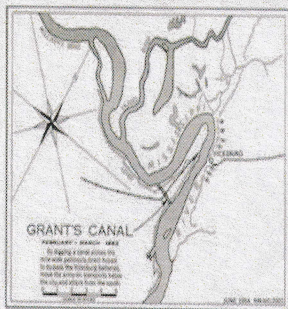




Grant's Canal



Believing it could leave Vicksburg high and dry by building a man-made channel to change the course of the Mississippi River, the Union army commenced work on a canal on June 27, 1862. Intending to catch

enough of the current's force to divert the river, the Federals hoped to make Vicksburg militarily worthless without firing a shot.

Under command of Brigadier General Thomas Williams, a 3,000-man infantry brigade composed of soldiers from Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Michigan began felling trees and turning dirt.



General Thomas Williams

Disease, however, soon began spreading like wildfire through the ranks. Dysentery, diarrhea, malaria, and various fevers took a heavy toll in addition to men falling victim to heat exhaustion and sun stroke. *"The labor of making this cut is far greater than estimated by anybody,"* confessed Williams.



To augment his fast-dwindling workforce, Williams reported that *"Between 1,100 and 1,200 blacks, gathered from neighboring plantations by armed parties, are now engaged in the work of excavating, cutting down trees, and grubbing up roots."*

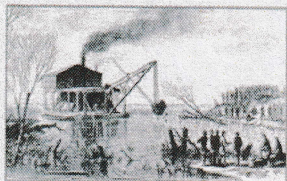
But, by July 24, 1862, work on the canal stopped and Williams's weary soldiers withdrew with Admiral David Glasgow Farragut's West Gulf Blockading Squadron to safer waters.

In January 1863, Major General Ulysses S. Grant's troops resumed work on the canal. Although he later claimed to have had little confidence in its chance for success, Grant nevertheless approved the project to maintain his soldiers' physical condition and keep alive the spirit of the offensive. President Lincoln, however, was enthralled with the endeavor and would daily query Grant, via War Department communications, "*How's work on the canal coming along?*" Although Grant provided somewhat optimistic replies, his colleague, Major General William T. Sherman, noted with candor, "*The canal don't amount to much.*"



General Ulysses S. Grant

When a sudden rise in the river during construction broke through the dam built at the head of the canal,



flooding the area, and filling it with back water and sediment, a desperate effort was made to rescue the effort. Two huge steam-driven dipper

dredges, the *Hercules* and *Sampson*, were put to work clearing the channel. But, exposure to Confederate artillery fire from the Vicksburg bluffs soon drove them away. By late March, General Grant's operational plan had shifted focus, and the project was abandoned.

Most of the canal has now been razed through agricultural operations. The small remaining tract,



which has retained most of its original width and depth, was donated to the National Park Service in 1990 by local land owners working in

conjunction with The Conservation Fund and is the only reminder of this innovative, yet fruitless tactic of the Vicksburg campaign.



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