



Civil War Battles 2

Chancellorsville

The new Union commander, “Fighting Joe” Hooker, was popular with his troops and eager to meet the Confederates in battle. In May 1863, he attacked the 60,000-man Confederate army at Chancellorsville, Virginia, with his 130,000 troops. Hooker was repeatedly outmaneuvered by Generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, who positioned their men so that they always had equal or superior numbers at the point of attack. After three days of fighting, Hooker’s troops were beaten, and he was forced to retreat. Despite his brilliant military maneuvers, Lee lost 13,000 men and his best commander. Jackson was wounded in battle and died a week later.

Vicksburg

Vicksburg was the last Southern stronghold on the Mississippi River. General Ulysses S. Grant was determined to take the city and cut the Confederacy in half. Despite the destruction of much of his supply line by Confederate forces, Grant marched his men over 180 miles in 17 days, fought five major battles, and surrounded the city. His artillery pounded the city until July 4, 1863, when Vicksburg finally surrendered. By this time, its weary citizens and defending army were both starving. Control of this city gave the Union forces control of the Mississippi River.

Gettysburg

Hoping to bring the war to an end, General Lee decided to invade the North again and take advantage of the war weariness of Union citizens. Confederate and Union forces clashed by accident at Gettysburg, a small town in Pennsylvania.



During three days of brutal warfare, Lee tried to destroy the Union armies and convince the North to accept the division of the country. Fighting with fewer men, less supplies, and unable to secure a military advantage on the ground, Lee’s army was halted and defeated by Union forces.

The final effort—an attack by Confederate General George Pickett’s troops—failed. Lee was forced to retreat back to Virginia, having suffered over 28,000 casualties. Union dead and wounded numbered over 23,000.

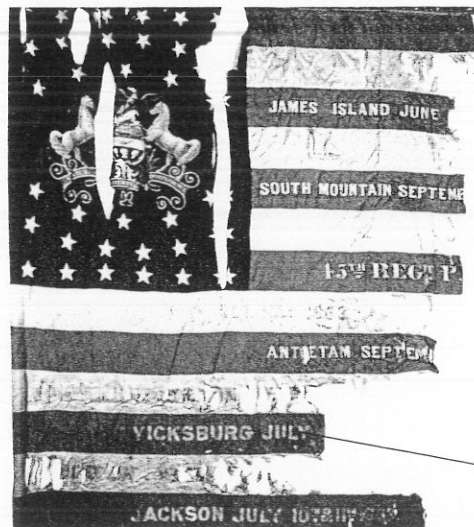
The siege of Vicksburg

VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI, is a town on the east bank of the Mississippi River between Memphis, Tennessee, and New Orleans, Louisiana. The Confederate military greatly fortified Vicksburg and set up heavy cannons that could fire on any vessel passing the town. After the Union navy conquered New Orleans and Memphis in 1862, Vicksburg and Port Hudson, to its south, were the only points that kept the river closed to Union commerce and traffic. Vicksburg was also the last place where Confederate territory west of the Mississippi could pass troops and goods east to the rest of the South. Through late 1862 and half of 1863, Union commander Ulysses S. Grant sent several Northern forces there. Each campaign failed. Then in May, 1863, Grant maneuvered an army behind the town. After some small battles, he drove Vicksburg's defenders inside the town's trenches and fortifications. Meanwhile, the Union navy began shelling the garrison from the river. The town was surrounded by Grant's forces and besieged for more than forty days. No food or ammunition entered it. Both soldiers and civilians were reduced to eating mules and rats. Citizens lived in bomb shelters in hillsides. After more than a month of hunger, repeated attacks, and shelling by Northern forces, Confederate General John Pemberton surrendered the town on July 4.



CIVILIAN BOMB SHELTERS

Some Vicksburg citizens lived in what they called "dug outs" or "bomb proofs." As this photograph shows, these were simply holes dug into the town's hillsides. Some people dug these bomb proofs themselves. Others had their slaves do the digging. Sometimes poor whites also made dug outs, and then sold them to the town's upper classes.



