate line, McClernand also received reinforcements from McPherson's corps. After holding off an audacious counterattack by Cockrell's brigade against his right flank, McClernand again opted for steamroller tactics. Eventually he massed twenty-one regiments against Baldwin's center. According to one Confederate, "the noise was so incessant that no orders could be heard; and the bullets flew so thick that hardly a leaf or twig was left on the bare poles of what had been a diminutive forest when we entered it." Finally, both Cockrell and Baldwin gave way.

Meanwhile, Osterhaus' division had problems of its own on the Bruinsburg Road off to the Union left. Disordered by the jumbled terrain and by Confederate skirmishers, it took hours for Osterhaus to even reach the Confederate line. His first assault failed, though a Union bullet killed General Tracy, leaving the Confederate force under the command of Col. Isham W. Garrott. Having given Green's battered brigade time to reorganize after the morning's fight on the Rodney Road, Bowen sent it to the Bruinsburg Road, reinforcing Garrott. After a pause in the fight, Osterhaus renewed his attack. This time he succeeded in turning the Confederate right flank, forcing Garrott and Green to fall back. With his troops in retreat on both the Bruinsburg and Rodney roads, Bowen recognized that he could do no more to slow Grant's advance. Accordingly, at 1730, he ordered all of his troops to break contact and withdraw.

The battle of Port Gibson cost the Union 131 killed, 719 wounded, and 25 missing. Confederate losses were 60 killed, 340 wounded, and 387 missing, but given the smaller size of his force (8,000, versus 18,000 Union troops engaged), Bowen's casualties were proportionately heavier than McClernand's. Grant's young son Fred, accompanying his father on the campaign, visited the battlefield that evening: "I joined a detachment which was collecting the dead for burial. Sickening at the sights, I made my way with another detachment, which was gathering the wounded, to a log house which had been appropriated for a hospital. Here the scenes were so terrible that I became faint, and making my way to a tree, sat down, the most woebegone twelve-year-old lad in America."

Essentially, Bowen's sacrifice bought Pemberton a day with which to formulate a response to Grant's crossing of the Mississippi. Informed by telegraph of the battle, Pemberton

finally recognized the magnitude of his peril. In an anguished message dispatched to the Confederate president in Richmond, Pemberton observed: "Enemy can cross all his army from Hard Times to Bruinsburg, below Bayou Pierre. Large reinforcements should be sent from other departments. Enemy's movement threatens Jackson, and, if successful, cuts off Vicksburg and Port Hudson from the east. Am hurrying all reinforcements I possibly can to Bowen. Enemy's success in passing our batteries has completely changed character of defense." In actuality, Pemberton did little more than order Loring's division, which had been chasing Grierson, from Jackson toward Port Gibson. The three divisions in and around Vicksburg stayed there. Pemberton himself moved his headquarters out of Jackson—not toward the enemy to take personal control of the fight, but to Vicksburg. Bowen's brave stand at Port Gibson accomplished little.

Grant, on the other hand, was quick to take advantage of the opportunities that the battle afforded him. The next day, 2 May, McPherson's corps occupied Port Gibson, a few miles beyond the battlefield. Finding the bridge across Little Bayou Pierre in ruins, Union engineers and labor details created a floating raft bridge 166 feet long and 12 feet wide, using material pulled from nearby buildings, and had it open to traffic by the end of the day. On 3 May McPherson drove toward the Big Black River, forcing the Confederates to evacuate Grand Gulf and, by the end of the day, capturing an intact bridge over the Big Black at Hankinson's Ferry.

#### CAMPAIGN OF MANEUVER

With Grand Gulf in Union hands and with the Confederates pushed north of the Big Black River, Grant's lodgment in Mississippi was relatively secure. The roads radiating out of Port Gibson afforded him considerable freedom of action. From 3 to 9 May, Grant paused in the area between the Big Black River and Big Bayou Pierre and prepared for future operations. The first order of business was to bring up Sherman and the XV Corps, which was still guarding the bases at Milliken's Bend and Young's Point. Sherman started south on 2 May, leaving behind one division of his own corps and one of McPherson's corps to protect the line of supply in Louisiana, augmented by several newly organizing black regiments. Sherman's corps landed at Grand Gulf on 7 May and advanced to join the main body.

The problem of logistics also required attention. In order to maximize combat power for the landing at Bruinsburg, Grant's army had left behind most of its wagons, draft animals, and provisions. The pause from 3 to 9 May enabled Grant's logisticians to get wagons, baggage, and badly needed supplies to the army by way of Grand Gulf. Nevertheless, the logistical situation remained worrisome. Supplies for Grant's army had to come from Memphis, down the Mississippi by riverboat to Milliken's Bend, then by wagon overland to a point below Vicksburg (bypassing the still-dangerous Vicksburg river batteries), by riverboat again to Grand Gulf, and finally by wagon to Grant's army. Once he moved away from Grand Gulf, Grant would have to rely on local requisition and heavily escorted wagon trains to provision his force, for he lacked the troops to occupy a regular line of communications. As he told Sherman, "I do not calculate upon the possibility of supplying the army with full rations from Grand Gulf. I know it will be impossible without constructing additional roads. What I do expect is to get up what rations of hard bread, coffee and salt we can, and make the country furnish the balance."

Most importantly, Grant used the pause to weigh his options and determine his future course of action. The campaign could have gone in any one of several different directions at this point. Grant's first plan—and the one that his superiors in Washington expected him to execute—was to detach a portion of his army to march south where it would combine forces with Maj. Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks in the reduction of Port Hudson. Then Banks would send forces north to support Grant in an assault on Vicksburg. Grant abandoned this plan when he determined that such a scheme would require the Army of the Tennessee to mark time for a month or more. Never one to yield the initiative to the enemy, Grant determined to take action on his own.

There remained two other viable options. First, Grant could move his army across the Big Black River on the bridge captured by McPherson and drive directly for Vicksburg. This option had the advantage of simplicity, and of keeping the Union army close to the Mississippi where it could readily be resupplied. However, the terrain along this direct route to Vicksburg resembled the rough, jumbled ground on which the battle of Port Gibson had taken place, affording innumerable opportunities for defenders to harass and delay the Union advance. Moreover, Pemberton had stationed two divisions on this route, about midway between Grand Gulf

and Vicksburg, so any advance along this direct road would entail a frontal assault on an enemy in prepared positions.

