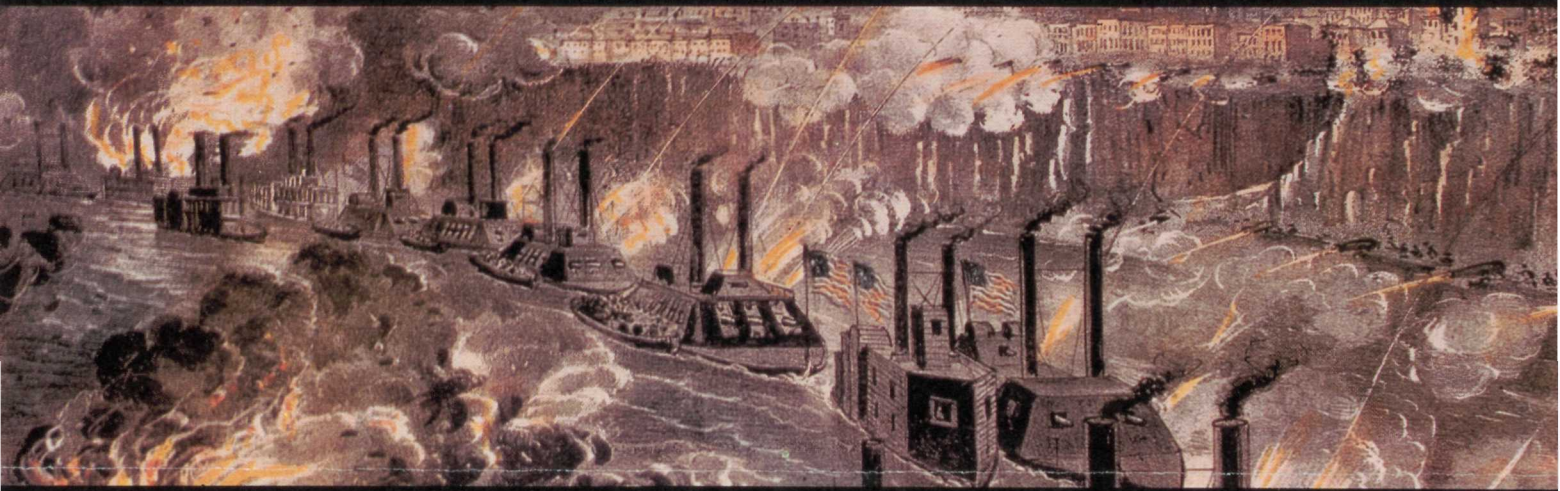


Vicksburg

Vicksburg National Military Park
Mississippi

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Admiral Porter's fleet passing the Confederate batteries at Vicksburg, April 16, 1863. From a Currier & Ives chromolithograph. Courtesy U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis.

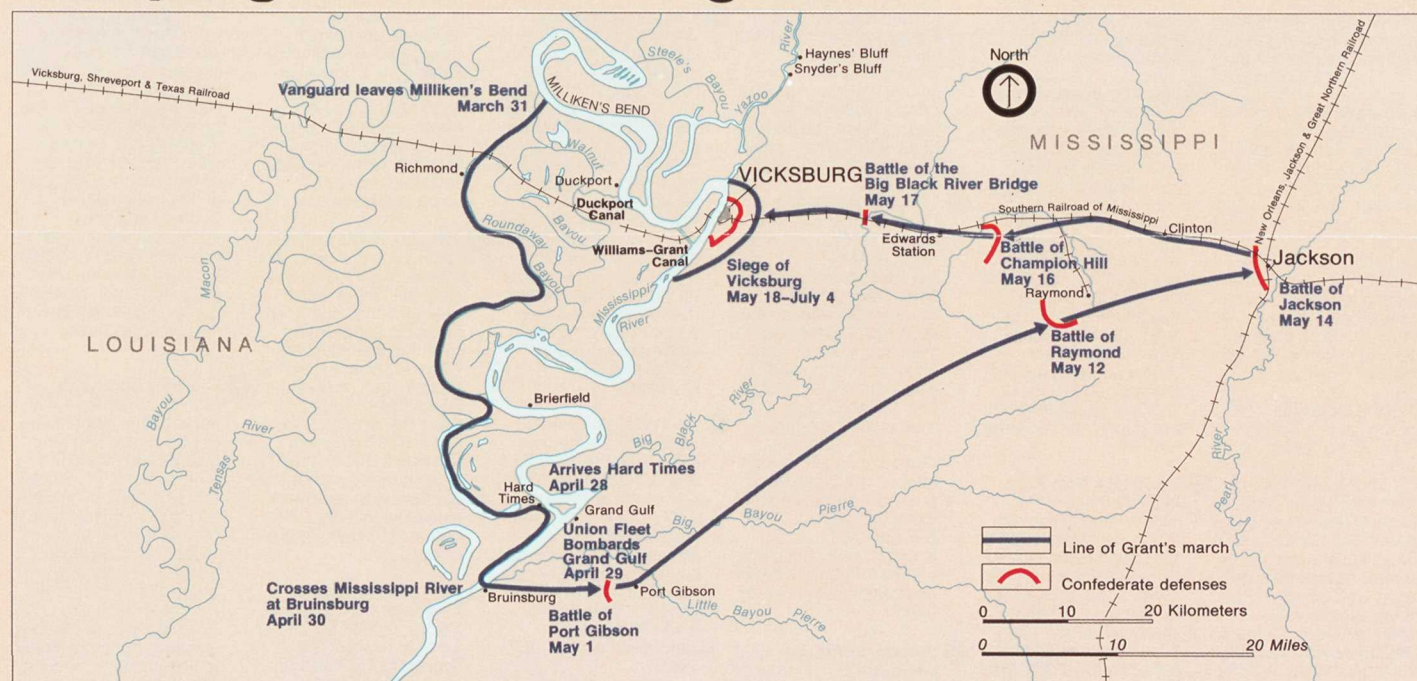
Between Cairo, Ill., and the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi River meanders over a course more than 1,600 kilometers (nearly 1,000 miles) long. During the Civil War, control of this stretch of the river was of vital importance to the Federal Government. Command of that waterway would allow uninterrupted passage of Union troops and supplies into the South. It would also have the desired effect of isolating the States of Texas and Arkansas and most of Louisiana, comprising nearly half the land area of the Confederacy