VICKSBURG HONORS

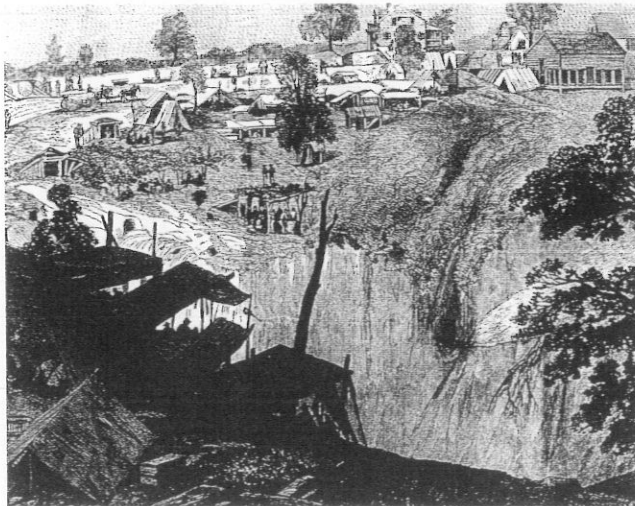
Regiments that served at Vicksburg were permitted to add the town's name to their list of battle honors. This meant the troops could stitch it onto their flag. Here the flag of the 51st Pennsylvania shows Vicksburg among the battle names sewn onto its tattered banner.

Battle honor

UNION TRENCHES AT VICKSBURG

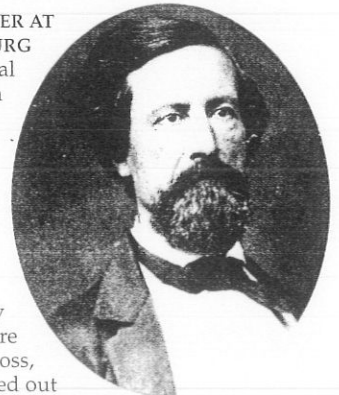
The Mississippi sun is fierce in summer.

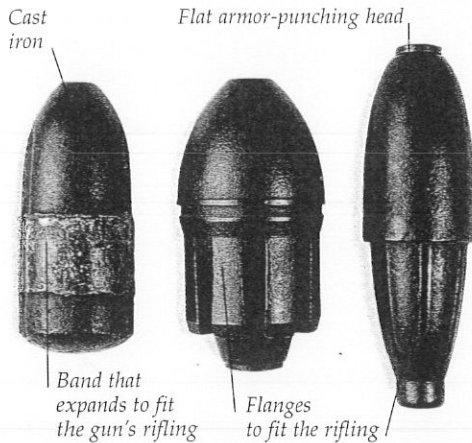
Many Northern troops who were at Vicksburg came from cool-weather states such as Minnesota and Wisconsin. As this newspaper illustration shows, to ward off sunstroke and dehydration, these men put up canopies over their trenches. The trenches with "sun shades" surrounded Vicksburg on its eastern, land side.



THE COMMANDER AT VICKSBURG

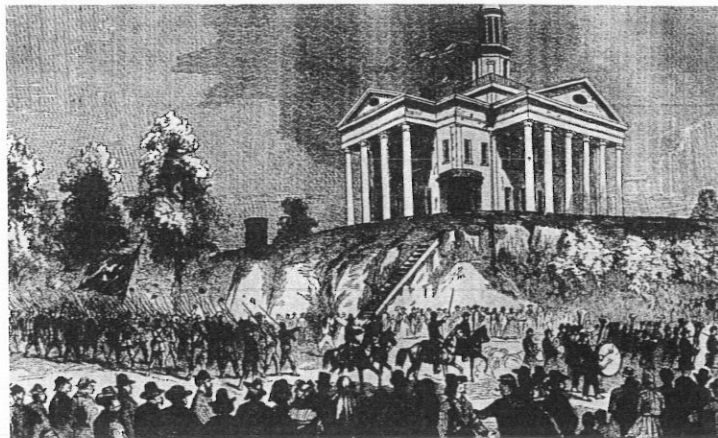
Confederate General John C. Pemberton led the defense of Vicksburg. This photograph shows him in civilian dress. His defeat at Vicksburg cast a shadow over his Confederate military service. When angry Southerners were blaming him for the loss, many of them pointed out that John Pemberton was a native of Pennsylvania. He had married a Southern woman and thrown his loyalty behind her family and her part of the country when the war came.