A second option, and the one Grant chose, was to drive northeast toward Edwards using the Big Black River to protect his left flank. Capturing Edwards would cut the Southern Railroad running between Vicksburg and Jackson, thus isolating Vicksburg for a Union assault.

On 10 May, with Sherman's corps just arrived by way of Grand Gulf, Grant launched his army on a quick lunge into the heart of Mississippi. McClernand's XIII Corps, with four divisions, constituted the main effort. With the Big Black River on his left, McClernand advanced toward Edwards. McPherson's XVII Corps, two divisions strong, swung out to the right, heading for Raymond and acting as flank guard. Sherman's XV Corps with its two divisions followed McClernand and then moved into the center of the Union advance as the interval between XIII Corps and XVII Corps widened. A soldier in McPherson's corps recorded in his diary the panorama of the march: "I shall never forget the scene of today, while looking back upon a mile of solid columns, marching with their old tattered flags streaming in the summer breeze, and hearkening to the firm tramp of their broad brogans keeping step to the pealing fife and drum." This was a veteran army that knew how to march and how to fight.

Grant had timed the advance so that all three corps would reach Fourteen Mile Creek on 12 May. Fourteen Mile Creek, a tributary of the Big Black, flows from east to west and lies south of Edwards and Raymond. By that time the army was operating on a front of nearly twenty miles, each corps within supporting distance of the others yet far enough apart to facilitate rapid marching and foraging. McClernand on the left reached the creek and pushed reconnaissance elements toward Edwards. Those patrols found the Confederates present in strength. Pemberton had discerned Grant's intentions, and brought forward three of his five divisions to the vicinity of Edwards and the railroad bridge over the Big Black. On the following day Pemberton finally moved his headquarters out of Vicksburg and joined his troops in the field. At long last Pemberton, the department commander and administrator, had made the transition to field commander.

Sherman, in the center, also reached the creek and secured a bridgehead. On the right flank, however, McPherson stumbled into an unanticipated battle at Raymond. The Confederate

responsible for McPherson's unpleasant surprise was Brig. Gen. John Gregg, whose brigade of 3,000 men had only recently been moved up from Port Hudson to augment the forces confronting Grant. Gregg's orders from Pemberton were to shield the state capital at Jackson and to fall on Grant's flank and rear when the Union army closed in to attack Edwards. When informed by state militia troops that a Union column was approaching Raymond from the southwest, Gregg concluded that only a small screening force could be operating so far from the enemy main body at Edwards. (In actuality, McPherson's corps outnumbered Gregg's brigade nearly four to one.) Accordingly, he laid plans to ambush the oncoming Union force in the thick woods along Fourteen Mile Creek, and then destroy it with a series of attacks culminating with an envelopment of the enemy's right flank.

When the lead regiments of Maj. Gen. John A. Logan's division approached Fourteen Mile Creek on the morning of 12 May, they were staggered by volleys of fire coming out of the creek bottom and then shoved back by Gregg's attacking Confederates. Logan rallied his troops and fed more regiments piecemeal into the fight as they came up the dusty road. In the confused fighting, neither Logan nor Gregg exercised much control over the action once their troops were committed. "For two hours the contest raged furiously," one of Logan's soldiers later recalled. "The creek was running red with precious blood spilt for our country." Eventually, Logan stabilized his line and the Union regiments began to push the Confederates back. Brig. Gen. Marcellus Crocker, commanding McPherson's second division, committed most of his division to the fray as the Union troops drove the Confederates back toward Raymond. At 1600, Gregg succeeded in disengaging his brigade and withdrew unchallenged to Jackson.

Grant could not have been pleased with McPherson's first battle as a corps commander. Not only had McPherson allowed his corps to be ambushed and bloodied by a single brigade, but the enemy brigade had escaped to fight another day. However, the unhappy affair at Raymond did provide Grant with an important insight—the presence of a Confederate brigade at Raymond indicated that there were almost certainly more forces assembling nearby in Jackson.

That evening, Grant recast his entire plan for the campaign. It was imperative that he insert his army between the Confederate

forces at Edwards and those at Jackson before they had a chance to combine. Then Grant could defeat them piecemeal. Jackson would be the first objective. Thus the battle of Raymond, which neither Grant nor Pemberton intended, reshaped the entire campaign.

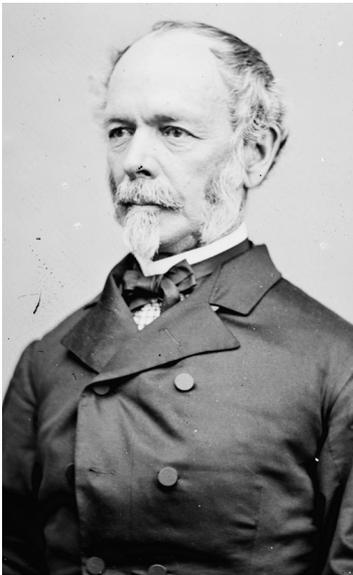
On 13 May, Grant directed McPherson's corps to march north from Raymond, cut the Southern Railroad, and turn east toward Jackson ready to assault the city the next day. Sherman's corps passed behind McPherson and approached the city from the south. McClernand feigned an attack on Edwards, then deftly broke contact with the Confederates, marched swiftly to the east, and established a westward-facing defensive screen west of Jackson to protect the rear of the forces attacking the city.

Confederate forces were indeed converging on Jackson, just as Grant had surmised. These included forces from within Pemberton's department, such as Gregg's brigade drawn from Port Hudson, and troops from other departments sent in response to Pemberton's appeal for reinforcement. By nightfall on 13 May, 6,000 Confederate troops were in Jackson with more due to arrive by rail. Among the troops who reached Jackson on 13 May was

one very important person, General Johnston, commander of the Department of the West and Pemberton's immediate superior. Johnston traveled to Jackson from Tennessee under orders from Confederate President Davis to take direct command of military operations in Mississippi. Johnston stepped from his train, quickly surveyed the situation, and telegraphed Davis, "I am too late." He then directed that all Confederate forces and moveable military supplies be evacuated from the threatened city. To Pemberton he sent a message ordering his subordinate to march east and link up with him, a directive that he repeated in subsequent days.