and a region upon which the South depended heavily for supplies and recruits.

From the beginning of the war in 1861, the Confederates, to protect this vital lifeline, erected fortifications at strategic points along the river. Federal forces, however, fighting their way southward from Illinois and northward from the Gulf of Mexico, captured post after post, until by late summer of 1862 only Vicksburg and Port Hudson posed major obstacles to Union domination of the Mississippi.

Of the two posts, Vicksburg was the strongest and most important. It sat on a high bluff overlooking a bend in the river, protected by artillery batteries along the riverfront and by a maze of swamps and bayous to the north and south. President Abraham Lincoln called Vicksburg "the key" and believed that "the war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket." So far the city had defied Union efforts to force it into submission.

Campaign for Vicksburg



In October 1862, Ulysses S. Grant was appointed commander of the Department of the Tennessee and charged with clearing the Mississippi of Confederate resistance. That same month, Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton, a West Point graduate and a Pennsylvanian by birth, assumed command of the roughly 50,000 widely scattered Confederate troops defending the Mississippi. His orders were to keep the river open. Vicksburg became the focus of military operations for both men.

During the winter of 1862-63, Grant conducted a series of amphibious operations (often referred to as the Bayou Expeditions) aimed at reducing Vicksburg. All of them failed. By spring Grant had decided to march his army of approximately 45,000 men down the west (Louisiana) bank of the Mississippi, cross the river well below Vicksburg, and then swing into position to attack the city from the south.

On March 31, 1863, Grant moved his army south from its encampments at Milliken's Bend, 32 kilometers (20 miles) northwest of Vicksburg. By April 28 the Northerners were established at Hard Times on the Mississippi above Grand Gulf. On the 29th Adm. David D. Porter's gunboats bombarded the Confederate forts at Grand Gulf to prepare the way for a crossing, but the attack was repulsed. Undaunted, Grant marched his troops a little further south and, on April 30, stormed across unopposed at Bruinsburg.

Striking rapidly eastward to secure the bridgehead, the Northerners met elements of Pemberton's Confederate forces near Port Gibson on May 1. The Southerners fought a gallant holding action, but they were overwhelmed and fell back toward Vicksburg. After meeting and defeating a small Confederate force near Raymond on May 12, Grant's troops attacked and captured Jackson, the State capital, on May 14, scattering the Southern defenders.

Turning his army westward, Grant moved toward Vicksburg along the line of the Southern Railroad of Mississippi. At Champion Hill on May 16 and at Big Black River Bridge on May 17, his soldiers attacked and overwhelmed Pemberton's disorganized Confederates, driving them back into the Vicksburg fortifications. By May 18, advanced units of the Federal army were approaching the bristling Confederate defenses.

Believing that the battles of Champion Hill and Big Black River Bridge had broken Confederate morale, Grant immediately scheduled an assault on the Vicksburg lines. The first attack took place against the Stockade Redan on May 19. It failed. A second attack, launched on the morning of May 22, was also repulsed.

