

The turning point of the american civil war: battle of gettysburg or siege of vic...

[War](#), [Civil War](#)



The Turning Point of the American Civil War: Battle of Gettysburg or Siege of Vicksburg? The American Civil War, also known as the War Between the States, was a brutal onslaught between the Union (the North) and the Confederacy (the South) originating in the fractious issue of slavery. The ruthlessness of this war, mostly fought in the South, lasted from 1861 through 1865, where the Confederacy was ultimately defeated, slavery was abolished, and the extremely difficult process of the reconstruction of the United States and its unity began.

There were many battles fought during the American Civil War including the Battle of Fort Sumter, the Battle of Yorktown, and the Battle of Hanover, however, the most known confrontation is the Battle of Gettysburg. The Battle of Gettysburg took place in Pennsylvania from July 1st through July 3rd of 1863. General Robert E. Lee (commanding the Confederate army) concentrated his full strength against Major General George G. Meade's Army of the Potomac (Union) at the crossroads county seat of Gettysburg.

On July 1st, Confederate and Union forces collided at Gettysburg, with General Lee's intention being to engage the Union army and to destroy it. Initially, the Union defended low ridges to the northwest of town. Unfortunately for the two corps of Union infantry and the Union cavalry division that was defending the region; two large corps of Confederate infantry assaulted them from the north and northwest. This collapsed the hastily developed Union lines of defense and sent the defenders retreating south through the streets of town and to the hills close by.

On the second day of battle, July 2nd, most of the Union and Confederate armies had been assembled. Fierce fighting raged this day, figuratively and literally staining the ground crimson with blood. Despite the onslaught of the Confederacy, the Union managed to hold their lines even with the significant losses that they suffered. On July 3rd, the last day of the Battle of Gettysburg, the Union army repulsed the attack with artillery fire, at great losses to the Confederate army. General Lee led his army on a torturous retreat back to Virginia, making the Union the victor of the battle.

But was the Battle of Gettysburg really the turning point of the Civil War? All that the Battle of Gettysburg accomplished was prohibiting the Confederacy from further travel into Union territory. This is where the Siege of Vicksburg comes into play. Believed to be one of the most remarkable campaigns of the American Civil War, the Siege of Vicksburg is also arguably the turning point of the Civil War militarily. General Ulysses S. Grant's campaign on Vicksburg secured John Pemberton's army's surrender on July 4th, 1863 as well as the Mississippi River firmly in Union hands.

With that, the Confederacy's fate was all but sealed. Also known as the Battle of Vicksburg, this confrontation was a culmination of a long land and naval campaign by Union forces to capture this strategic position. Abraham Lincoln (the president at the time) recognized the significance of Vicksburg. He said, " Vicksburg is the key, the war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket. " There were many attempts at securing Vicksburg, the first being in the summer of 1862.

It included a prolonged bombardment by Union naval vessels, but unfortunately after the ships withdrew the attempt failed. General Grant was moving his troops on land towards the town from the rear. However, his advance ended when General Nathan Bedford Forrest of the Confederacy destroyed Grant's rail supply line, and General Earl Van Dorn of the Confederacy captured the Union supply base at Holly Springs. General Grant tried again that December, but again was met with failure. Another Union General, General William T. Sherman, led an assault against the high ground of the Chickasaw Bluffs north of Vicksburg.

To the Union's dismay this resulted in nearly 1, 800 casualties of their own with only just over 200 casualties to the Confederate defenders. Because of this, Grant's men attempted to find ways through the shallow and narrow bayous to bypass what is called the Confederate " Gibraltar of the West". After months of trying to find a bypass, Grant finally decided that his army would have to operate south of Vicksburg, which would require the cooperation of the navy. To mask his army's movement down the Louisiana side of the Mississippi river, Grant had Sherman administer two deceptive maneuvers north of Vicksburg.

On April 16th, 1863, Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter traveled down the Mississippi River, running a gauntlet of guns firing from the Vicksburg cliff, and met with Grant's army. In the largest amphibious operation ever conducted by an American force before World War II, Porter and Grant transferred 24, 000 men and 60 guns from the west bank to the east bank of the Mississippi. Unopposed at Bruinsburg, Mississippi they landed and began

marching toward Grand Gulf and Port Gibson which were towns that were to the north along the river.