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*General Johnston*  
(Library of Congress)



Meanwhile, Johnston himself retreated with the Jackson garrison toward the northeast, away from Pemberton.

In retrospect, it is by no means clear that Johnston was in fact “too late.” Six thousand Confederate troops was certainly a small force to confront the 23,000 men that Sherman and McPherson could bring to bear. Had Johnston found some way to hold the railroads at Jackson for three days, his force might have doubled by the influx of reinforcements from other departments. As it was, Johnston took himself and his little army out of the campaign, which was exactly what Grant would have wished. Although Johnston remained in Mississippi, eventually returning to Jackson and acquiring even more troops, he played no further active role in the struggle for Vicksburg.

On the morning of 14 May, McPherson and Sherman each sent forward one division in a converging attack on Jackson. Advancing from the west, Crocker’s division of McPherson’s corps moved forward through a driving rainstorm and encountered a stout rear guard action, which continued until the last of Johnston’s wagon trains cleared the city. Then the Confederate rear guard broke contact and also retreated, abandoning Jackson. To the south, Sherman’s men slogged through the rain and mud to find only a tiny force of state militia confronting them. Brushing aside this resistance, Sherman too entered the city. By that evening, the Stars and Stripes were flying from the top of the statehouse in Jackson. One of McPherson’s soldiers who was not engaged at Jackson commented, “If my own regiment has not had a chance today to cover itself with glory, it has with mud.” Although glory may have been lacking that day, the capture of Jackson had exactly the effect that Grant intended—the Confederate forces there had withdrawn, and the reinforcements coming in by rail had reversed course. The Confederate convergence on Jackson had become a divergence.

Grant immediately turned his attention against Pemberton. On the evening of 14 May, a double agent informed Grant that Johnston, retreating northeastward from Jackson, had ordered Pemberton to leave the Vicksburg area and march his army east to link up with Johnston. Grant moved immediately to catch Pemberton in the open before he could join forces with Johnston. There were three roads by which to travel from Jackson toward Edwards, Pemberton’s point of departure. McClernand, acting as the rear guard while McPherson and Sherman captured the city of

Jackson, already had forces covering each of these routes. A tidy general would have consolidated McClernand's corps on one of these roads and assigned McPherson and Sherman to the other two. Such redeployments would have cost at least a day, and Grant had no intention of giving the Confederates a day to get their bearings. Accordingly, on the morning of 15 May, he launched McClernand westward on all three routes, with McPherson's corps following on the northern road, the one Pemberton would be most likely to take as he marched toward a rendezvous with Johnston. One division of Sherman's corps, which had escorted the last wagon train to reach Grant's army from Grand Gulf, fell in on the southern route under McClernand's command. The rest of Sherman's force remained in Jackson for a day to complete the destruction of the railroads and make sure that Johnston kept his distance.

The Union forces moved like clockwork. By that evening, Grant had 32,000 men poised to converge by three routes on Champion Hill just east of Edwards. Three Union divisions occupied the northern road, two stood on the middle road and two more on the southern road. None of the Union troops marched more than fifteen miles that day, and all got a full night's rest.

The situation on the Confederate side differed dramatically. Pemberton, disoriented by the rapid pace of events since the Bruinsburg landings, could not decide what to do. His own inclination was to occupy defensive positions in the vicinity of Edwards and make Grant attack him on ground of the Confederates' choosing. This plan held considerable merit. It was within his capabilities as a field commander to fight from prepared positions. Maneuvering in the open with a wily opponent such as Grant was an invitation to disaster. Moreover, Pemberton placed little trust in his army, which had never operated as a unit before. Much of it had spent the last several months in camp, not marching and fighting. Nor did Pemberton trust his chief subordinates, some of whom, most notably Loring, had begun to display open contempt for their cautious, northern-born commander. Finally, a defensive battle near Edwards accorded with the directive he had received from President Davis to hold Vicksburg.

However, Pemberton was now under orders from Johnston to execute an operation diametrically opposed to the one he preferred—abandon Vicksburg for the time being, join forces and crush Grant, then reoccupy Vicksburg at a later date. Pemberton called a council of war with his chief subordinates in an attempt to

find his way out of this dilemma. Instead, the council of war came up with a third option—strike southeastward from Edwards with three divisions, totaling 25,000 men, to cut Grant’s line of supply while the Union army was busy at Jackson. This scheme reconciled neither with Johnston’s orders nor with the Confederate president’s directive; however, this was the one he adopted. Pemberton was later to assert that “the advance movement of the army from Edwards Depot on the afternoon of May 15 was made against my judgment, in opposition to my previously expressed intentions, and to the subversion of my matured plans.” The only merit inherent to this scheme was one of which Pemberton was unaware—had he in fact succeeded in executing the march to the southeast on 15 May, he might have eluded the trap that Grant had laid for him.

The Confederate army’s actual movements on 15 May also contrasted dramatically with those of the Union army on the same date. Whereas Grant’s army wheeled sharply, changing course by 180 degrees and executing a smooth and rapid march, Pemberton’s three divisions stumbled and blundered. As the Confederates prepared to depart from Edwards that morning, they discovered that neither Pemberton nor his staff, nor any of his subordinates, had thought to issue supplies and rations to the troops. There ensued a delay of several hours while a train brought supplies out from Vicksburg. Once the march began, the lead elements discovered that Baker’s Creek, just outside of Edwards, was too deep to ford, owing to the rains of the day before. Nobody had bothered to reconnoiter the route of march. Pemberton ordered the army to move north to another road that carried the troops over Champion Hill. At nightfall, the lead division bedded down less than five miles in a straight line from the point of departure. The trailing division did not even leave Edwards until 1700 and finally dropped packs at 0300 on 16 May. Behind them, the supply wagons left Edwards at midnight and were still on the road when dawn broke the next morning.

The march left Pemberton’s army sprawled across the southern face of Champion Hill in the form of a giant letter “Z.” Inadvertently, Pemberton’s troops occupied two of the three roads in the path of Grant’s army. Loring’s division, in the lead, formed the base of the Z along the southernmost of the roads. Bowen’s division constituted the middle bar of the Z along a farm path linking the middle and southern roads. Stevenson’s division and the supply trains formed the top of the Z in the vicinity of the

middle road. The northern road was unoccupied and, indeed, unpatrolled. Pemberton had placed his army squarely within the jaws of the trap formed by Grant's three-pronged advance. Skirmishing in the night informed Pemberton that enemy forces were indeed nearby.

