# Vicksburg

Vicksburg National Military Park
Mississippi

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

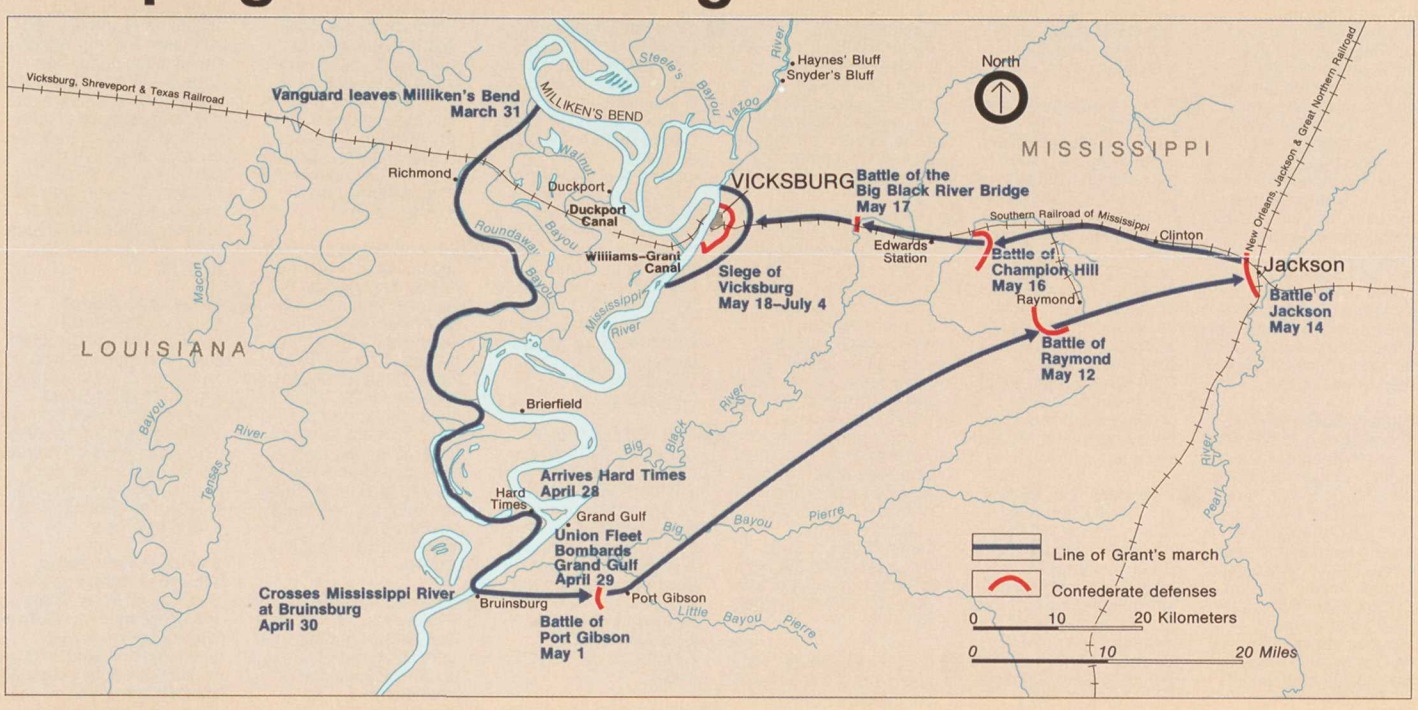
Admiral Porter's fleet passing the Confederate batteries at Vicksburg, April 16, 1863. From a Currier & Ives chromolithograph. Courtesy U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis.