HEAVY ARTILLERY SHELLS

Union artillerymen brought heavy rifled cannons to Vicksburg. This assortment of shells for rifled artillery shows the grooves or fins that allowed these rounds to travel straight to their targets over long distances. Southern soldiers also used rifled guns. However, they were not able to replenish their supply of ammunition.

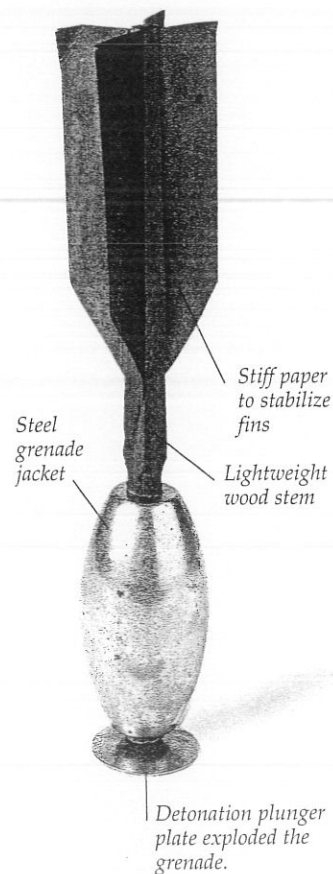
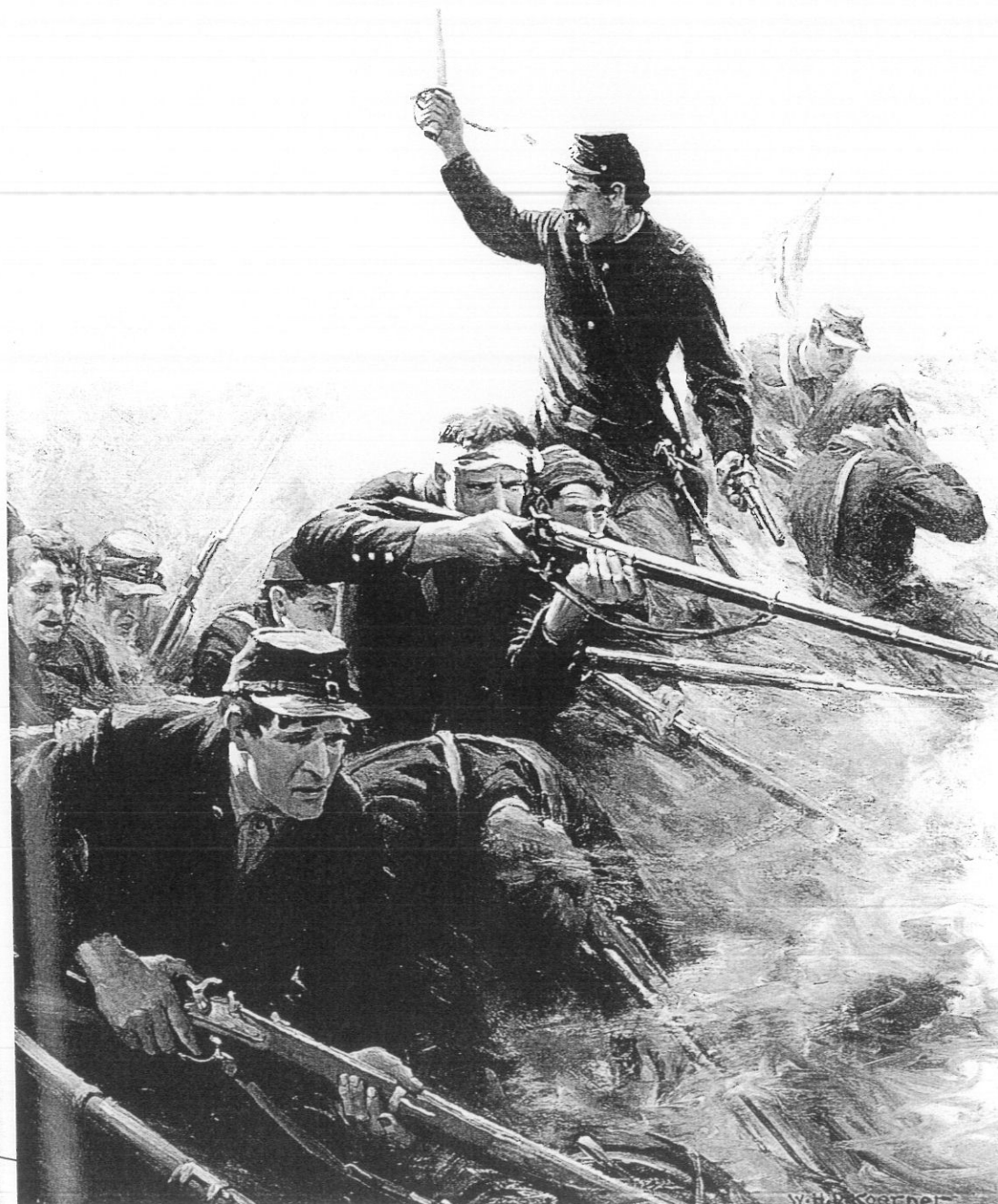