On May 1st, four divisions of the Union army clashed with a Confederate brigade near Port Gibson. This battle cost each side between 700 and 900 men. Even with the losses, the two river towns were captured without any more significant fighting between the Union and the Confederacy. With General Sherman leading the rest of General Grant's army, they then crossed the river at Grand Gulf, bringing the force to over 45, 000 men. He then turned them all inland toward the Mississippi state capital, Jackson.

There were two Confederate forces in the area, one in Jackson of only approximately 5, 000 soldiers and another at Vicksburg of approximately 26, 500 soldiers who were under the leadership of General John C. Pemberton. One of Grant's advancing divisions came into contact with a Confederate force at Raymond on May 12. Although this was not a major battle, it was this confrontation that sent Pemberton's army retreating. After hours of confused conflict, the Confederate army withdrew from the battle and ran to the shelter of Vicksburg. After a few more battles, General Grant decided to besiege Vicksburg on May 25th, 1863.

He devised a plan that is still studied to this day as a basis for siege warfare. Inside the town of Vicksburg, civilians were huddled in caves to avoid the artillery shells that Grant's army were constantly bombarding the town with. Foods as well as other much needed supplies were cut off from the town. Animals like dogs, cats, horses, and sometimes even rats were reportedly becoming part of the diets of civilians and soldiers alike. Conditions for the

town of Vicksburg became so unbearable that on July 3rd, 1863, General Pemberton of the Confederacy rode out to discuss the terms of surrender of his army.

The next morning on July 4th, 1863 Pemberton's men began marching out and stacking their guns in surrender to Grant's army. The city of Vicksburg was so defeated by the surrender that they would not celebrate Independence Day thereafter until well into the 20th century. During the Siege of Vicksburg, Union and Confederate forces alike kept busy in their supporting roles on the Louisiana side of the Mississippi River. Lieutenant General Edmund Kirby Smith of the Confederacy received a telegraph from Pemberton requesting a movement against Grant's communication lines along the Mississippi.

To the Confederacy's dismay, Grant had established supply depots at Milliken's Bend, Young's Point, and Lake Providence within Smith's jurisdiction. However, Smith failed to recognize the importance of Pemberton's situation. It wasn't until June when Smith finally decided to act on Pemberton's request the month earlier. To the growing Confederate activity in the area, Grant decided to respond by dispatching troops from the Vicksburg trenches across the Mississippi River. General John G. Walker's Confederate division on the Louisiana side of the Mississippi was of particular concern.

Its presence could possibly aid Pemberton's Confederate army's escape from the city of Vicksburg. Therefore, the Union sent a brigade in the vicinity of Milliken's Bend to stop the threat. Many smaller battles were fought to

prevent support to those in Vicksburg; one included an artillery battery targeting an iron foundry that was recasting spent Union artillery shells as the men returned to De Soto Point. The targeted foundry was destroyed on June 25th. Additional Confederate activity occurred on June 29th at Goodrich's Landing.

The Confederates attacked a plantation and army training center run by former slaves. They destroyed the plantations and captured over a hundred former slaves before disengaging in the face of the Union army. Confederate raids such as these were disruptive and caused damage, but they were only minor setbacks. They also showed the Confederates that they could only cause momentary disturbances in the area and ultimately would not halt the Union. Later in the Siege of Vicksburg, Union troops tunneled under the 3rd Louisiana Redan and packed the mine with 2, 200 pounds of gunpowder, then proceeded to detonate it.

The explosion destroyed the Confederate lines on June 25th, while an infantry attack followed the blast. The 45th Illinois Regiment (known as the "Lead Mine Regiment") charged into the 40 foot diameter 12 foot deep crater with ease, but unfortunately they were stopped by the recovering Confederate infantry. The Union soldiers became pinned down while the defenders also rolled the artillery shells with short fuses into the pit with very deadly results. Union engineers worked to set up a casemate in the crater in order to extricate the infantry, and soon the soldiers fell back to a new defensive line.

From the crater left by the explosion on June 25th, Union miners worked to dig a new mine to the south and on July 1st this mine was detonated but no infantry attack followed the explosion. This attack was much more successful. Due to the brilliance of General Grant's leadership the fortress city had fallen, and with the surrender of Port Hudson on July 9th, the Mississippi River was firmly in Union hands, leaving the Confederacy effectively split into two. During the Siege of Vicksburg, the Union's casualties mounted up to just under 5, 000 men while the Confederacy lost over 32, 000 men.

