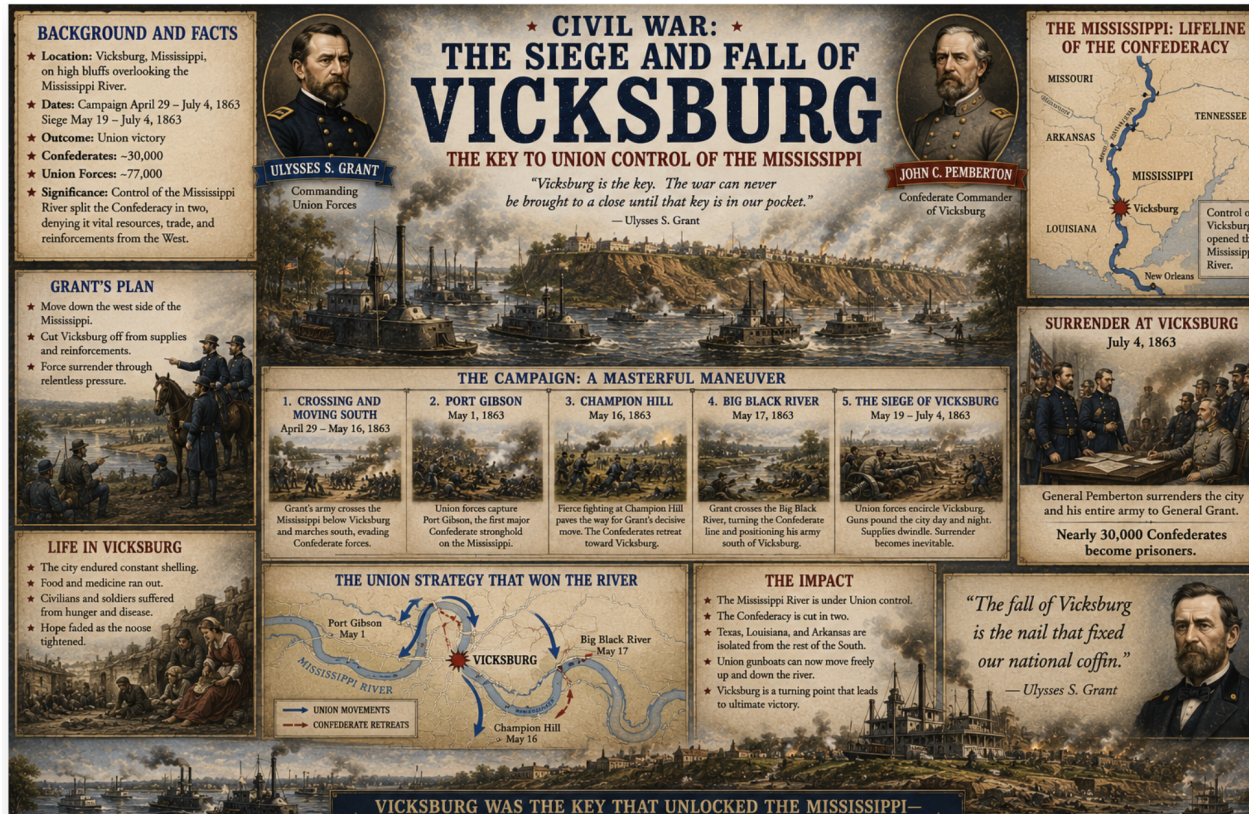


The siege and surrender of Vicksburg

By Curtis Jerry Smothers



The Union siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi, was the culmination of a yearlong Union campaign, orchestrated by General U.S. Grant, to wrest control of the Mississippi from the Confederacy and split it in two.

The Fall of Vicksburg followed a three-month siege by an ever-growing Union Army (77,000 troops) by land and Union gunboats that showered the besieged city with over 20,000 rounds of artillery.

As the terrified populace hid in caves and slowly starved, Confederate General J.C. Pemberton's last hopes of reinforcement or escape faded, and he surrendered the city on July 4th, a national holiday that was not celebrated in Vicksburg again until 1945.

Some Background and Facts

Location: On the east bank of the Mississippi River in southwest Mississippi State, 40 miles west of the state capital of Jackson. Inclusive

Dates: May 18 to July 4, 1863. Outcome: Union victory

Casualties: Union: 806 killed, 3,940 wounded, 164 missing & captured); Confederacy: 805 killed, 1,938 wounded, 29,620 missing & captured

Significance

The Confederate surrender at Vicksburg in the West, coupled with Lee's defeat back east at Gettysburg, PA, are considered the turning point of the U.S. Civil War. In a brilliantly orchestrated campaign, Union General Grant wrested control of an over 200-mile stretch of the Mississippi River and split the Confederacy in two.

Grant's Brilliant Vicksburg Campaign

Following unsuccessful attacks from the swampy and river-bottomed north of Vicksburg by Grant's lieutenant, William T. Sherman, Grant decided on a strategy of flanking and deception.

Grant marched his army south on the western side of the river in Louisiana. The plan was to have Union Admiral David Porter's gunboats run the gauntlet of Vicksburg's murderous artillery and meet Grant's army to the South and ferry it across the Mississippi. The plan worked. Embarking his army at Bruinsburg, Grant drove northwest toward his objective of Jackson and thence to turn west towards Vicksburg.

Meanwhile, Grant diverted Confederate General Johnston's attention elsewhere with feints by Sherman in the North and a breathtaking cavalry thrust southward from the Tennessee border through the heart of Mississippi under the command of an Illinois ex-music teacher Benjamin Grierson. Johnston took the bait. Grant defeated the depleted Confederates at Jackson, and turned west. The Confederates fell back to Vicksburg, while Grant guarded his rear and fought his way to the citadel city. At Vicksburg Grant ordered two failed assaults, reluctantly settling on a siege.

What began as a campaign through swampy bayous, became a stunning military expedition into Mississippi and ended in the three-month siege and surrender an important river city.