The next morning, 16 May, Pemberton received a message from Johnston disapproving Pemberton's plan to raid Grant's line of communication and again ordering him to march northeastward to join forces. The message also informed Pemberton for the first time that Jackson had fallen and that Johnston had retreated to the northeast. This news stunned Pemberton. The Union force near Champion Hill, which Pemberton had assumed to be a Union rear guard, might well be Grant's main body. Even as he pondered this news, Union troops drove in his pickets, indicating that a battle was at hand. Pemberton's first reaction was to order his army to reverse course and withdraw toward Edwards. The wagon train was turned around and headed back when Pemberton's subordinates persuaded him that it was too late to leave. Reluctantly, Pemberton ordered his army to form for battle.

On the Union side, Grant was surprised to find Pemberton so far east of Edwards. The trap he had set was not perfect. The jaws were too far apart to coordinate effectively, and the chain of command was confused by the presence of divisions from various corps sharing the same roads. Rough terrain and the absence of a lateral road further hindered coordination. Grant himself was on the northern road, where he placed McPherson in charge of the tactical battle despite the fact that the lead division, commanded by General Hovey, was from McClernand's corps. As the battle unfolded, the brunt of the fighting fell on the forces of the northern road. Those on the middle road became fully engaged only late in the day, while the troops on the southern road either never received or disobeyed orders to attack the enemy, and engaged only in a six-hour artillery duel with Loring's troops in their front.

The action opened when Hovey's division on the northern road advanced to the crest of Champion Hill where it struck Stevenson's division and crushed its right flank. To Hovey's right, Logan's division pushed through heavy woods, drove back Stevenson's center and left, and cut the road by which the Confederates had marched to Champion Hill the day before. Pemberton, who attempted to command the battle from a farmhouse in the center of the Confederate position, was convinced that the Union main

effort would come in the center and the south. He was oblivious to Stevenson's calls for help until stragglers and wounded troops from the top of Champion Hill began to stream past his headquarters. Belatedly, he pulled Bowen's division out of the quiet center of the line and sent it north to stabilize the situation.

Bowen launched a counterattack that struck Hovey's disorganized forces as they streamed down the southern face of Champion Hill, and drove them back to the crest and beyond. Grant took a personal hand in rallying Hovey's troops and bringing in reinforcements to stem Bowen's onslaught. Among those reinforcements was a soldier who recorded the scene: "Almost whole companies of wounded, defeated men from [Hovey's] division hurried by us. . . . They held up their bleeding and mangled hands to show us they had not been cowards." In some of the most intense fighting that Grant's soldiers ever saw, Crocker's division moved up, absorbed the Confederate blow, and brought Bowen's tired men to a halt. "There was no charging further by our line," recalled one of Crocker's men. "We halted, stood still . . . and killed each other as fast as we could." After a prolonged and bitterly contested firefight, Crocker finally pushed Bowen back up and over the crest of Champion Hill. Bowen's withdrawal became more urgent when Osterhaus' division, pushing through rough terrain on the middle road, reached and drove in the thinly held Confederate center.

With Stevenson's division disintegrating and Bowen's men fought out, Pemberton tried to stem the converging Union forces with Loring's division, but it was too late. Pemberton ordered his entire command to break contact and withdraw by the southern road, where the swollen creek that had halted his march the day before had subsided to fordable levels. Stevenson's division fell apart and retreated in disorder. Bowen's division withdrew intact while Loring's relatively unbloodied division conducted a rear guard action. The Union pursuit continued into the evening. Loring, holding his rear guard position on the southern road, could see Union troops outflanking him to the north. Rather than fight his way through to rejoin Pemberton, he pulled his division out to the south and then made his way east to join Johnston's command near Jackson. The rest of the Confederate army poured back through the night, past Edwards and across the Big Black River with Bowen holding a bridgehead on the east bank. An officer in Pemberton's army described the retreat: "It was slow progress until we arrived at the Big Black—as it was covered with Artillery, the

trains of the Army—straggling and wounded men—and every conceivable conveyance with women and children fleeing their homes and abandoning them to the Yankees.”

The battle of Champion Hill had cost Pemberton heavily. Confederate casualties totaled 381 killed, 1,018 wounded, and 2,441 missing. To this total one might add Loring’s entire division of 7,800 men, which would play no further role in the campaign for Vicksburg. In addition, Pemberton lost twenty-seven irreplaceable artillery pieces, not counting those that Loring took with him. Union casualties came to 410 killed, 1,844 wounded, and 187 missing. Of this total, Hovey’s division, which led the attack on the northern road and absorbed the full brunt of Bowen’s counterattack, suffered 211 killed, 872 wounded, and 119 missing.

The victory at Champion Hill dramatically improved Grant’s chances of taking Vicksburg. Prior to the battle, the troops in Pemberton’s department actually outnumbered the Union forces under Grant. With Johnston driven off in the battle of Jackson, and Pemberton mauled at Champion Hill, there was little likelihood that Grant would have to contend with a field force equal to or superior to his own. He could proceed to assault Vicksburg in relative safety.

On the other hand, if Pemberton had managed to salvage something resembling a victory at Champion Hill, Grant would have been in a truly precarious situation. Deep in enemy territory, surrounded by hostile forces and ammunition and supplies depleted with no ready prospect of replenishment, Grant’s force would have faced the prospect of total destruction. The entire Union campaign since the landing at Bruinsburg had been a calculated risk; at Champion Hill the risk paid off.

Grant kept up the pressure on 17 May. McClernand’s corps pushed westward along the Southern Railroad toward the Big Black River. Upon reaching the river, he found Bowen’s division, reinforced by an additional brigade, manning earthworks in a bridgehead east of the railroad bridge. Bowen’s orders were to hold the bridge until Loring’s division crossed to safety. Neither he nor Pemberton was aware that Loring was even then marching in the opposite direction as fast as he could go. From the Confederate perspective, the battle that followed was a meaningless sacrifice.