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

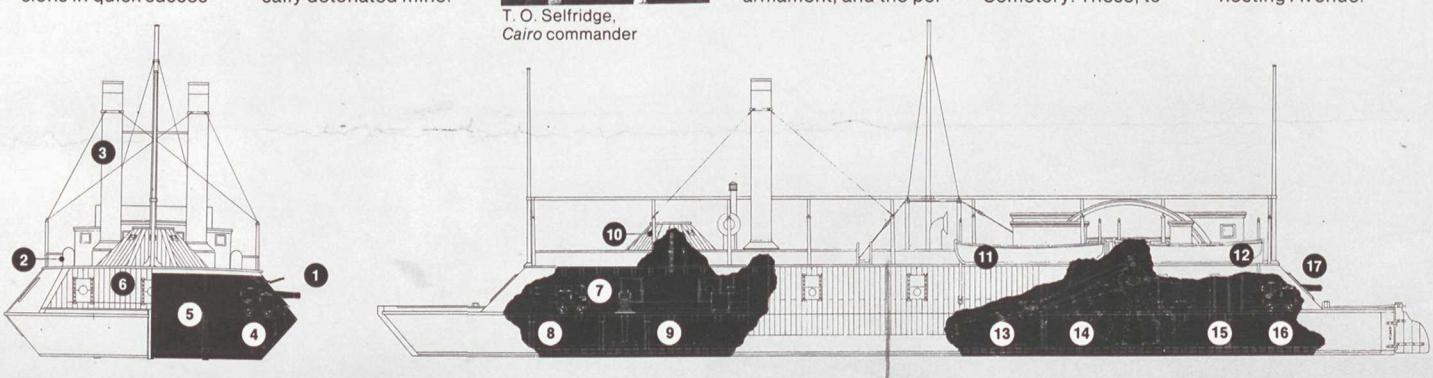
On December 12, 1862, the Union ironclad gunboat *Cairo*, along with several other vessels, steamed up the Yazoo River, north of Vicksburg, to destroy Confederate batteries and clear enemy obstructions from the channel. Suddenly, two explosions in quick succession tore gaping holes in the boat's bottom. 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

