Vicksburg

Vicksburg National Military Park
Louisiana/Mississippi

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Official Map and Guide

From "The Glorious Fourth: Ulysses S. Grant at Vicksburg, July 4, 1863,"© by Mort Künstler.

Campaign for Vicksburg

From the beginning of the Civil War, control of the Mississippi River south of Cairo, Ill., was of vital importance to the Federal Government. Command of that waterway would allow uninterrupted passage of Union troops and supplies into the South and have the desired effect of isolating the States of Texas and Arkansas and most of Louisiana—a region upon which the South depended heavily for supplies and recruits. To protect this vital lifeline, the Confederates erected fortifications at strategic points along the river. Federal naval and military 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, Miss., and Port Hudson, La., posed major obstacles to Union domination of the Mississippi. Of these, Vicksburg was the stronger and more important.

Sitting atop a high bluff overlooking a bend in the river, Vicksburg was protected by artillery batteries along the riverfront, by a maze of swamps and bayous to the north and south, and by a ring of forts mounting 172 guns that guarded all land approaches to the city. 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." In October 1862, Vicksburg became the focus of military operations for Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, who was ordered to clear the Mississippi of Confederate resistance, and Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton, who, with roughly 50,000 widely scattered Confederate troops, was expected to keep the river open.

After his initial operations against Vicksburg ended on December 29 with Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman's defeat at the Battle of Chickasaw Bayou, Grant undertook a series of amphibious operations (often referred to as the Bayou Expeditions) aimed at forcing the city's surrender. All of them failed, including an effort to bypass the batteries of Vicksburg by digging a canal across the base of De Soto Point. By spring Grant had decided to march his army of about 45,000 men down the Louisiana side of the Mississippi, cross the river well below Vicksburg, and then swing into position to attack the city from the south or east.

On March 31, 1863, Grant began to move his army south from its encampments at Milliken's Bend, 20 miles northwest of Vicksburg, and by April 28 the Northerners were established at Hard Times, La., on the Mississippi above Grand Gulf. Unable to cross the river at Grand Gulf because of Confederate resistance, Grant marched his troops farther south, and on April 30, sent them ashore at Bruinsburg. Marching eastward, Grant's soldiers defeated elements of Pemberton's forces near Port Gibson on May 1 and near Raymond on May 12, then captured Jackson, the state capital, on May 14, scattering its defenders.

Turning westward, Grant marched his forces toward Vicksburg along the line of the Southern Railroad of Mississippi. On May 16, at Champion Hill, they defeated Pemberton's field army in the largest, bloodiest, most significant action of the campaign. The following day, at Big Black River Bridge, the Federals overwhelmed and drove Pemberton's disorganized troops back into the Vicksburg fortifications. By May 18 the Northerners were approaching the bristling Confederate defenses.

Grant lost no time in assaulting the Vicksburg lines. The first attack, against the Stockade Redan on May 19, failed. A second attack, launched on the morning of May 22 over a three-mile front from Stockade Redan to Fort Garrott, was also repulsed. Reluctant to expend additional lives in attempts to storm the city, Grant began formal siege operations. Batteries of artillery were established to hammer the Confederate fortifications from the land side, while Adm. David D. Porter's gunboats blasted the city from the river. By the end of June, Pemberton knew that he must soon "capitulate upon the best attainable terms." On July 3, after 46 days under siege, he met with Grant to discuss those terms and the next morning, July 4, 1863, Vicksburg was officially surrendered.

When Port Hudson surrendered five days later one of the great Northern objectives of the war—the opening of the Mississippi River and the severing of the Confederacy—was at last realized. As President Lincoln put it, "The Father of Waters again goes unvexed to the sea."

The Occupied City

The surrender of Vicksburg and Port Hudson, coupled with the defeat of Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia at Gettysburg, July 1-3, marked a critical turning point in the Civil War. Although the fighting would continue for another 21 months, Federal control of the Mississippi River would help to ensure the survival of the Union.

After its surrender, Vicksburg became an occupied city for the rest of the war, serving as a base for Federal operations throughout the region. In February 1864, Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman marched across the state from Vicksburg to Meridian in the first manifestation of his concept of total war that would later "make Georgia howl" during the March to the Sea.

The city also served as an exchange point for prisoners of war. On April 24, 1865, more than 2,300 Union soldiers, released from imprisonment at Andersonville and Cahaba, embarked on the steamer *Sultana* at Vicksburg for the journey upriver to home. Three nights later, near Memphis, the overloaded boat exploded and more than 1,800 perished. The *Sultana* incident is the greatest maritime disaster in American history, but, due to the surrender of both Lee's and Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's Confederate armies, and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln in April 1865, it received little attention in the newspapers of the period and remains a little known tragedy of the Civil War.

