

Civil war battle at vicksburg essay sample

[Government](#), [Army](#)



Sadly the Civil War divided our young nation, this time we weren't fighting another country for our freedom. We were fighting now fighting amongst ourselves—all Americans!!!! The potential to ruin our own nation from within was a distinct possibility. This was brother against brother-families divided. The Civil War lasted four years, 1861 to 1865.

“ Vicksburg is the key. The war can never be brought to a close until the key is in our pocket,” President Abraham Lincoln said. Southerners agreed. “ Vicksburg is the nail head that holds the South's two halves together,” said Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

As you can tell from these quotes, the battle and control of Vicksburg was very important to the winning of the civil war. The importance of Vicksburg is due mainly to its location. The North needed to control the Mississippi river, they already had control of the river from the north and the south. This was the last big obstacle in the way. Once they had control, the Confederate states of Louisiana, Texas and Arkansas would be cut off from the war and the Union would now have a major supply artery. The city of Vicksburg, Mississippi on a bluff 250 feet high, overlooks the Mississippi River on the Louisiana-Mississippi state border. This made it an ideal spot for defense. The commander at Vicksburg was Lieutenant General John Clifford Pemperton. He obtained supplies and soldiers from Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana and the Mississippi Yazoo Delta district.

Before the start of the Civil War, Vicksburg was a very prosperous and sophisticated town. The city was a busy center of trade, the wharves were crowded with boats carrying many kinds of goods and commodities. It was

sophisticated enough to have a Shakespeare repertory company, a municipal orchestra and the courthouse was made in Greek revival style. This town was the “ Queen of the Bluff” with much culture, education and luxury.

All this was to change with the coming of the war. By early 1862 the peaceful town had become one of the most strategically important spots in the entire Confederacy and would soon be one of the most bitterly fought over.

From the beginning of the war in 1861, to protect their most prized possession, the Confederacy put up battlements at strategic points along the river. Federal forces eventually captured post after post. After fighting their way southward from Illinois and northward from the Gulf of Mexico. Until by late summer of 1862, only Vicksburg and Port Hudson appeared to be major constraints to the Union.

Of the two posts, Vicksburg was by far the strongest and most important. Setting high over looking a bend in the river, protected by artillery and dangerous swamps. So far the city had defied Union efforts to force it into submission.

After the navy attempts failed. Those planning the war strategy felt they had no choice but to use ground forces and General Ulysses S. Grant. From mid October 1862. Grant made several attempts to take Vicksburg.

In order to protect the Mississippi Valley, Confederates established a line of defense, which ran from Columbus, Kentucky, overlooking the Mississippi River through Bowling Green to Cumberland Gap.

It was then realized by both Union and Confederate high commands that if Vicksburg were going to fall, it would be in the hands of a huge combined land and navel effort. A decision was made to construct a line of defense around the city, which would guard the road and railroad access to Vicksburg.

Grant's long campaign to capture Vicksburg on the Mississippi was one of the most important series of connected battles during the Civil War. As long as the Confederacy controlled the great river, it could prevent the Union from bring its full weight to bear against Lee in Virginia. Vicksburg's situation on a bend of the river made it extremely hard to attack. Navel assaults were fruitless, as shown by the fate of the U. S. S Cairo's which was sunk in just a few moments.

In early December Grant sent orders to General Sherman to begin to prepare for a move down the river. Grant was keeping Pemperton occupied with the threat of overland advance. However the Confederate forces did not fall for the diversion and launched an attack on Grant. During the winter of 1862-1863, Grant conducted the Bayou Expeditions, or amphibious operations, all to try to reduce Vicksburg. Needless to say-they all failed. After months of frustration and failure, Grant had reached a crossroads in his military career. There was a lot of talking in the northern press to remove him from command. Even members of the U. S. cabinet urged President Lincoln to replace Grant as commander of the western army. The President could not spare this man because he fought. He decided to try him a little longer.

At this point, Grant was where he had started 2 months ago. He traveled down the west side of the river stopping northwest of Vicksburg.

Unsuccessfully, Grant tried to reach Vicksburg: two attempts to bypass the city to the south and another two attempts to cross the Yazoo Delta to the north. The date was March 1863 and Grant was still at square one.

On March 29, 1863, Grant opted to march south. Grant ordered Major General John A. McClernand of the thirteenth corps to open a road from Milliken's Bend to New Carthage on the Mississippi River below Vicksburg. The movement didn't actually begin until March 31.

Grant's infantrymen made their way south through Louisiana, building roads and bridges each step of the way. On diversion, brought on by Major General Frederick Steele, was to move a division north of Vicksburg to destroy supply stations and take livestock that Confederate forces desperately needed. And on the plus side, Steel was going to get Pemperton's attention in the north, spread his forces, and conceal Union movement. This was surprisingly a success. Hurlbut contributed the second diversion; he was to launch a pattern of cavalry raids to strain Pemperton's already thin defense. Sherman had the third diversion. He was to draw forces away from Vicksburg towards Haynes Bluff.