McClernand formed two divisions for an assault on Bowen’s position—General Osterhaus on the left, and General Carr on the right. One of Carr’s brigade commanders, Brig. Gen. Michael K.

Lawler, preempted any battle plans that McClernand may have formulated. Lawler found a trough of low ground, an ancient channel of the Big Black, which enabled him to work his brigade to within assaulting distance of the Confederate earthworks. There he formed his four regiments into an assault column, two regiments wide and two deep, and launched them against the Confederates in an impetuous charge. The defenders in the path of Lawler's assault broke and ran. Within minutes the Confederates in the bridge-head had abandoned their positions and were streaming across the railroad bridge, which was then set ablaze to prevent its capture. Some troops unable to reach the bridge attempted to swim the Big Black and many drowned. At the conclusion of the brief battle, Union forces counted nearly 1,800 Confederate prisoners, along with 18 captured cannon, for the loss of 39 Union troops killed, 237 wounded, and 3 missing. Pemberton ordered the remnants of his army back to the fortifications of Vicksburg.

As he rode westward with his demoralized and broken force, Pemberton may well have reflected on the rapidity with which disaster had overtaken him. For three months he had watched as Grant flailed about in the floodplain on various unsuccessful bayou expeditions. Suddenly, on 30 April, Grant was ashore on the west bank in force. Seventeen days and five battles later, Grant

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*Pontoon bridge Sherman's troops used to cross the Big Black River*  
(Library of Congress)



was chasing him into the fortifications of Vicksburg. During the retreat from the Big Black, Pemberton remarked to one of his staff officers, "Just thirty years ago I began my military career by receiving my appointment to a cadetship at the U.S. Military Academy; and today—the same date—that career is ended in disaster and disgrace."

One civilian who witnessed the arrival of Pemberton's army in Vicksburg that afternoon wrote, "I shall never forget that woeful sight of a beaten, demoralized army that came rushing back—humanity in the last throes of endurance. Wan, hollow-eyed, ragged, footsore, bloody—the men limped along, unarmed but followed by siege-guns, ambulances, gun-carriages, and wagons in aimless confusion." Another eyewitness observed, "Many of the troops declared their willingness to desert rather than serve under [Pemberton] again."

## THE SIEGE

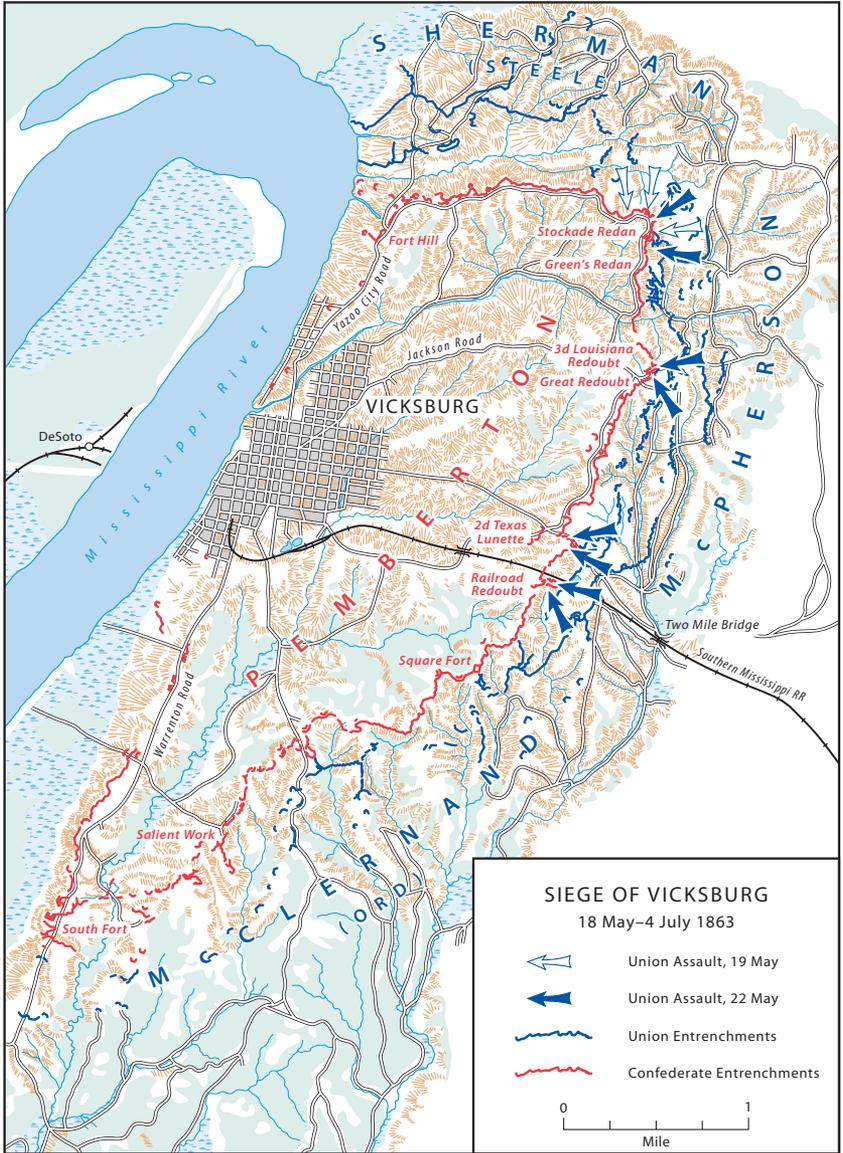
Once within the Vicksburg fortifications, Pemberton's men proved to be surprisingly resilient. Two fresh divisions commanded by Generals Forney and Martin Smith provided a foundation on which to rebuild the army. Stockpiles of weapons and supplies were on hand to replace those lost on campaign. Moreover, the fortifications themselves inspired confidence—nine major strongpoints and 102 artillery pieces covering all likely avenues of approach. Smith's division manned the northern face of the works on the Confederate left. Forney's troops occupied the center and Stevenson's battered division held the positions on the right where a Union attack was least likely to fall. Bowen's division constituted the reserve. The Confederates did not have long to wait for the next fight.