The citizens of Vicksburg suffered the ignominy of life in an occupied city from July 1863 through Reconstruction as civil liberties were suspended and a force of 5,000 United States Colored Troops patrolled the streets. Loyalty oaths were required of the townspeople. Failure to take the oath resulted in arrest or banishment from Vicksburg. Area plantations belonging to those declared an "enemy of the government" were confiscated and leased to "carpetbaggers and scalawags" who sought fortune in cotton speculation. Although Mississippi was readmitted to the Union on February 23, 1870, Federal troops continued to serve as an occupation force until removed in 1877 by President Rutherford B. Hayes.

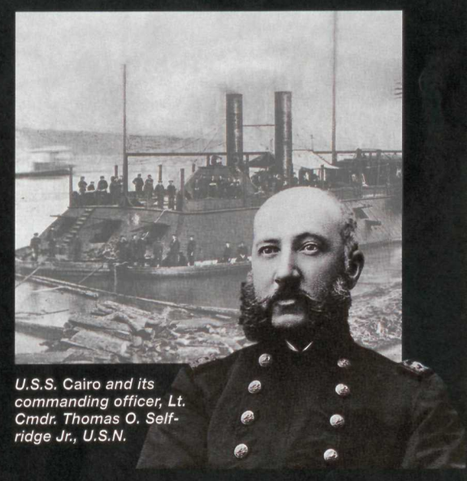
Thousands of blacks poured into Vicksburg to exercise their new found freedom. Many enlisted in the Union army, while those who were skilled artisans opened their own businesses or hired themselves out to help rebuild those parts of the city that were heavily damaged during the siege. The Freedman's Bureau opened schools to teach blacks of all ages how to read and write—tools essential for their new way of life.

Some blacks opened churches and banks, and even entered the political arena. Many of these freedoms, however, were restricted or taken away with the return of white rule at the end of Reconstruction. Not until the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s-1960s was their equality established by law. Despite the harsh realities imposed by occupation and Reconstruction and by the uncertainties of freedom, life in Vicksburg slowly returned to normal following the city's surrender, as restored river commerce brought economic stability to towns along the Mississippi. Although the river changed its course in 1876 and moved away from the city, its muddy water continues to shape the history of Vicksburg.

The victorious Union army marches past the Vicksburg Court House, July 4, 1863. The court house is now a museum.

Legacy From the Past

On December 12, 1862, the Union ironclad gunboat *Cairo* and 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 its smokestacks and flagstaffs above the water. *Cairo* had become the first vessel in history to be sunk by an electrically detonated torpedo (today called a mine). It is not for her wartime record, however, that *Cairo* has won a lasting place in history, but because of what went down with it when it 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 onboard. The vast array of artifacts recovered from the gunboat before and after it was salvaged in the early 1960s is on display at the U.S.S. Cairo Museum adjacent to Vicksburg National Cemetery. These, together with the remains of the gunboat itself, also on display, give new insights into naval life during the Civil War years.



U.S.S. Cairo *and its commanding officer, Lt. Cmdr. Thomas O. Selfridge Jr., U.S.N.*

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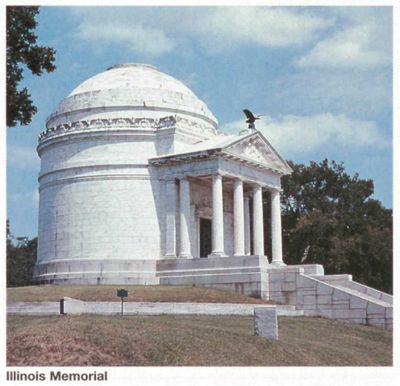
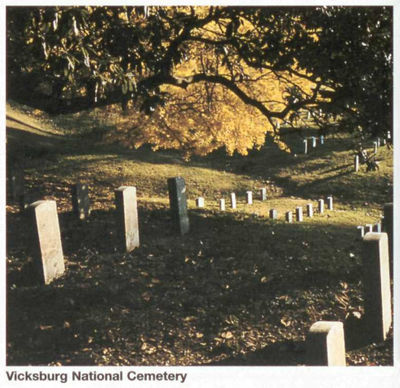
Vicksburg National Military Park is located in the northeastern portion of the city of Vicksburg, Miss., with three detached units south of the city along Washington Street (U.S. Bus. 61) near the Mississippi River bridges and one in Madison Parish, La. The park entrance and visitor center are on Clay Street (U.S. 80), within one quarter mile of I-20. Both the visitor center and the U.S.S. Cairo Museum are open daily, except December 25. Please check with the park staff for information about special programs and activities.