Grant, beginning to think his plan had failed, encountered an escaped slave. The slave then notified Grant of the location of a good road to Bruinsburg. Grant moved his forces further south. On May 1, 1863, Grant finally reached the eastside. He then began making a supply base while waiting for Sherman and his forces.

While Grant was waiting for supplies from Memphis, which was taking to long, he left without them. He knew if he would wait for the supplies, Vicksburg would have time to be reinforced. Grant decided not to wait for the supplies any longer and just move to Jackson and attack Vicksburg from the rear. The Union leaders hardly agreed with this “ carry-what-you-can” plan and sent a message to Grant to wait for the supplies in Baton Rouge. This message never made it to Grant, it was too late and he was already in the execution phase.

Sherman joined Grant on may 7th; the exact same day Grant would begin his movement to Jackson. He moved thru Rocky Springs to Raymond.

McClerland was ordered to move straight north to Auburn. Grant wanted Pemperton to assume that his next target was Champion’s Hill. McPherson and Sherman got to Raymond on May 12th after Confederate forces retreated to Jackson. Soon, McClerland met up with Grant in Raymond, Grant made McPherson destroy the railroad in Clinton to prevent reinforcements and re-supply, then move eastward to Jackson. Sherman was to attack Jackson from Raymond, and McClerland was to stay in Raymond to protect the rear and reinforce Sherman or McPherson.

Jackson had 6, 000 Confederate troops to Grant’s 25, 000 Union troops. Needless to say, Jackson was taken relatively easily. The commander at Jackson was General Joe Johnston, he retreated his forces north to Clinton. Grant’s decision to keep going without supplies was key to this victory. If he had waited for supplies, they would have then had to face an increasingly growing Confederate army over 14, 000 troops with another 9, 000 close

behind. Grant was now in position to take what he initially came to take: Vicksburg.

At this point, the Confederate's moral was very low while the Union's confidence was increasing. Union forces almost seemed invincible. Grant's success was defiantly having an impact.

On May 18th, the federal army crossed the Big Black River and pushed towards Vicksburg. The first Union forces arrived in this direction was the 15th Army Corps under the command of Major General William T. Sherman, Grant's most trusted and experienced subordinate officer. The next corps to get there was that of the 17th Corps commanded by the young James McPherson. The final Corps arrived; the 13th Army Corps commanded by Major General John McClernand, as these troops arrived, they started to slowly make their lines longer to the left and to the right. While investigating the Confederate works and prepare for attack, which they knew, would be ordered shortly.

When Grant got to Vicksburg in mid-May, he tried two assaults that didn't really work. The second assault on May 22nd had worse results than the first on May 17th. Realizing his attacks wouldn't work, Grant decided to settle down regular siege operations. Pemperton couldn't get any supplies in and no confederates could get out of Vicksburg. Grant knew Pemperton wouldn't last very much longer. Grant also got reinforcements to increase Union numbers to 70, 000 to Pemperton's 30, 000 Confederates.

As Grant thought about his next move, he left behind his dead and his wounded many that had been laying exposed since May 19th. Being exposed to the sun, rain, and heat took a number on the corps. The bodies of the dead started to bloat and turn black. The stench was so sickening; one Confederate thought the Yanks were trying to stink them out of Vicksburg. On May 25th , White flags appeared along the Confederate line, Union soldiers were hopeful that the city would soon be surrendered and given up to the Union forces. This wasn't the case, however, as word quickly spread that a note was passed from Pemberton to Grant saying that in the name of humanity that Grant should bury his dead as the odor had become very offensive.

A Mississippi summer consists of temperatures exceeding 110 degrees, and humidity always up around 200%. This means water has to be a huge necessity. Disease began to spread rapidly throughout the ranks, dysentery, malaria, and various fevers took a toll on human life.

Hundreds of men could be seen lying down their weapons and walking or crawling as best they could towards the direction of the hospitals in Vicksburg. Public buildings were completely filled, many residences were converted into hospitals, but even then, there weren't any medications that could be provided to them. Each day, dead wagons as they were called, made the rounds of the hospitals and the dead brought out in increasing numbers. They were laid to rest in the city cemetery, north of town.

As May faded into June, Grant moved up his infantry and artillery, first within 300 yards, then 200 yards, then 100 yards. The object was to get as close to

the enemy as possible. So if an attack was ordered, all they had to do was get out of their man-made ditches, over the parapet and among the enemy. This would help cut down on casualties and help the troops strengthen which would vacate the enemy.

An option was to tunnel underneath the enemy, hollow out rooms, fill them with black powder and destroy the fortifications of Vicksburg. Union soldiers excavated 13 approaches. Of the 13, the most popular was called Logan's approach, situated along the Jackson Road, here in the center of the Confederate line. They excavated a trench 7 feet deep and 8 feet wide.

In early July, Pemperton and Grant began negotiations for the conditions of surrender. On July 4th, 1863, the Confederates surrendered. Grant rode horseback along Jackson Road and down to the Warren County Courthouse, where he watched the stars and stripes be placed on top of the building. When word reached President Lincoln, he sighed, " Thank God, the Father of waters again goes on decks to the sea."