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Editor Gloria Swift and her assistant Fred

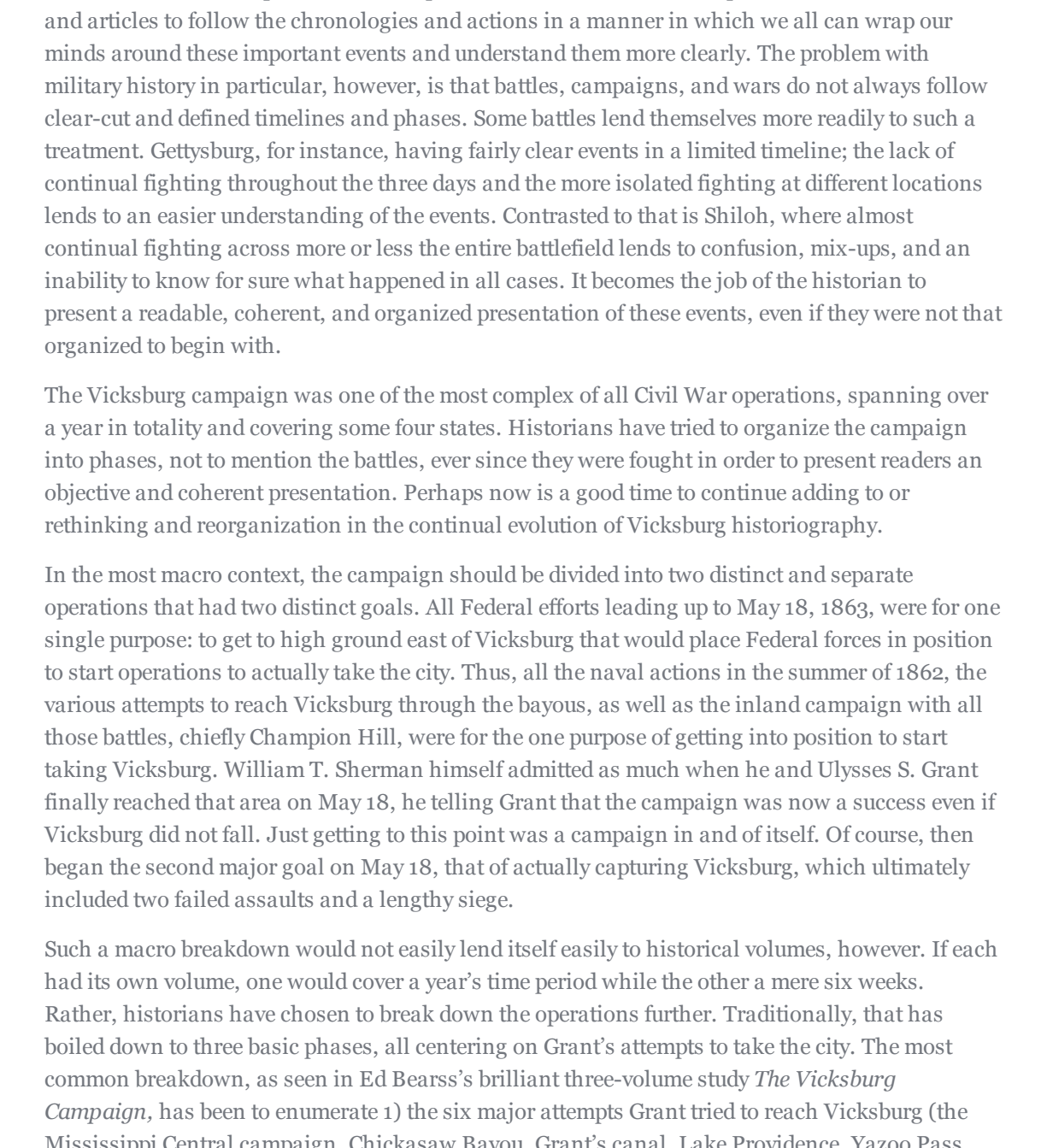
## Time to Say Goodbye

Hello everyone! Starting with the next issue, you will see that there is a new editor at the helm of “Along the Monocacy.” It is time for me to step back and now is the appropriate moment. As of the end of June, I will no longer be working for BGES.