The full forty-seven day siege claimed many lives, but in doing so many were also saved. With the Mississippi in Union hands, communication between the Confederate army was lost, which ultimately secured the fate of the war being in the Union's favor. The Battle of Gettysburg, although a very important engagement between the Union and the Confederacy, was not the turning point of the American Civil War militarily. After crossing the Mississippi River on April 30th, 1863, General Ulysses S. Grant's Union army waged a fighting campaign and maneuvered to isolate the city of Vicksburg and the Confederate army defending it.

The constant defeats Grant and his army inflicted gave the Confederate commander General John C. Pemberton no choice but to retreat to the defenses of the city of Vicksburg and hold out until much needed reinforcements could arrive. On May 19th and May 22nd, General Grant launched a series of frontal assaults against Pemberton's forces, suffering heavy casualties. Finding it irresponsible to continue these frontal assaults,

Grant decided to lay siege to the city of Vicksburg, ordering his men to dig a series of trenches to the Confederate standings.

For 47 days, the Union bombarded Vicksburg while the Confederate soldiers and civilians alike suffered the hardships of siege warfare. On July 4th, General Pemberton surrendered his army to General Grant and the Union, ending the siege and granted control of the vital Mississippi River in the North's hands, effectively cutting the Confederacy in half. Grant's success here secured the South's fate and inevitably led to the Union victory. The Battle of Gettysburg was not the turning point of the Civil War considering all that the Union achieved was prohibiting the Confederacy from proceeding north.

The Siege of Vicksburg destroyed the Confederacy offensive and ultimately led to the end of the American Civil War with the North as the victors, the abolishment of slavery, and the beginning of the reconstruction of the south as well as the United States of America. Bibliography 1. Bearss, Edwin C. Fields of Honor: Pivotal Battles of the Civil War. Washington, D. C: National Geographic Society, 2006 2. Hay, Thomas Robson. " Confederate Leadership at Vicksburg. " The Mississippi Valley Historical Review. 11. no. 4 (1925): pp. 543-560 3. Hoehling, A. Vicksburg: 47 Days of Siege. Stackpole Books, 1996. 400.

Print 4. Rhodes, James Ford. " The Battle of Gettysburg. " (1899): pg. 665-677 5. Sabin, Edwin L. " Vicksburg, and after: Being the Experience of a Southern Merchant and Non-Combatant during the Sixties. " The Sewanee Review. 15. no. 4 (1907): pg. 485-496 6. Woodworth, Steven E. Jefferson

Davis and His Generals: The Failure of Confederate Command in the West. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990 ----- [1]. James Ford Rhodes, " The Battle of Gettysburg" (1899): pg. 665-677 [2]. Rhodes, James Ford. " The Battle of Gettysburg. " (1899): pg. 665-677 [3].

Bearss, Edwin C. Fields of Honor: Pivotal Battles of the Civil War. Washington, D. C: National Geographic Society, 2006 [4]. Edwin C. Bearss, Fields of Honor: Pivotal Battles of the Civil War, (Washington, D. C: National Geographic Society, 2006) [5]. Hoehling, A. Vicksburg: 47 Days of Siege. Stackpole Books, 1996. 400. Print. [6]. Bearss, Edwin C. Fields of Honor: Pivotal Battles of the Civil War. Washington, D. C: National Geographic Society, 2006 [7]. Thomas Robson Hay, " Confederate Leadership at Vicksburg," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 11, no. 4 (1925): pp. 543-560 [8]. Edwin L. Sabin, Vicksburg, and after: Being the Experience of a Southern Merchant and Non-Combatant during the Sixties," The Sewanee Review, 15, no. 4 (1907): pg. 485-496 [9]. Thomas Robson Hay, " Confederate Leadership at Vicksburg," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 11, no. 4 (1925): pp. 543-560 [10]. Steven E. Woodworth, Jefferson Davis and His Generals: The Failure of Confederate Command in the West, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990) [11]. Hoehling, A. Vicksburg: 47 Days of Siege. Stackpole Books, 1996. 400. Print [12]. Hoehling, A. Vicksburg: 47 Days of Siege. Stackpole Books, 1996. 400. Print