



The nation was divided, but both sides agreed Vicksburg was vital to victory.

President Jefferson Davis knew how important this town overlooking a Mississippi River bend was to the Confederacy. To him, Vicksburg, Mississippi, was “the nailhead that holds the South’s two halves together.” At the start of the Civil War, Confederates controlled the Mississippi River south of Cairo, Illinois. They fortified strategic river points—like Vicksburg with its riverfront artillery batteries and a ring of forts whose 172 guns guarded all land approaches. They leveraged the natural maze of swamps and bayous for defense. They used its routes for supplies and troops. Vicksburg was the South’s lifeline.

But Vicksburg could be the North’s lifeline. The US Army could pass troops and supplies into the South by road, river, or rail. They could isolate Texas, Arkansas, and most of Louisiana—which would cut off Confederate supplies and recruits. As the war progressed, Federal naval and military forces gained control of more of the Mississippi River, fighting south from Illinois and north from the Gulf as they closed in on Vicksburg. President Abraham Lincoln knew Vicksburg was “the key! The war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket.” He knew how valuable this town on a high bluff was to the United States.

The Federals captured post after post. Then, they set their sights on Vicksburg.

October 1862 Since late summer only Vicksburg, MS, and Port Hudson, LA, block Federal control of the Mississippi River. The stronger and more important post, Vicksburg is the focus of military operations.

US Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant is ordered to clear the Mississippi River of Confederate resistance. Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton—with 50,000 widely scattered Confederate troops—is expected to keep the river open.

December 29 Pemberton defeats US Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman at the Battle of Chickasaw Bayou. Grant begins amphibious maneuvers (the Bayou Expeditions) to force the surrender of Vicksburg.

All fail, including digging a canal across the base of De Soto Point to bypass Vicksburg’s batteries.

Spring 1863 Grant marches a 45,000-strong army down the Louisiana side of the Mississippi River. He crosses well below Vicksburg and swings into position to attack the city from the south or east.

March 31 Grant starts south from his encampments at Milliken’s Bend, 20 miles northwest of Vicksburg (see map).

April 28–29 The Federals are established at Hard Times, LA. Confederate resistance prevents Grant from crossing the river at Grand Gulf. Grant moves south.

April 30–May 1 Grant sends his troops ashore at Bruinsburg. Marching eastward, they defeat parts of Pemberton’s forces near Port Gibson.

May 12 Grant’s troops defeat parts of Pemberton’s forces near Raymond.

May 14 Grant captures Jackson, the state capital, scattering its defenders.

May 16 Grant marches west to Vicksburg along the Southern Railroad of Mississippi. At Champion Hill Grant’s force defeats Pemberton’s field army in the campaign’s largest, bloodiest, and most significant action.



May 17 At Big Black River Bridge the Federals overwhelm and drive Pemberton's disorganized troops back into Vicksburg's fortifications.

May 18–19 The Federals close in on the Confederate defenses. Grant quickly assaults the Vicksburg lines, but the Federals' first attack against the Stockade Redan fails.

May 22 The Federals' next attack—launched over a three-mile front from Stockade Redan to Fort Garrott—is repulsed. Reluctant to expend more lives trying to storm the city, Grant begins a formal siege. While Grant's artillery batteries hammer the

Confederate fortifications, Adm. David D. Porter's gunboats blast the city from the river.

Late June Pemberton realizes he must “capitulate upon the best attainable terms.”

July 3 After 46 days of siege, Pemberton meets Grant to discuss terms.

July 4 Vicksburg is officially surrendered.

July 9 Port Hudson surrenders. A key Federal objective—open the Mississippi River and sever the Confederacy—is achieved. Using a nickname for the Mississippi River, President Lincoln says, “The Father of Waters again goes unvexed to the sea.”

Freedom and Equality after the Siege

Vicksburg and Port Hudson were surrendered on the heels of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee’s defeat in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania (July 1–3, 1863). The Civil War had reached a turning point—and, just as Lincoln thought, Federal control of the Mississippi River helped ensure the United States’ 1865 victory. But what happened to the people of Vicksburg after the siege?

Federal troops remained in Vicksburg until President Rutherford B. Hayes removed them at the end of Reconstruction (1877). Some townspeople resented and challenged the Federal troops, whose lingering presence was a bitter reminder of the South’s lost struggle for independence; however, others welcomed the troops and hoped order and normal life in Vicksburg would be restored.