VICTORS MARCHING INTO TOWN

On Independence Day, July 4, 1863, Grant's troops marched into Vicksburg. This newspaper illustration shows the U.S. flag flying over the Vicksburg courthouse, the town's tallest landmark. This western Union victory followed by one day the Northern army's success at Gettysburg in Pennsylvania. Historians consider these back-to-back Union victories the beginning of the end for the Confederate war effort.

ATTACKING TRENCHES

The Vicksburg fight included infantry assaults. Early in the siege, Union foot soldiers rushed the Confederate trenches several times. Many of them were shot down as they tried to scale the sides of earthen ditches in front of Southern lines. Others were wounded or killed as they rushed across the open ground between their lines and Confederate trenches. After these assaults failed, Union cannons began firing on the town nonstop.



A HAND GRENADE

Northerners tried several infantry assaults on the Vicksburg trench lines. In those attacks, they sometimes used Ketchum hand grenades. These weapons exploded when they landed on the detonation plates fixed to their noses.

Confederates stopped these grenades by catching them in blankets and throwing them back at the attacking Union troops.

Lincoln Spares a Soldier's Life

Early on the morning of August 31, 1861, while on guard duty, a young man who had recently enlisted with the Vermont Volunteers fell sound asleep. For sleeping on the job, Private William Scott was arrested, tried, and ordered to be hanged on September 9.

The men of Scott's regiment submitted a petition to Lincoln, begging that the young boy be pardoned. The president, known to have a soft heart, responded, "I do not think an honest, brave soldier, conscious of no crime but sleeping when he was weary, ought to be shot or hung. The country has better uses for him." Lincoln granted clemency, a legal pardon that forgave Scott and allowed him to return to duty.

Young Scott died seven months later in combat, and newspapers described his noble death. A poem about him, "The Sleeping Sentinel," was read before the U.S. Senate in January 1863.

McClellan forced Lee to abandon his invasion, but he could not claim a complete victory. Southern troops managed to slip back across the Potomac River to Virginia, and Lincoln relieved McClellan for his failure to pursue Lee.