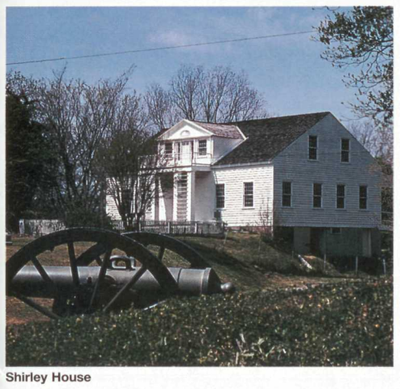
The map below shows the main area of the park plus the four detached units of *Louisiana Circle*, site of a Confederate fortification; *South Fort*, another Confederate defense work; *Navy Circle*, marking the southern anchor of the Union lines; and a small portion of *Grant's Canal*, across the Mississippi in Louisiana. When established in 1899, the park encompassed the entire extent of the siege and defense lines. The lower one-third of the park (highlighted in brown) was later transferred to the city. Many state and regimental markers, monuments, and tablets are located on former park property, which, along with the detached units, can be reached via Mission 66 Road and South Confederate Avenue.

Federal law prohibits any attempt to possess, disturb, remove, excavate, or destroy archaeological, cultural, historic, or prehistoric resources. The possession or use of metal detectors on park property is prohibited. Weapons of any kind are also prohibited within the park. Pets must be leashed or physically restrained at all times. Picnicking is allowed only at the U.S.S. Cairo Museum and at Tour Stop 12. Fires and camping are not allowed. Do not climb on cannon or monuments, and do not disturb plants and animals.

For more information write to: Superintendent, Vicksburg National Military Park, 3201 Clay Street, Vicksburg, MS 39183-3495. You may also call 601-636-0583 or access the park website at www.nps.gov/vick on the Internet.


Illinois Memorial


Vicksburg National Cemetery


Shirley House

Color photographs and black and white images are from National Park Service files.

Touring the Battlefield

We suggest that you begin the 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. During the tour, you will notice either red or blue metal markers. Red markers pertain to Confederate lines or emplacements. Blue markers pertain to Union forces.

1 Battery De Golyer From this position a battery of guns, including those from the 8th Michigan Artillery commanded by Capt. Samuel De Golyer, hammered the Confederate Great Redoubt directly ahead. At one time as many as 22 Federal artillery pieces were positioned here. Captain De Golyer was mortally wounded while directing the fire of this battery.

2 Shirley House Union troops called it "the white house." It is the only surviving wartime structure in the park. During the siege it served as headquarters for the 45th Illinois Infantry, members of which 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 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 To provide additional artillery support for infantry manning this sector of the siege lines, men of the 2nd 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 100 yards from the Confederate position. There the guns were reassembled and returned to action.

5 Stockade Redan Attack 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 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 six-foot-deep approach trench toward the Southern position. His soldiers dug the tunnel beneath the road to avoid crossing the ridge, where they would be exposed to Confederate fire.

7 Battery Selfridge This battery consisted entirely of naval cannon and was manned by sailors of the U.S. Navy. It is named in honor of Lt. Commander Thomas O. Selfridge, Jr., one of the naval officers stationed here and the man in command of the ironclad *Cairo* when it 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 Of the nearly 17,000 Union soldiers buried here, about 13,000 are unknown. Established in 1866, the cemetery is also the final resting place for veterans of the Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, and the Korean Conflict. It was closed to burials in 1961. Many Confederates who died during the siege are buried in Vicksburg's Cedar Hill Cemetery.

9 Fort Hill This fort, which anchored the northern flank of the Confederate lines, was so formidable that no Union attack was ever made against it. Confederate gunners posted here helped the river batteries sink the Federal gunboat *Cincinnati* on May 27, 1863.

10 Stockade Redan The Federal failures on May 19 and 22 to overrun this fortification, the principal Confederate work guarding the Graveyard Road approach to Vicksburg, were major factors in Grant's decision to avoid any more direct assaults.

11 Great Redoubt 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. Union artillery subsequently kept the redoubt under almost continuous bombardment.

12 Second Texas Lunette 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 15 feet of the lunette.

13 Railroad Redoubt 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 On June 17 Confederate soldiers of Col. Isham W. Garrott's 20th Alabama Regiment suffered great casualties here 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 he had been promoted to brigadier general.