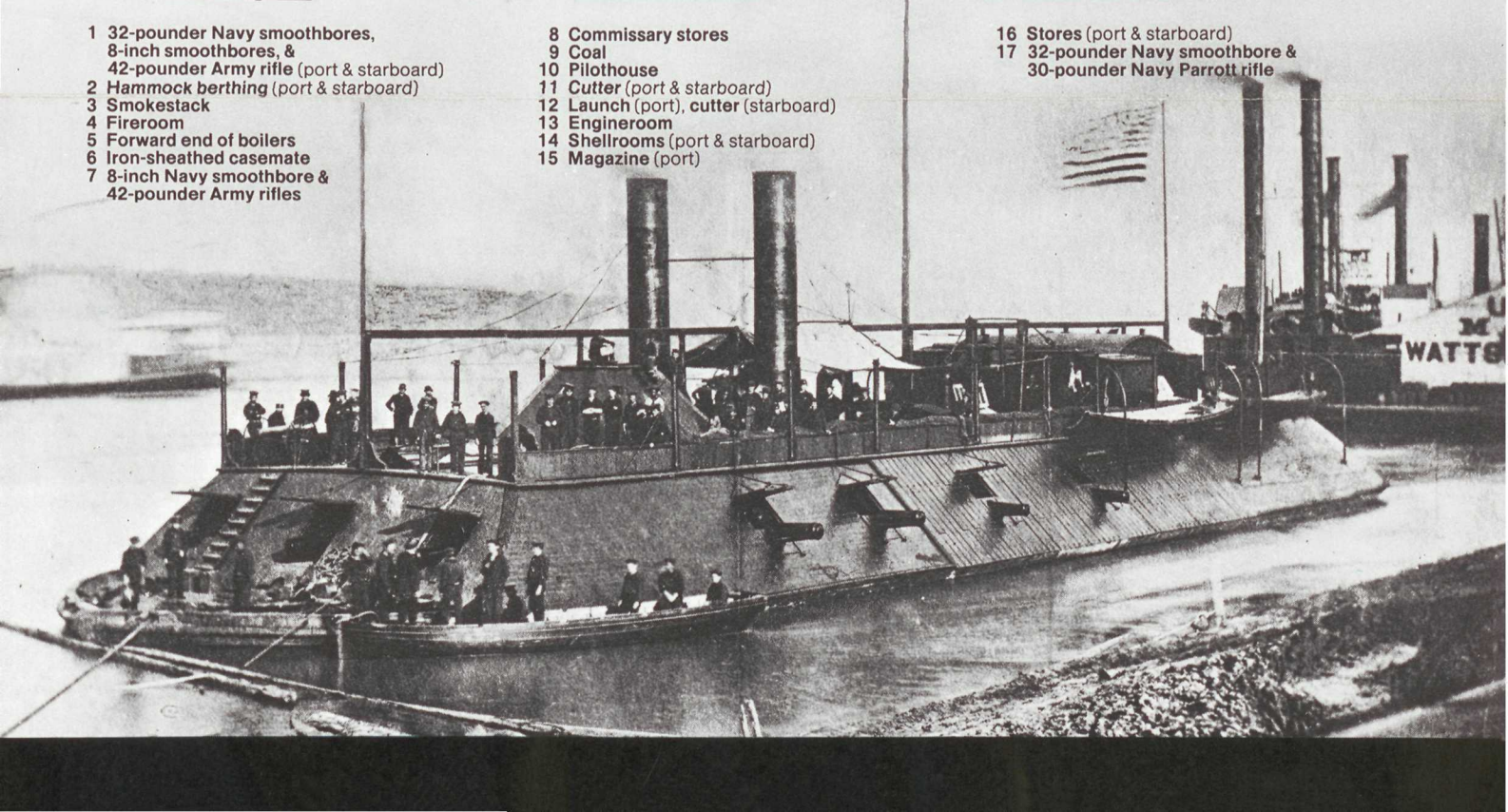
It is not for her wartime record, however, that the *Cairo* has won a lasting place in history, but because of what went down with her when she sank in the Yazoo. Here was preserved, in time-capsule form, information about naval construction, naval stores, armament, and the personal gear of the crew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



1 **32-pounder Navy smoothbores, 8-inch smoothbores, & 42-pounder Army rifle** (port & starboard)
2 **Hammock berthing** (port & starboard)
3 **Smokestack**
4 **Fireroom**
5 **Forward end of boilers**
6 **Iron-sheathed casemate**
7 **8-inch Navy smoothbore & 42-pounder Army rifles**
8 **Commissary stores**
9 **Coal**
10 **Pilothouse**
11 **Cutter** (port & starboard)
12 **Launch** (port), **cutter** (starboard)
13 **Engineroom**
14 **Shellrooms** (port & starboard)
15 **Magazine** (port)
16 **Stores** (port & starboard)
17 **32-pounder Navy smoothbore & 30-pounder Navy Parrott rifle**



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## About Your Visit

Vicksburg National Military Park is located in the northeastern portion of the city of Vicksburg, Miss. The park entrance and visitor center are on Clay Street (U.S. 80), within 1.6 kilometers (1 mile) of Interstate 20. Both the visitor center and the U.S.S. *Cairo* Museum are open daily, except Christmas. Please check with the park staff for information about special programs and activities.

The map below identifies the main areas of the park. Four areas, however, are not shown. Three are located south of Vicksburg along Warrenton Road (U.S. 61) near the Mississippi River bridges: *Louisiana Circle,* site of a Confederate fortification; *South Fort,* another Confederate defense work; and *Navy Circle,* marking the southern anchor of the Union lines. Interpretive markers explain their significance. The fourth area, a portion of *Grant's Canal,* is located across the Mississippi in Madison Parish, Louisiana.