Because he was looking for the right time to "strike at the heart of the rebellion," Lincoln decided to emphasize Lee's retreat and claim Antietam as a Union victory. The president believed that emancipating runaway slaves would strip Southern plantations of valuable labor and provide an important resource for the Union army. He would free only those slaves belonging to Rebel masters and not interfere with Union slave owners.

On September 22 Lincoln announced his plan for emancipating all the slaves in Rebel states. By declaring that all Southern slaves would be freed January 1, he signaled that the Union was moving closer to total war, threatening to crush the rebellion by any means necessary.

GRANT APPROACHES VICKSBURG

Vicksburg was a marvel. Perched high atop a bluff over the Mississippi River, virtually unapproachable from three sides and heavily fortified, the town was called the "Gibraltar of the West." This Confederate outpost commanded a view of the river for miles in both directions, so approaching ships and soldiers could be easily picked off.

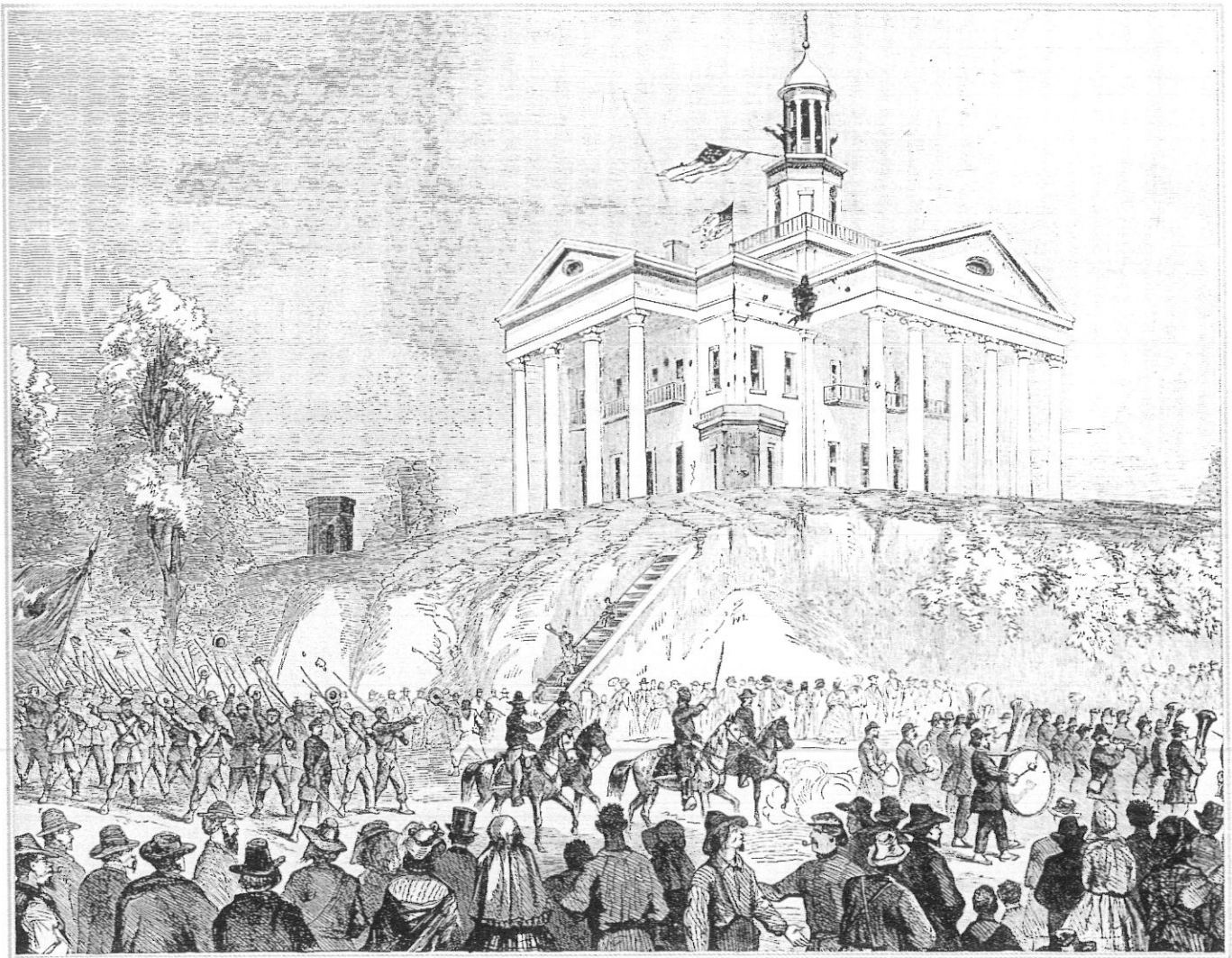
In December Union General William T. Sherman slogged through a swampy bayou as he headed toward Vicksburg, but Confederates held him off. Although the Union also launched a vigorous naval assault, General Ulysses S. Grant knew that skill, cunning, and patience would be needed to defeat the Confederates, who looked down from their high perch at Vicksburg and jeered at Union failures. Another six months of starvation and deprivation, of attacks on land and sea, would pass before the town of Vicksburg would finally be forced to surrender.