Realizing that it was useless to expend further lives in attempts to take the city by storm, Grant reluctantly began formal siege

operations. Batteries of artillery were established to hammer the Confederate fortifications from the land side, while Admiral Porter's gunboats cut off communications and blasted the city from the river. By the end of June, with little hope of relief and no chance to break out of the Federal cordon, Pemberton knew that it was only a matter of time before he must "capitulate upon the best attainable terms." On the afternoon of July 3 he met with Grant to discuss terms for the surrender of Vicksburg.

Grant demanded unconditional surrender; Pemberton refused. The meeting broke up. During the afternoon, the Federal commander modified his demands and agreed to let the Confederates sign paroles not to fight again until exchanged. In addition, officers could retain sidearms and a mount. Pemberton accepted these terms, and at 10 a.m. on July 4, 1863, Vicksburg was officially surrendered.

When Port Hudson surrendered 5 days later, the great Northern objective of the war in the West—the opening of the Mississippi River and the severing of the Confederacy—was at last realized. For the first time since the war began, the Mississippi was free of Confederate troops and fortifications. As President Lincoln put it, "The Father of Waters again goes unvexed to the sea."

Legacy from the Past

On December 12, 1862, the Union ironclad gunboat *Cairo*, along with several other vessels, steamed up the Yazoo River, north of Vicksburg, to destroy Confederate batteries and clear enemy obstructions from the channel. Suddenly, two explosions in quick suc-

cession tore gaping holes in the boat's bottom. Within minutes the ironclad lay on the bottom of the river, only the tops of her smokestacks and flagstaffs above the water. The *Cairo* had become the first vessel in history to be sunk by an electrically detonated mine.



T. O. Selfridge,
Cairo commander

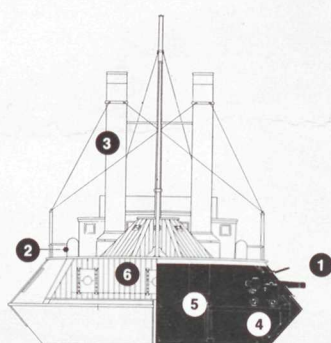
It is not for her wartime record, however, that the *Cairo* has won a lasting place in history, but because of what went down with her when she sank in the Yazoo. Here was preserved, in time-capsule form, information about naval construction, naval stores, armament, and the per-

sonal gear of the crew who served on board.

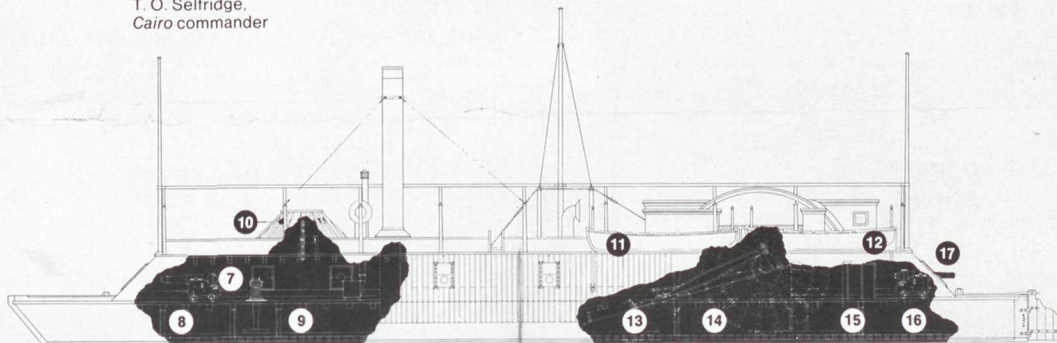
The vast array of artifacts recovered from the gunboat before and after it was salvaged in the early 1960s is now on display at the U.S.S. *Cairo* Museum adjacent to Vicksburg National Cemetery. These, to-

gether with the remains of the gunboat itself, give new insights into naval life during the Civil War years.

The museum can be reached from the park tour road or through the city of Vicksburg via Fort Hill Drive and Connecting Avenue.



- 32-pounder Navy smoothbores, 8-inch smoothbores, & 42-pounder Army rifle (port & starboard)
- Hammock berthing (port & starboard)
- Smokestack
- Fire room
- Forward end of boilers
- Iron-sheathed casemate
- 8-inch Navy smoothbore & 42-pounder Army rifles



- Commissary stores
- Coal
- Pilot house
- Cutter (port & starboard)
- Launch (port), cutter (starboard)
- Engine room
- Shellrooms (port & starboard)
- Magazine (port)

- Stores (port & starboard)
- 32-pounder Navy smoothbore & 30-pounder Navy Parrott rifle