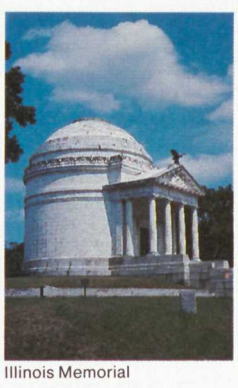
Federal law prohibits relic hunting and the possession or use of metal detectors on park property. Weapons of any kind are also prohibited within the park. Picnicking is allowed only at the U.S.S. *Cairo* Museum and at Tour Stop 12. Fires and camping are not allowed. Pets must be leashed or physically restrained at all times. Do not climb on cannons or monuments and do not disturb plants and animals.

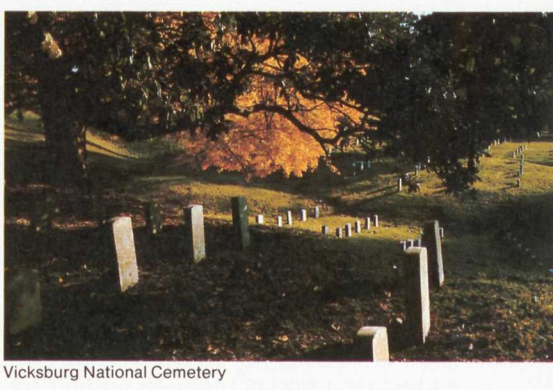
Vicksburg National Military Park and Cemetery are administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is 3201 Clay Street, Vicksburg, MS 39180, is in charge.

☆ GPO: 1994—301-085/00073 Reprint 1994.

Shirley House

Living History Gun Crew


Illinois Memorial


Vicksburg National Cemetery

## A Tour of the Battlefield

We suggest that you begin the 25.8-kilometer (16-mile) tour at the visitor center, where exhibits and an audio-visual program explain the campaign and siege of Vicksburg. The numbered stops below are keyed to the numbers on the map. Mileage figures indicate distance from the visitor center. During the tour, you will notice metal markers painted either red or blue. Red markers signify interpretive information pertaining to Confederate lines or emplacements, while the blue markers denote information on the Union forces.

**1 Battery DeGolyer** (2.3 kilometers/1.4 miles). From this position, a battery of guns from the 8th Michigan Artillery commanded by Capt. Samuel DeGolyer hammered the Confederate Great Redoubt directly ahead. At one time as many as 22 Federal artillery pieces were mounted here. Captain DeGolyer was mortally wounded while directing the fire of this battery.

**2 Shirley House** (2.9 kilometers/1.8 miles). Union troops called it "the white house," and it is the only surviving wartime structure in the park. During the siege it served as headquarters for the 45th Illinois Infantry, whose members built hundreds of bombproof shelters around it to protect themselves against Confederate artillery fire. It has been restored to its 1863 appearance.

**3 Third Louisiana Redan** (3 kilometers/1.9 miles). Here was one of the major Confederate fortifications guarding the Jackson Road approach to Vicksburg. Concluding that the fort was impregnable to direct assault, General Grant ordered his troops to dig mines under the work and blow it up. The first mine was detonated on June 25; the second on July 1. Neither succeeded in breaking the Confederate line.

**4 Ransom's Gun Path** (4.7 kilometers/2.9 miles). To provide additional artillery support for Union infantry manning this sector of the siege lines, men of the 2d Illinois Artillery dismantled two 12-pounder cannon and, aided by Gen. Thomas Ransom's infantry, dragged the guns over rough terrain to an earthen parapet just 91 meters (100 yards) from the Confederate position. There the guns were reassembled and returned to action.

**5 Stockade Redan Attack** (6 kilometers/3.7 miles). From this and nearby points on May 19, Gen. William T. Sherman launched an infantry attack against the Stockade Redan (Tour Stop 10). The Federals were repulsed with heavy losses. Three days later, as part of a general assault on the Confederate lines, Union soldiers attacked the redan again. This attack also failed.