Conscientious Objectors

In all wars, some people are morally opposed to killing, even to defend their country. During the Civil War, many religious groups opposed to war faced a moral dilemma. For example, although the Society of Friends, Quakers, were pacifists who spoke out against war, they were also opposed to slavery. The Quakers had founded the first antislavery societies in the American colonies. They were extremely active in the Underground Railroad and they wanted to help freed slaves with food, clothing, and education. Most Quakers supported the Union cause.

When they were drafted, people whose beliefs would not permit them to fight were allowed to serve in other than combat roles and were given the legal status of "conscientious objectors."

Forced to enlist against his will, Cyrus Pringle, a Quaker from Burlington, Vermont, described his experience: "They are utterly unable to comprehend the pure Christianity and spirituality of our principles. They have long stiffened their necks in their own strength. They have stopped their ears to the voice of the Spirit, and hardened their hearts to his influences. They see no duty higher than to country. What shall we receive at their hands?" Held in a guardhouse, Pringle appealed directly to President Lincoln, who responded that he could do nothing but give him hospital duty. Such work was the "alternate service" offered to most conscientious objectors.



THE FALL OF VICKSBURG

By land and water, Union troops struggled toward Vicksburg, as they had since the summer of 1862. This port overlooking the Mississippi was the key to controlling the river and maintaining Confederate supply lines. Soldiers encountered every kind of obstacle, from polluted water (“With every pint of fluid one has to drink a half ounce of dirt”) to insects (“Every soldier was a walking chigger cemetery”) to dysentery, an inflammation of the bowels that the men nicknamed the “Mississippi quickstep.”

In a desperate push, Union soldiers seized nearby Port Gibson, where sixteen thousand Rebel troops had previously menaced Union gunboats. For the Rebel soldiers trapped at Vicksburg, morale was even lower. A soldier’s rations were limited to one biscuit a day and a little bacon. Federal soldiers joked that the Rebels were waiting for the arrival of a new general—“General Starvation.”

On July 3 the Confederate commander finally sent a messenger with a flag of truce. Vicksburg surrendered and Grant claimed his prize on July 4. The news from Gettysburg reinforced Union hopes of victory, as a Southern general glumly observed: “The Confederacy totters to its destruction.”

Union troops take possession of Vicksburg.

BATTLE AT-A-GLANCE

BATTLE OF VICKSBURG
Vicksburg, Mississippi, May 22
Surrender, July 4

Union troops: 77,000
Confederate troops: 29,500

Union casualties: 3,200
Confederate casualties: 500
UNION VICTORY