15 Hovey's Approach 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.

Detached Park Sites

Louisiana Circle Confederate cannon here guarded the river approaches to the city and engaged Union gunboats during the siege.

South Fort Southern anchor of the Confederate defense lines around Vicksburg. It guarded the Warrenton Road (Washington Street) entrance to the city.

Navy Circle Southern anchor of the Union siege lines. Rifled cannon mounted here prevented Confederates from escaping the city via the Warrenton Road (now Washington Street).

Grant's Canal This site, located across the Mississippi River in Madison Parish, La., is where Federal troops attempted to cut a canal across the base of De Soto Point to enable gunboats and transports to bypass Confederate batteries at Vicksburg.

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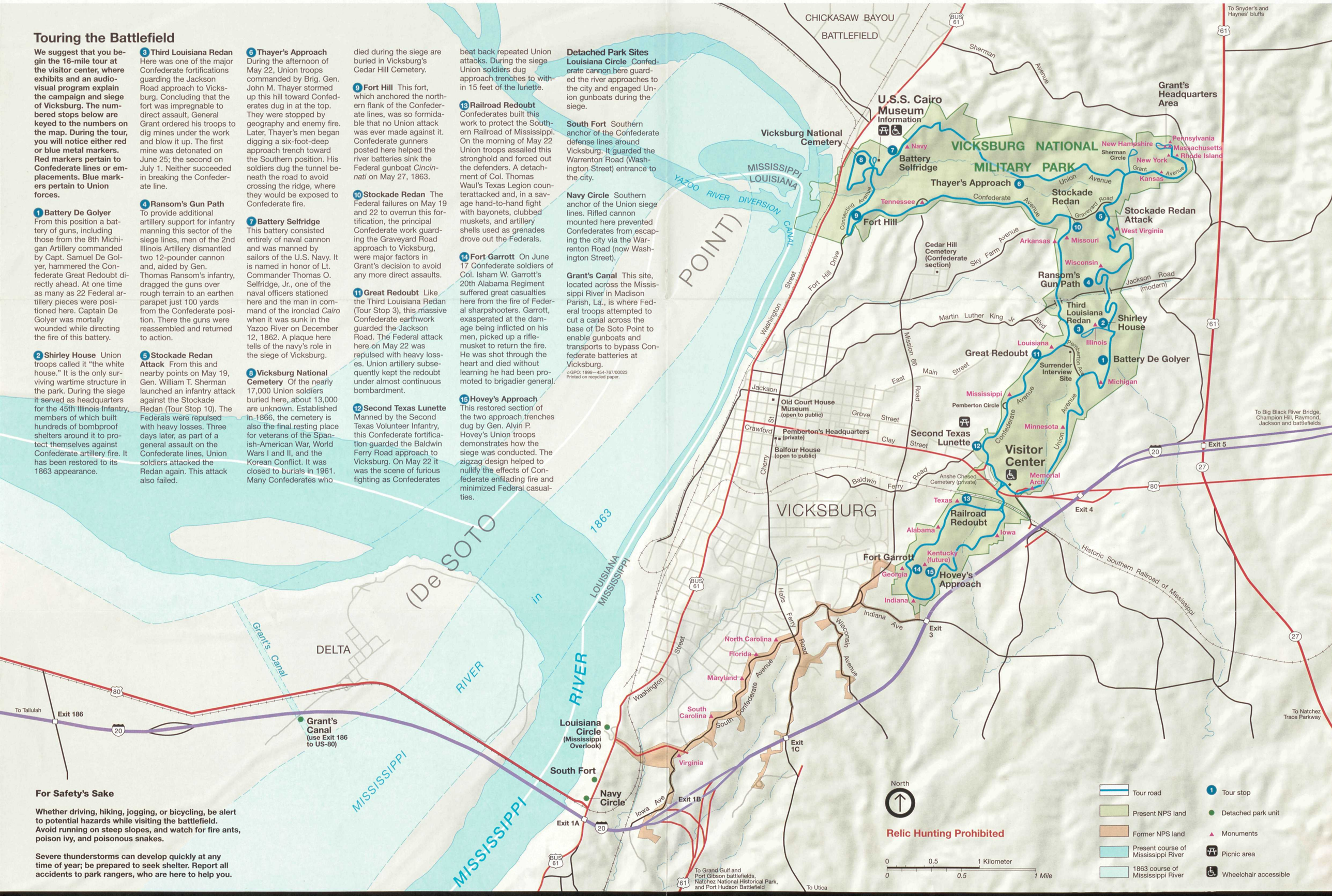

For Safety's Sake

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, poison ivy, and poisonous snakes.

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.