

A BGES Civil War Field University Program: Vicksburg: How Terrain Dictated the Campaign and Battles

Carl van Clausewitz wrote that terrain “**modifies, at times completely alters, the action of all forces,**” and, “**while on the one hand it often concerns the most minute features of locality, on the other it may apply to immense tracts of country.**” The BGES Vicksburg terrain tour will explore how the terrain dictated the actions of the forces, and will cover vast expanses at the strategic level and small tracts at the tactical level of war. In short, we will travel and see how rivers, roads (to include railroads) dictated strategies and the movements (the operational art) to achieve those strategies. We will also get down to the tactical level to see how the ground dictated the flow of the troops, and how a few feet of dirt was the difference between life and death. Good boots and long pants (due to both weather and terrain) will be a necessity.

One should attend this tour armed with a good understanding of the campaign and the battle, because this is not a Vicksburg primer. It is a reinforcement and an enhancement of knowledge already earned. Pre-armed with the knowledge of what happened, those who attend will see why it happened based upon the dictates of terrain.

An excellent tool for those planning to attend is herewith provided—the military acronym for the *Commander’s Estimate*: **METT-T (Mission, Enemy, Terrain (and Weather), Troops, Time Available)**

If you are really gung-ho, then a second acronym for the *Effects of Terrain* will serve you well: **OCOKA (Observation and Fields of Fire, Cover and Concealment, Obstacles and Movement, Key Terrain, Avenues of Approach)**

Graduates of our 2015 Gettysburg program acclaimed the comprehensive and interactive nature of this presentation—now you too can ‘Lock and Load.’ Afterwards you will have a new template to evaluate Civil War battlefields.

Sunday, March 13, 2016

5:30 p.m. Registration at Hampton Inn, Vicksburg, MS
5:45-7:30 p.m. Introductions by Len Riedel and PowerPoint program by Parker Hills.

Monday, March 14, 2016

8:00 a.m. We will begin our tour with a visit to the USS *Cairo* and a discussion of the US Navy and how was vital to the capture of Vicksburg. The North had water superiority, and, with the aid of Admiral Porter, Grant took advantage of that fact. We will then travel to Fort Hill, Snyder's Bluff, the Chickasaw Bayou battlefield, and a Confederate River Battery to see the daunting terrain of the loess bluffs. Then we will venture a short distance into Louisiana to see where Grant's army floundered during the wet winter of 1862-1863. Grant knew that the strategic situation required his army to suffer in these wetlands until spring. After returning to Vicksburg for lunch we will travel north to Deer Creek and see one of Grant's attempts to get to the high ground on the east side of the Mississippi River. Then we will travel thru Satartia and Mechanicsburg to the high ground atop the loess bluffs and follow the back door route into Vicksburg—a route which Grant and Porter hoped to gain, but which eluded their grasp.

Tuesday, March 15, 2016

8:00 a.m. On Tuesday we will head south towards Port Gibson, once again along the high ground and historic roads, to see Grant's beachhead at Bruinsburg. This private property has very limited access and the road can be treacherous, but Blue and Gray will get you there if the weather allows. Along the way to Bruinsburg we will walk a ways to the historic Daniell Cemetery, perched atop a Mississippian Indian Mound (never before visited by Blue and Gray). Here Irish-born Peter Bryan Bruin, the founder of Bruinsburg in 1778, and Smith Coffee Daniell II, the builder of Windsor Plantation in 1859, are buried. After visiting Windsor Ruins, we will visit the Port Gibson battlefield to discuss how the terrain dictated the troop movements. Then we will go into Port Gibson for lunch, after which we will discuss the water obstacles that Grant had to overcome. We will follow Grant's troops and engineers and see where they marched and built, then we will go into Grand Gulf, where we will stand where Grant made his momentous decision when he wrote to General in Chief Henry Halleck: "I shall not bring my troops into this place, but immediately follow the enemy, and, if all promises as favorable hereafter as it does now, not stop until Vicksburg is in our possession." We will then follow Grant as he moved inland after writing this gutsy message announcing a decision which flew in the face of his superiors in Washington.