Before I go, I wanted to tell you how much I have enjoyed meeting you and traveling with many of you on numerous Civil War adventures. I certainly have appreciated getting to visit the historic places that I never thought I would ever get to see. I have had the pleasure to enjoy them not only with you, but with some of the best historians in the business.

My best to each and every one of you! Happy Civil War trails!

—Gloria



Vicksburg by Currier & Ives | U.S. Naval Academy

## Breaking Down the Vicksburg Operations Into Easily Understandable Components

By Timothy B. Smith

As a student of history, I like to be able to analyze and condense important events and movements into clear timelines or phases. That helps me as a historian, and it helps readers who read books and articles to follow the chronologies and actions in a manner in which we all can wrap our minds around these important events and understand them more clearly. The problem with military history in particular, however, is that battles, campaigns, and wars do not always follow clear-cut and defined timelines and phases. Some battles lend themselves more readily to such a treatment. Gettysburg, for instance, having fairly clear events in a limited timeline; the lack of continual fighting throughout the three days and the more isolated fighting at different locations lends to an easier understanding of the events. Contrasted to that is Shiloh, where almost continual fighting across more or less the entire battlefield lends to confusion, mix-ups, and an inability to know for sure what happened in all cases. It becomes the job of the historian to present a readable, coherent, and organized presentation of these events, even if they were not that organized to begin with.

The Vicksburg campaign was one of the most complex of all Civil War operations, spanning over a year in totality and covering some four states. Historians have tried to organize the campaign into phases, not to mention the battles, ever since they were fought in order to present readers an objective and coherent presentation. Perhaps now is a good time to continue adding to or rethinking and reorganization in the continual evolution of Vicksburg historiography.

In the most macro context, the campaign should be divided into two distinct and separate operations that had two distinct goals. All Federal efforts leading up to May 18, 1863, were for one single purpose: to get to high ground east of Vicksburg that would place Federal forces in position to start operations to actually take the city. Thus, all the naval actions in the summer of 1862, the various attempts to reach Vicksburg through the bayous, as well as the inland campaign with all those battles, chiefly Champion Hill, were for the one purpose of getting into position to start taking Vicksburg. William T. Sherman himself admitted as much when he and Ulisses S. Grant finally reached that area on May 18, he telling Grant that the campaign was now a success even if Vicksburg did not fall. Just getting to this point was a campaign in and of itself. Of course, then began the second major goal on May 18, that of actually capturing Vicksburg, which ultimately included two failed assaults and a lengthy siege.

Such a macro breakdown would not easily lend itself easily to historical volumes, however. If each had its own volume, one would cover a year's time period while the other a mere six weeks.

Rather, historians have chosen to break down the operations further. Traditionally, that has boiled down to three basic phases, all centering on Grant's attempts to take the city. The most common breakdown, as seen in Ed Bearss's brilliant three-volume study *The Vicksburg Campaign*, has been to enumerate 1) the six major attempts Grant tried to reach Vicksburg (the Mississippi Central campaign, Chickasaw Bayou, Grant's canal, Lake Providence, Yazoo Pass, and Steele's Bayou); 2) the seventh attempt that precipitated the inland march to the city and the five battles fought between May 1 and 17 (Port Gibson, Raymond, Jackson, Champion Hill, and Big Black River Bridge); and then 3) the assaults and siege that finally took Vicksburg. These three major phases, sometimes broken down into sub-phases, are well understood, and have made their way into the general histories of the war.

Studying Vicksburg for the past several decades has made me rethink this original organization for at least my own purposes of research and study. For one, operations against Vicksburg itself began long before Grant ever uttered the word. As early as the spring and certainly the summer of 1862, Union naval and land forces reached Vicksburg and took it under fire, although they could not capture it in the summer of 1862. This “prequel,” if you will, has admittedly been covered in another Bearss volume, *Rebel Victory at Vicksburg*, but these early 1862 operations are not normally linked in most studies with the traditional operations at Vicksburg.