Under military rule, Vicksburg’s residents faced suspended civil liberties, loyalty oaths, seized property, arrest, or even banishment. This treatment may seem contrary to President

Andrew Johnson’s 1868 pardon designed “to renew and fully restore confidence and fraternal feeling among the whole people.” For others, though, these conditions were necessary to bring the South back into the United States as part of Reconstruction.

As local rule was returned to Vicksburg in the 1870s, thousands of African Americans came to Vicksburg to exercise their new freedoms. Many of the 5,000 United States Colored Troops garrisoned in Vicksburg settled here after the war. Enslaved just years prior to these events, their military duty personified freedom. Some opened banks or churches or entered politics. But African Americans’ freedoms remained limited, and their legal and political powers were virtually non-existent.

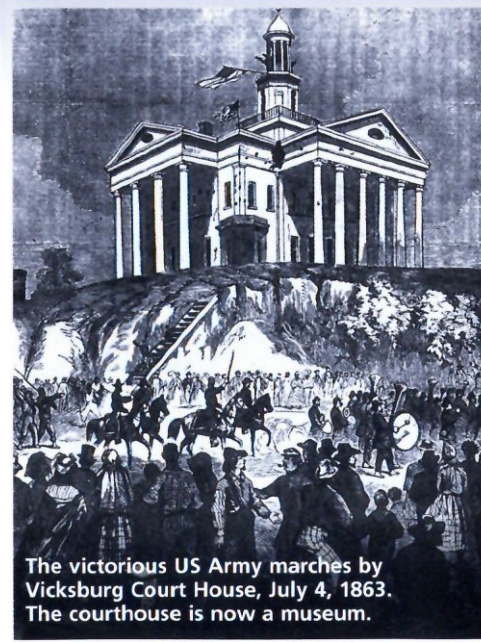
During Reconstruction’s early years the federal Freedmen’s Bureau aimed to provide African Americans and poor southern whites schooling, housing or property, food, and legal aid. Yet even as the Freedmen’s Bureau encouraged

blacks and whites to work together as equals, southern states had been passing laws to disadvantage African Americans—like the Black Codes (1865–66) that led to Reconstruction and Jim Crow laws that forced racial segregation from 1877 through the 1950s.

Mississippi was readmitted to the United States in 1870, but a century passed before the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 finally outlawed racial discrimination and guaranteed nationwide equality for all—in Vicksburg and beyond.

Then as now, perspectives of the Civil War’s legacy vary from person to person. Was the siege of Vicksburg a victory or a defeat? Was the Federal troops’ lingering presence occupation or reconstruction? Was Reconstruction a way to punish Vicksburg, or was it a way to mold the South back into the United States?

Vicksburg National Military Park offers a place for all to explore the many perspectives in this enduring story that helps define our nation.



An Explosive Discovery!

DECEMBER 12, 1862 The gunboat USS *Cairo*, one of the United States’ first ironclad warships, steams up the Yazoo River north of Vicksburg. *Cairo* is on a mission to destroy Confederate batteries and clear enemy obstructions from the channel. Suddenly, two quick explosions tear holes into *Cairo*. In minutes *Cairo* sinks. Only the tops of its smokestack and flagstaff show above water. Amazingly, no crew were hurt.

Cairo was the first vessel sunk by an electrically detonated torpedo (mine). Silt, sand, and mud covered the ship until its 1956 discovery. Like a time capsule, *Cairo* preserved information on naval construction, naval stores, armament, and the crew’s personal gear.

Today, the artifacts recovered from *Cairo* before and after its salvage in the 1960s and the boat’s remains are exhibited at the U.S.S. *Cairo* Museum (see map, other side). These artifacts and the gunboat give many insights into Civil War naval life.



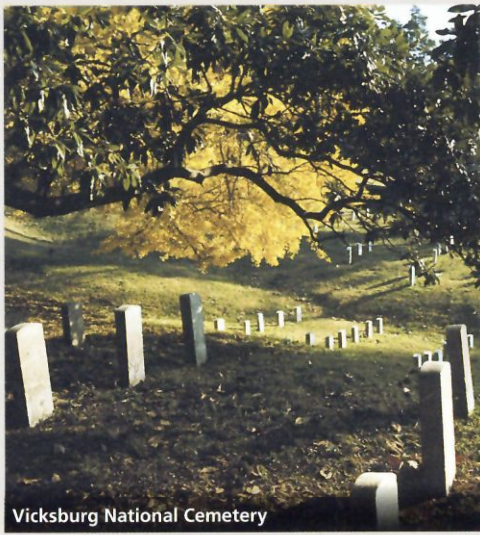
USS *Cairo* and its commanding officer, Lt. Cdr. Thomas O. Selfridge Jr., U.S.N.