Grant's army, including Sherman's corps which had come up from Jackson, crossed the Big Black River and closed in on the Vicksburg fortifications on 18 May. The first priority was to occupy the heights at Snyder's Bluff, in order to reopen a river borne line of supply. Grant and Sherman rode together in person to stand on the high ground that Sherman had tried and failed to capture the previous December. He had finally reached the bluffs overlooking Chickasaw Bayou, although it required a five-month detour by way of Bruinsburg and Jackson to get there. As Grant later remembered the moment, Sherman "turned to me, saying that up to this minute he had felt no positive assurance of

success. This, however, he said was the end of one of the greatest campaigns in history. . . . Vicksburg was not yet captured, and there was no telling what might happen before it was taken; but whether captured or not, this was a complete and successful campaign.” With Snyder’s Bluff in Union hands, and his supply situation assured, Grant turned his attention to taking Vicksburg.

Hoping for a repeat of the Confederate collapse at the Big Black River, Grant ordered a hasty assault for 19 May as soon as Sherman’s corps was in position (*Map 5*). The problem with any assault on Vicksburg was that there were few feasible avenues of approach, and each of these was protected by well-sited Confederate defensive works. Sherman’s attack on 19 May focused on the fortification known as Stockade Redan, located at the apex of the east-west and north-south branches of the Confederate line. General Blair’s division constituted the main effort. After a five-hour artillery preparation, Blair’s men launched their assault only to be raked and thrown back by enfilading fire. An officer in Blair’s division wrote: “The leaden hail from the enemy was absolutely blinding. The very chips and sticks scattered over the ground were jumping under the hot shower of rebel bullets.” Only one element, the 1st Battalion, 13th U.S. Infantry, reached the redan and planted its colors on the enemy works, though the Union troops were unable to enter the position. In recognition of this deed, the 13th Infantry was officially accorded the honor “First at Vicksburg.” Sherman’s corps lost 134 killed, 571 wounded, and 8 missing in the assault of 19 May. McPherson and McClernand, whose corps were still largely moving up into position, suffered a combined total of 23 killed and 206 wounded.

Wishing above all else to avoid a prolonged siege, Grant attempted a second attack on 22 May. This was a coordinated assault involving all three corps. In the north, Sherman’s men assaulted the Stockade Redan again. In the center, McPherson’s corps stormed the Great Redoubt, located on the highest point of the fortified line. McClernand’s main objective was Railroad Redoubt in the south. Despite prolonged preparatory fires and a carefully synchronized attack, none of these assaults succeeded. McClernand’s corps managed to break into the Confederate positions, only to be swiftly evicted. In a message to Grant, McClernand exaggerated the extent and significance of his gains, causing the other two corps to prolong their failed attacks unnecessarily. At the end of the day, Grant’s army had lost another 502 killed, 2,550 wounded, and 147 missing. Confederate losses are not known, but



MAP 5

are believed to have totaled about 500. “Thus ended another day of bloody fight in vain,” recorded one Union soldier, “except for an increase of the knowledge which has been steadily growing lately, that a regular siege will be required to take Vicksburg.”

In the aftermath of the 22 May assault, the dark side of Grant’s tremendous persistence and unshakeable resolve emerged. The failed assault left the ground between the lines littered with dead and wounded Union soldiers. In those days, it was customary for the general to whom the casualties belonged to ask his adversary for a temporary truce so that the dead and wounded could be removed. This Grant refused to do. To ask for an armistice would be an admission of failure, something that Grant was unwilling to accept even to alleviate the suffering of his own troops. So the wounded lying between the lines suffered for three days and many of them died in the hot Mississippi sun, while the corpses bloated and stank. Finally, on 25 May, Pemberton proposed a truce so that the battlefield could be cleared of its human debris.

The assault of 22 May led to another troubling incident. On 30 May, McClernand issued a congratulatory order to the troops of the XIII Corps in which he not only lauded his own troops but cast aspersions on the rest of Grant’s army. This order found its way into the Northern newspapers, without first being cleared through Grant’s headquarters as required by regulations. Grant seized on this infraction to relieve the hard-fighting but increasingly troublesome political general. Maj. Gen. Edward O. C. Ord replaced McClernand as corps commander on 18 June.

On the same day as Grant’s second assault on the fortifications of Vicksburg, General Banks laid siege to Port Hudson with a Union army of four divisions totaling 30,000 men. On 27 May, Banks launched his first assault against the Confederate positions, manned by 7,500 Confederates commanded by General Gardner. Banks’ assault opened with a naval bombardment from vessels located both upstream and downstream from the fort. The infantry assaults that followed were directed against the weakly fortified northern side of Gardner’s perimeter. The Union attacks went in piecemeal and none succeeded. Among the more noteworthy actions was the stout, though unsuccessful, assault made by the 1st and 3d Louisiana Native Guards, composed of African American troops. Banks resumed his attacks later in the day along the southern portion of the perimeter, but the delay between assaults allowed Gardner to shift forces and successfully

repulse all attacks. Another poorly planned attack on 14 June met with similar results. Banks then dug in and attempted to starve out the Confederates.

Like Banks, Grant settled in for regular siege operations after the direct assaults failed. For six weeks Union soldiers did more digging than fighting. First they dug a line of fighting positions, paralleling the Confederate works, to protect themselves from enemy fire and to block any Confederate attempts to attack outward from their fortifications. "We were now as strong for defense against the garrison of Vicksburg as they were against us," Grant noted. Then, under the direction of engineer officers, troops dug zigzag trenches, known as "saps," toward the enemy fortifications. These they used to move artillery closer and closer to the Confederate parapets, and to prepare advanced staging areas for an eventual assault. They also dug mines under the principal Confederate fortifications. The most noteworthy of these was in McPherson's sector, where soldiers from Logan's division dug a forty-five foot tunnel underneath the 3d Louisiana Redoubt and packed it with 2,200 pounds of gunpowder. On 25 June, they detonated the powder, blowing the fortification to bits. One of Logan's brigades immediately charged into the crater, only to find that the defending Confederates of Forney's division had previously

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*Union dugouts in front of the Shirley house during the siege of Vicksburg*  
(Library of Congress)



vacated the redan and built another fortification immediately to its rear.