Wednesday, March 16, 2016

8:00 a.m. On this third day we will pick up Grant's movements inland by going to Willow Springs, Kenison Creek, and Hardscrabble Crossroads—all to discuss how the terrain offered options. We will go to the Bagnell house site which was discovered while researching *Receding Tide*. At this site Grant planned his next moves through the use of terrain and intelligence, and it is a site which is key to the Vicksburg Campaign. We will then follow Grant to Rocky Springs and Cayuga and discuss his decisions. Then we will jump over to the Confederate side by traveling to Lanier's farm and discussing the thoughts of Generals Loring and Pemberton. After lunch in Vicksburg we will travel to Bovina to discuss Pemberton's thought-

process and his orders from above. We will travel to the Big Black Bridge to see the critical railroad crossing which Grant coveted and which was so important to Pemberton, then we will travel to Mt. Moriah to discuss the terrain and the Confederate council of war which led to the disastrous march to intercept Grant's supply line. This key site is private property, but again, BGES will get you there. We will wrap up the day by going to Dillon's farm, where Grant spurned any idea of a council of war and made a quick decision that would change the course of the entire campaign.

Thursday, March 17, 2016

8:00 a.m. On our final day we will travel to the Raymond battlefield to see how the terrain dictated this small, but important battle. Recent archaeology work at Raymond has uncovered much about where and how the battle was fought, and you will see the results of this work on the battlefield, to include many new interpretive devices in the field. Then on to Champion Hill to again see how the terrain affected the troops and the fighting. We will then travel back through the Big Black battlefield en route to Vicksburg and lunch. Afterwards we will travel to the spot where Sherman experienced his epiphany as he finally understood what Grant was trying to achieve, then we go into Vicksburg National Military Park to see how the terrain affected the attacks of 19 and 22 May. We will also see siege operations and how the West Point-trained officers used what they learned in New York by practicing their trade in Mississippi. Before you leave you will understand terms such as *parallel*, *boyaux*, *front of attack*, and *opening of the trenches*, all of which were dictated by terrain.

The Vicksburg Campaign has aptly been described by the US Army as "the greatest campaign ever fought on American soil." This tour will show you the difficult terrain that had to be traversed, thus, the brilliancy of that campaign. Again, you should attend this tour well-armed with a good knowledge of the campaign. If you do, you will leave with a much better understanding of not only what happened, but why it happened.

About the Faculty:

Parker Hills is the nation's leading historian on the Vicksburg Campaign and a scholar of some note on the Gettysburg Campaign. He has a well earned reputation for the highest standards of preparation on tours and the exceptional educational value of his content. Being with Hills is like taking a senior military service school course in which you will surely leave with far more knowledge than when you arrived. Parker is a graduate of the US Army War College and he is in high demand from businesses and military organizations that want his leadership training. Hills is the founder of BattleFocus and is a retired officer who served on both active duty as a battery commander in Korea, and as an aide to General of the Army Omar

Bradley. He was the Director of Public Affairs for the Mississippi National Guard and he founded the Regional CounterDrug Training Academy in Meridian, Mississippi. Parker is the co-author of **Receding Tide, Vicksburg and Gettysburg, The Campaigns that Changed the Civil War**. Parker has also published the Vicksburg Campaign Driving Guide and The Art of Commemoration—a book that reveals the symbolism and beauty of the commemorative memorialization at the Vicksburg Park. He is also the driving force for preservation in the state of Mississippi and largely through his efforts the Raymond Battlefield Park exists. He is in high demand and his programs cost a little more; but, you will quickly see that they are well worth it.

Hotel Information:

We have previously used the Hampton Inn Vicksburg and we will make arrangements with them to host our group yet again. Failing that we will select one of the other new hotels constructed over the past ten years. We will post the hotel details by December 22nd.

Transportation:

The closest servicing airport is Jackson (JAN). A back up is Monroe; however, both require you to get additional transportation usually in the form of a rental car. I have had great success using Priceline. If you do not seek a discount the rental cars from Jackson tend to be pretty expensive. This is a program where driving is a great option.

Recommended Reading:

You will be provided with a reading book and maps upon arrival. The following books are suggested to enhance your readiness for the program.

_____ Edwin C. Bearss and James Parker Hills: **Receding Tide: Vicksburg and Gettysburg, The Campaigns that Changed the Civil War** \$35 [click here to order](#)

_____ Christopher Gable: **Staff Ride Handbook for the Vicksburg Campaign December 1862-July 1863** \$30 [Click here to order](#)

Registration Form

Vicksburg:

How Terrain Dictated the Campaign and Battles

A BGES Field University Program

Presented by Brigadier General James Parker Hills, Ret.

March 13-17, 2016 from Vicksburg, MS

Because of places we are going, this program is restricted to three vans and no more than 30 people.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Registration includes four lunches, a reading book with maps, the academic program, support of a professional historian, tour director, all admissions and transportation. We will also provide snacks, bottled water and a limited selection of sodas.

_____ Registration \$950

_____ Current BGES member \$895

_____ Teacher/full time student with identification \$825

_____ I am not a member but would like to join so that I can get the member's rate or I am a member who is past due to renew. Please accept my donation of

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