BOTH IMAGES—LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Explore Vicksburg National Military Park



Illinois Memorial



Vicksburg National Cemetery



USS Cairo

TOUR THE BATTLEFIELD

We suggest you begin the 16-mile tour at the visitor center, where exhibits and a 20-minute film explain the campaign and siege of Vicksburg. The numbered stops below are keyed to the map. Along the tour, red metal markers pertain to Confederate lines or emplacements; blue markers pertain to Federal forces.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE APP TOUR

When stopped at one of the locations below, use the official NPS App for more information.

1 Battery De Golyer From this position a battery of guns, including those from the Eighth 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. De Golyer was mortally wounded while directing the fire from this battery.

2 Shirley House "The white house," as Federal troops called it, is the only surviving wartime structure in the park. During the siege it served as headquarters for the Forty-Fifth 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 Here was one of the major Confederate fortifications guarding the Jackson Road approach to Vicksburg. Concluding the fort was impregnable to direct assault, Gen. Grant ordered his troops to dig mines under the work and blow it up. The first mine was detonated June 25; the second, July 1. Neither broke the Confederate line.

4 Ransom's Gun Path To provide additional artillery support for infantry at this sector of the siege lines, the Second Illinois Artillery dismantled two 12-pounder cannon. Aided by Gen. Thomas Ransom's infantry, they 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 On May 19 from this and nearby points US 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, Federal soldiers attacked the Redan again. This attack also failed.

6 Thayer's Approach On the afternoon of May 22, Federal troops commanded by Brig. Gen. John M. Thayer stormed up this hill toward Confederates dug in at the top, but geography and enemy fire stopped them. Later Thayer's troops began digging a six-foot-deep approach trench toward the Confederate 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 guarded by US Navy sailors. It is named in honor of Lt. Cmdr. Thomas O. Selfridge Jr., the naval officer stationed here who was in command of the *Cairo* when it was sunk in the Yazoo River 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 Federal 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 in the siege are buried in nearby Cedar Hill Cemetery.

9 Fort Hill This fort anchored the Confederate lines' northern flank and was so formidable that no Federal 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 repulsed Federal attack here May 22 suffered heavy losses. Federal artillery kept the redoubt under almost continuous bombardment later.

12 Second Texas Lunette This Confederate fortification, operated by the Second Texas Volunteer Infantry, guarded the Baldwin Ferry Road approach to Vicksburg. On May 22 it was the scene of furious fighting as Confederates beat back repeated Federal attacks. During the siege Federal 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 Federal troops assailed this stronghold and forced out the defenders. A detachment of Col. Thomas Waul's Texas Legion counterattacked and drove out the Federals in a savage hand-to-hand fight with bayonets, clubbed muskets, and artillery shells used as grenades.

14 Fort Garrott Here on June 17 Confederate soldiers of Col. Isham W. Garrott's Twentieth Alabama Regiment suffered great casualties from Federal sharpshooter fire. Exasperated by the damage inflicted on his men, Garrott picked up a rifle-musket to return fire. Shot through the heart, he 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 Federal troops demonstrates how the siege was conducted. The zigzag design helped nullify the effects of Confederate fire and minimized Federal casualties.

The park entrance and visitor center are on Clay Street (US 80) within ¼ mile of I-20. The visitor center and U.S.S. Cairo Museum are open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Ask about special programs and activities. Service animals are allowed.

When established in 1899, the park included the entire extent of the siege and defense lines. In the 1960s the park's lower third was transferred to the city to complete I-20. Today, the main park area is in northeastern Vicksburg, Mississippi. The four detached units to the south along Washington Street (US Bus. 61) are **Louisiana Circle**, site of a Confederate fortification; **South Fort**, a Confederate defense work; **Navy Circle**, marking the Federal lines' southern anchor; and a portion of **Grant's Canal** across the Mississippi River in Louisiana. Follow Mission 66 Road and South Confederate Avenue to the many monuments and regimental markers on former park property.

Accessibility We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website.

Regulations and Safety Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the park. It is illegal to possess, disturb, remove, excavate, or destroy archeological, cultural, historic, or prehistoric resources. • Possession or use of metal detectors on park property is prohibited. • Fires and camping are prohibited. • For fire-arms regulations check the park website. • Always leash or physically restrain pets. • Picnic only at the U.S.S. Cairo Museum. • Do not climb on cannon or monuments. • Be alert to hazards like fire ants, poison ivy, and poisonous snakes. • Severe thunderstorms can develop quickly year-round; be prepared to seek shelter.

Emergencies call 911

More Information
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Last updated 2021