Another important component of siege warfare was artillery fire. During the six weeks of siege, Union artillery kept up a steady fire against both the fortifications and the town of Vicksburg itself. Admiral Porter's mortar boats joined in the bombardment, lofting their huge 200-pound shells into the city. There was little rest for either defenders or citizens as shells rained down day and night. The Confederate artillery could not retaliate in kind—Pemberton directed his gunners to conserve their ammunition for the inevitable Union assaults to come.

Major reinforcements flowed in to Grant's army, allowing him to seal completely the land approaches to Vicksburg and to establish a separate rear guard force of 36,000 troops to fend off any Confederate attempts to break the siege from the outside. He placed this force under the command of General Sherman, who turned over the XV Corps to his senior division commander General Steele. Three divisions came in from Grant's own XVI Corps in Tennessee, as well as one division from the Department of the Missouri and the IX Corps (two divisions) from the Department of the Ohio. These additions raised Grant's strength from 56,000 to about 90,000 troops.

As it turned out, Grant need not have bothered with the rear guard covering force. Any outside relief for Pemberton would have to come from General Joseph Johnston, and Johnston showed no inclination to attack Grant. Reinforcements raised Johnston's strength to over 30,000 men, yet he limited his activity to sending messages—telling Richmond that he was too weak to attack, and urging Pemberton to break out of Grant's siege lines on his own.

Both Johnston and the Confederate government in Richmond urged Lt. Gen. Edmund Kirby Smith, commander of the Department of the Trans-Mississippi, to do what he could to help Pemberton. Accordingly, between 7 and 10 June forces under Maj. Gen. Richard Taylor staged a series of disjointed attacks against the Union bases at Milliken's Bend, Young's Point, and Lake Providence in Louisiana. A few months earlier, these bases had been vital links in Grant's line of supply, but with the opening of the landing at Snyder's Bluff they had lost much of their significance. By June, they were used primarily as training bases for recently raised regiments of black troops. The most significant of these attacks came at Milliken's Bend, where a brigade of Maj.

Gen. John G. Walker's Texas division surprised a Union garrison consisting of one Iowa regiment and a large number of black troops undergoing training. The Texans drove through the Union defenses and were stopped only by fire from the ironclad *Choctaw*. The Union troops at Milliken's Bend suffered a total of 652 casualties, including a number of black soldiers confiscated as runaway slaves. Had General Kirby Smith assailed the Louisiana bases a few months earlier, he could have made a significant impact on the Vicksburg campaign. By June it was too late. However, the engagements at Port Hudson and Milliken's Bend had a wider significance. Charles A. Dana, a noted journalist, reported to the Secretary of War: "The sentiment in regards to the employment of negro troops has been revolutionized by the bravery of the blacks in the recent battle of Milliken's Bend. Prominent officers, who used in private to sneer at the idea, are now heartily in favor of it."

As the siege of Vicksburg wore on, conditions within the Confederate lines deteriorated. "When the siege commenced, it had been announced that there were provisions enough stored away to subsist the army for six months," noted one Confederate. In reality, such was not the case. Food rations were cut and cut again to conserve stockpiles. Many of the army's draft animals were set loose in no-man's-land because the Confederates lacked the fodder to keep them alive, while others were consigned to the stewpot. Malnutrition and disease decimated the Confederate ranks. Morale declined as the hoped-for relief from outside never materialized. For the citizens of Vicksburg the siege was an equally trying experience. Many moved into "caves" dug into Vicksburg's hillsides to escape the shelling. Even though only a handful of civilians were actually killed or wounded in the bombardment, the psychological toll was considerable. "It was an awful and strange sight," wrote one Vicksburg diarist. "As I sat at my window, I saw the mortars from the west passing entirely over the house and the Parrott shells from the east passing by, crossing each other, and this terrible fire raging in the center." "People do nothing but eat what they can get, sleep when they can, and dodge the shells," wrote another civilian. Sometimes, even the Confederate soldiers were moved by the plight of the civilians, despite their own tribulations. One sergeant observed that "delicate women and little children, with pale, careworn and hunger-pinched features, peered at the passer-by with wistful eyes from the caves in the hillsides."

Ironically, the high ground on which the Confederate works were located proved to be less habitable, in the long run, than were the Union positions. According to one Union officer, “we had the advantage of the rebel garrison in many ways because we were sheltered from the blistering heat of the sun by the forest shade, and had plenty to eat and the cool springs in the ravines furnished us an abundance of pure water, while the enemy was wholly unsheltered in their defensive works, reduced to almost starvation rations and a scarcity of good water.”

On 28 June, Pemberton received a mysterious letter signed “Many Soldiers” stating that the army had reached the limits of endurance. “If you can’t feed us, you had better surrender us.” Pemberton knew that a general Union assault was coming, and he feared that his army was incapable of mounting a defense. (Indeed, Grant had an attack planned for 6 July, in preparation for which mines had been dug under all of the major Confederate fortifications.) Following a council of war with his key subordinates, Pemberton bowed to the inevitable. On 3 July, he sent a message to Grant requesting negotiations for surrender. The two commanders met between the lines that afternoon, and by the end of the day both sides had agreed to terms. On 4 July, the Confederate troops marched out of their positions and stacked arms. “It was one of the saddest sights I ever beheld, and I can honestly say I pitied those brave men from the bottom of my heart,” wrote a Union officer. Then each Confederate signed a document of parole, stating that he would not bear arms until “exchanged” for a Union soldier. Union troops marched into the city as Porter’s gunboats tied up at Vicksburg’s waterfront. Five days later, upon learning of Pemberton’s capitulation, Gardner surrendered Port Hudson to Banks, and the Mississippi was in Union hands from its source to its mouth. “The Father of Waters,” wrote President Lincoln, “again goes unvexed to the sea.”

### *Analysis*

“Yesterday we rode on the pinnacle of success—today absolute ruin seems to be our portion. The Confederacy totters to its destruction.” This was the reaction of Col. Josiah Gorgas, the Confederate army’s Chief of Ordnance, upon hearing of Vicksburg’s surrender, following hard on the heels of the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg. Confederate morale would recover at least partially, but the fall of

Vicksburg and Port Hudson inflicted irreparable damage on the Confederate States of America, not just militarily, but also politically and economically. In military terms, the surrender of Vicksburg took an entire Confederate field army out of the war. Though some of the 30,000 soldiers who signed parole papers at Vicksburg would eventually return to the war, many others deserted. The Confederacy also lost 60,000 small arms and 260 cannon in the Vicksburg campaign and subsequent surrender. In strategic terms, the loss of Vicksburg meant that military operations east and west of the Mississippi would from this point on take place in isolation from each other.