**6 Thayer's Approach** (10.3 kilometers/6.4 miles). During the afternoon of May 22, Union troops commanded by Brig. Gen. John M. Thayer stormed up this hill toward Confederates dug in at the top. They were stopped by geography and enemy fire. Later, Thayer's men began digging a 1.8-meter- (6-foot-) deep approach trench toward the Southern position. His soldiers used the tunnel beneath the road to avoid crossing the ridge where they would be exposed to Confederate fire.

**7 Battery Selfridge** (12.1 kilometers/7.5 miles) consisted entirely of naval cannon and was manned by sailors of the U.S. Navy. The battery is named in honor of Lt. Commander T. O. Selfridge, one of the naval officers stationed here and the man in command of the ironclad *Cairo* when she was sunk in the Yazoo River on December 12, 1862. A plaque here tells of the navy's role in the siege of Vicksburg.

**8 Vicksburg National Cemetery** (12.6 kilometers/7.8 miles) was established in 1866. In addition to the nearly 17,000 Union soldiers buried here, of whom about 13,000 are unknown, the cemetery is the final resting place for veterans of the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, and the Korean Conflict. It was closed to further burials in 1961. Many of the Confederates who died during the siege are buried in Vicksburg City Cemetery.

**9 Fort Hill** (14.8 kilometers/9.2 miles) anchored the left flank of the Confederate lines. So formidable were its defenses that no Union attack was ever made against it. Confederate gunners posted here assisted the river batteries in sinking the Federal gunboat *Cincinnati* on May 27, 1863.

**10 Stockade Redan** (17.4 kilometers/10.8 miles). The Federal failures on May 19 and 22 to overrun this fortification, the principal Confederate work guarding the Old Graveyard Road approach to Vicksburg, was a big factor in Grant's decision to avoid any more direct assaults.

**11 Great Redoubt** (19.2 kilometers/11.9 miles). Like the Third Louisiana Redan (Tour Stop 3), this massive Confederate earthwork guarded the Jackson Road. The Federal attack here on May 22 was repulsed with heavy losses. Subsequently, Union artillery kept the redoubt under almost continuous bombardment.

**12 Second Texas Lunette** (20.6 kilometers/12.8 miles). Manned by the Second Texas Volunteer Infantry, this Confederate fortification guarded the Baldwin Ferry Road approach to Vicksburg. On May 22 it was the scene of furious fighting as Confederates beat back repeated Union attacks. During the siege Union soldiers dug approach trenches to within 4.5 meters (15 feet) of the lunette.

**13 Railroad Redoubt** (21.7 kilometers/13.5 miles). Confederates built this work to protect the Southern Railroad of Mississippi. On the morning of May 22 Union troops assailed this stronghold and forced out the defenders. A detachment of Col. Thomas Waul's Texas Legion counterattacked and, in a savage hand-to-hand fight with bayonets, clubbed muskets, and artillery shells used as grenades, drove out the Federals.

**14 Fort Garrott** (22.9 kilometers/14.2 miles). Here, on June 17, Confederate soldiers of Col. Isham W. Garrott's 20th Alabama Regiment suffered great casualties from the fire of Federal sharpshooters. Garrott, exasperated at the damage being inflicted on his men, picked up a rifle-musket to return the fire. He was shot through the heart and died without learning that he had been promoted to brigadier general.

**15 Hovey's Approach** (23.5 kilometers/14.6 miles). This restored section of the two approach trenches dug by Gen. Alvin P. Hovey's Union troops demonstrates how the siege was conducted. The zigzag design helped to nullify the effects of Confederate enfilading fire and minimized Federal casualties.

***For Safety's Sake:* Whether driving, hiking, jogging, or bicycling, be alert to potential hazards while visiting the battlefield. Avoid running on steep slopes, and watch for fire ants and poison ivy. Severe thunderstorms can develop quickly at any time of year; be prepared to seek shelter. Report all accidents to park rangers, who are here to help you.**