

BATTLE DIGEST™

Lessons for Today's Leaders

Volume 3 ★ Issue 6

American Civil War:

Vicksburg

DATE:

November 4, 1862 – July 4, 1863

LOCATION:

Vicksburg, Mississippi

OPPOSING FORCES

Union Army: 40,000 troops (grew to 70,000 by the siege) of the Army of the Tennessee, commanded by Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. His corps commanders were Maj. Gens. William T. Sherman (XV Corps), James B. McPherson (XVII Corps), John A. McClernand (XIII Corps), and Stephen A. Hurlbut (XVI Corps). Rear Adm. David D. Porter commanded Union naval forces.

Confederate Army: 40,000 troops (declined to 30,000 during the siege) of the Confederate Army of Mississippi, commanded by Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton. His division commanders were Maj. Gens. Carter L. Stevenson, William W. Loring, Martin L. Smith, John H. Forney, Earl Van Dorn and Brig. Gen. John S. Bowen.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE



Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant

1863 was a pivotal year in the American Civil War. In both theaters, eastern and western, Confederate forces had recently seized the initiative. Northern support for the war ebbed to an all-time low, threatening President Abraham Lincoln's dream of a unified nation. But everything changed in the summer of 1863 when Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant captured the Confederate stronghold of Vicksburg. With his victory, Grant had cut the Confederacy in two and assured Union control of the Mississippi River. This, combined with Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's defeat at Gettysburg, restored Union confidence in the war and helped reelect Lincoln. For the South, however, the loss of Vicksburg was devastating - representing the beginning of the end.

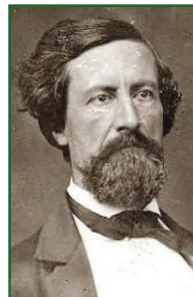
STRATEGY & MANEUVER

Actions by the Union - Vicksburg's dominance on the Mississippi River made it an important Union objective in the West. Lincoln knew Vicksburg was "the key" to defeating the South, saying "The war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket."¹ After the Union navy failed to subdue the fortress in May of 1862, the problem would fall to Grant.

In July, when Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck was summoned to Washington to serve as general-in-chief, Grant was left in charge of the Army of the Tennessee. He had to be prepared to move on Vicksburg

His campaign began on 4 November, when he moved from south-central Tennessee toward Vicksburg along the Mississippi Central Railroad.

(Map 1) When he pushed Confederate Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton back from his defensive line along the Tallahatchie River, the situation looked promising. Grant even brought Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman's remaining divisions forward from Memphis to press the attack. But the balance was about to shift.



Maj. Gen. J.C. Pemberton

John A. McClernand, a former Democrat congressman and Maj. Gen. in the Illinois volunteers, had been petitioning Lincoln to lead an expedition down the Mississippi River to capture Vicksburg. Due to McClernand's recruiting abilities and popularity within the opposing political party,

Lincoln approved the idea. Grant, who became aware of the plan after McClernand's recruits started arriving in Memphis, telegraphed Halleck about his concerns. But Lincoln remained supportive.

Because Grant didn't trust McClernand, he sent Sherman back to Memphis, on 8 December, to take charge of "all the troops there."² Sherman would now lead the expedition down the river and attack while Grant held Pemberton in place.

Grant's other surprise came in the form of Confederate cavalry. On 20 December, the same day Sherman departed south, two cavalry forces wreaked havoc on Grant's rear. Brig. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest destroyed rail and telegraph lines while Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn's cavalry destroyed Grant's vast stores at Holly Springs. (Map 1) This major setback forced Grant to retreat and regroup. But Sherman, cut off from communications, continued south and attacked Vicksburg's Chickasaw Bluffs on 29 December, where he was easily repulsed.

Afterward, Sherman withdrew to Milliken's Bend, where an agitated McClernand soon arrived and assumed command. Grant, meanwhile, frustrated with the divided command, threw the problem to Halleck. This time, Lincoln allowed Halleck to resolve it, whereupon Halleck gave Grant the authority to relieve McClernand. Yet, the politically astute Grant knew the Union cause didn't need another rift. Instead of relieving McClernand, Grant reformulated his plan again. By 29 January 1863, he had relocated to Milliken's Bend, taken personal command of the operation, and split McClernand's army into two corps - forcing McClernand to work directly for him. Despite McClernand's frustration, this allowed Grant to focus on the real problem. In his words, "to secure