Politically, the damage was equally severe, though not so immediate. The legitimacy of the Confederate nation was seriously compromised. Split in two by the loss of the Mississippi River, the Confederate States of America no longer resembled a viable nation-state. After Vicksburg, the states west of the Mississippi increasingly went their own way politically just as they did militarily, as the influence of the government in Richmond waned. Moreover, the Confederacy could no longer hope for a status quo peace settlement from the Union, unless it was willing to exist permanently as a bifurcated nation. And to the population of the South, as to the world at large, the Confederate government in Richmond seemed less and less able to provide for the common defense or promote the general welfare of its citizens. After Vicksburg it appeared that Union armies could go where they wished and do what they pleased anywhere in the Confederacy. The fortifications of Vicksburg were as strong as man could devise and the great bastion had been protected by a powerful Confederate army, yet the Union forces under Grant had shattered the army and captured the fortress in a one-sided campaign lasting just over two months. If Vicksburg could fall so readily, what place in the Confederacy was safe?

Economically, the loss of the western waterways, which culminated in the surrender of Vicksburg and Port Hudson, seriously crippled the Confederacy's internal transportation system. The presence of Union gunboats on the Mississippi and its tributaries constituted nothing less than an internal blockade, choking off commerce of any scale. As the railroads deteriorated and money lost value, the Confederacy ceased to have any national or even regional economy at all. By the end of the war, commerce and trade had reverted to subsistence farming and local barter through much of the Confederacy, thanks in large part to Union control of the western rivers.

The successful conclusion of the Vicksburg campaign had a correspondingly positive impact on Union fortunes. Grant's victory effectively shut down an arena of conflict that had absorbed significant Union resources since the spring of 1862. Grant's veteran Army of the Tennessee was now free to enter other theaters of the conflict. With the Mississippi secure, the Union's western armies could combine their forces in Tennessee and, in 1864–1865, Georgia and the Carolinas. Given the simplified strategic picture made possible by the conclusion of the Vicksburg campaign, the Union was able increasingly to focus its military strength against the Confederate center of power on the East Coast. Moreover, Vicksburg catapulted Grant to the top tier of Union generals. President Lincoln wrote, "Grant is my man, and I am his for the rest of the war." By the end of 1863, Grant commanded the entire western theater and in 1864 rose to the position of general in chief of the U.S. Army. Thus Grant himself presided over the massing of Union forces that ultimately crushed the core of the Confederacy.

The victory at Vicksburg brought other benefits to the Union as well. With the Mississippi River again open to Union trade, the farmers of the Midwest regained an important outlet for their commodities. This development in turn bolstered Lincoln's political standing in the region. Most importantly, the nearly simultaneous Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg gave the Northern populace a sense of progress toward victory at a time when enthusiasm for the long and bloody conflict was dissipating rapidly.

Even today the Vicksburg campaign remains valuable as a case study for the military profession. The campaign provides an example of effective joint Army-Navy cooperation the likes of which would not be seen again until the twentieth century. Somehow, Grant and Porter managed effectively to combine the efforts of their respective services in the absence of any joint commander or staff. Moreover, the campaign abounds with examples of leadership both good and bad, and at all levels from commanding general to company-grade officer, that continue to instruct and inspire. The contrasting command styles of Grant and Pemberton are the easiest to discern, but useful models of leadership in battle can also be found at the lower ranks. Vicksburg also serves as a case study in campaign design. The artful manner in which Grant identified objectives, weighed options, and structured effective courses of action continues to instruct officers today. Perhaps the greatest lesson to be gleaned from such a study is the way in which Grant adapted to developments, swiftly altering

his plans to accommodate the contingencies of war and exploit the weaknesses of his adversaries. For Grant there was no boundary between “plan” and “execute,” and he rarely allowed his plans to drive his actions when circumstances in the field called for other solutions.

Vicksburg never attained the prominence in American culture enjoyed by the great battles waged in the east. Pemberton's surrender of Vicksburg, perhaps the most momentous event of the war to date, was overshadowed by the great battle at Gettysburg, which reached its climax just one day earlier. This is not to suggest that Vicksburg has been forgotten. In 1896, a congressman from Mississippi proposed legislation to create a national military park at Vicksburg. Two years later, the House Committee on Military Affairs submitted a report in support of the bill, asserting that

the campaign of General Grant, which terminated in the capitulation of the “Gibraltar of the South,” from the landing of the first of his troops on the east bank of the Mississippi River at Bruinsburg on April 30, 1863, until the complete investment of the city twenty days later, was not only one of the most remarkable of the war, but has been justly assigned a place affording the greatest interest to the student of the military history of the past.

In 1899, the United States government established a national military park at Vicksburg. For many states of the Deep South and the Midwest, this beautiful park, with its adjacent military cemetery containing the remains of 17,000 Civil War soldiers, became their chief site for commemorating the Civil War. In 1933, the War Department transferred the park and cemetery to the National Park Service. Every year over 600,000 visitors explore the beautiful grounds of the Vicksburg National Battlefield Park to learn about and pay tribute to the soldiers who fought there 150 years ago.

Perhaps the final word on Vicksburg should come from President Lincoln, the long-suffering commander in chief. On 13 July 1863, he wrote to congratulate Grant on the recently concluded campaign:

I do not remember that you and I ever met personally. I write this now as a grateful acknowledgment for the almost inestimable service you have done the country. I wish to say a word

further. When you first reached the vicinity of Vicksburg, I thought you should do, what you finally did—march the troops across the neck, run the batteries with the transports, and thus go below; and I never had any faith, except a general hope that you knew better than I, that the Yazoo Pass expedition, and the like, could succeed. When you got below, and took Port-Gibson, Grand Gulf, and vicinity, I thought you should go down the river and join Gen. Banks; and when you turned Northward East of the Big Black, I feared it was a mistake. I now wish to make the personal acknowledgment that you were right, and I was wrong.  
Yours very truly  
Abraham Lincoln.



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