Similarly, the manner in which the six early attempts to reach Vicksburg played out begs for additional study and differentiation. The Mississippi Central and Chickasaw Bayou efforts were by-the-book, Jominian efforts to move into enemy territory, take major geographical points, and do so by maneuver and with fixed lines of supply, in one case the railroad and the other the Mississippi River. These by-the-book efforts contrast sharply with the next five attempts, when Grant seemingly threw out the book and began operations whose nature had not necessarily been studied by the great military thinkers. Digging a canal to divert the Mississippi River, breaching levees to flood the low-lying Delta regions on both sides of the river and move through narrow bayous and swamps, and eventually moving an army south of Vicksburg and marching inland with a long and tenuous, at best, supply line that was finally abandoned altogether were all anti-establishment efforts and nothing like Jomini would recommend. In fact, they followed more closely the teachings of Clausewitz in an effort to get at the enemy and fight the opposing army rather than take geographical positions.

Then, once Grant reached the critical area east of Vicksburg and approached the city, most historians have lumped the assaults and siege into one major action. In fact, the famous 47-day moniker ran from May 19 to July 4. Recent historians have begun to split the two into major events in their own phases, separating the four days of assaults, from May 19 to 22, from the larger siege operations, which did not begin until May 23 in action and May 25 officially.

As a result, a rethinking of the timeline of Vicksburg can produce at least five major phases. The first should be by all rights be the 1862 Union naval operations against the city, most notably the May-July confrontations. Second would be the fall 1862 Jominian efforts by Grant's forces from Tennessee, encompassing both the Mississippi Central as well as the Chickasaw Bayou efforts. Third would be the winter and early spring operations under Grant's charge that saw all the bayou efforts as well as the final against-the-book crossing of the river south of Vicksburg and the march inland toward Vicksburg. The fourth phase would be the major assaults against the city, with the fifth being the siege itself. In actuality, the third phase could itself be divided into two separate stages: the winter bayou operations and the final (and only successful) effort in the land campaign to Jackson and then Vicksburg. Such a layout would then make six distinct phases.

We can certainly look at Vicksburg in phases even though all the operations did not always break down into simple time and space groupings. Still, it is helpful to organize our thoughts around central themes we can wrap our minds around. That is exactly what I am doing with several forthcoming volumes on the Vicksburg campaign.

*Tim Smith teaches at the University of Tennessee-Martin. He will be leading a Vicksburg tour for BGES in 2021.*



Parker Hills at the Raymond gateway marker | courtesy of Parker Hills

## On the Trail of the Vicksburg Campaign

By Parker Hills

In 1989, I conducted the first military staff ride of the Vicksburg Campaign for 125 young soldiers of the Mississippi Army National Guard. Uniformed in our woodland camouflage BDUs, we charged along the Union attack routes, clawing our way up the steep slopes of the loess bluffs to the Stockade Redan, the Great Redoubt, and the Railroad Redoubt. The purpose of these runs, other than for tough physical training, was to demonstrate how terrain affects fields of fire. At certain points the formation would be halted, and the red Confederate markers in the distance would be pointed out. The lesson was that line of sight works both ways, and if the enemy is in range, so are you. Therefore, if you could see the marker you were a target.

It was marvelous training. As a bonus, charging up those hillsides demonstrated to the soldier why physical fitness was vitally important—mission important—and you just can't get any better than that. As a bonus, staff rides in military parks gave me a chance to show off my soldiers and to instill pride in them. Time and again tourists would stop to photograph, and sometimes even make videos, of our training.

My wife, Carol, sewed full-size regimental flags for these staff rides so that the soldiers could “guide on the colors.” Despite the flags, the attempts to maintain unit formation were usually unsuccessful due to incredibly convoluted ground. But, command and control, or the loss of it, was a learning point. Over the years I used those colorful flags countless times on staff rides for soldiers, Marines, and airmen as training aids to help teach young warfighters, most of whom had never really walked a lot of rough ground, on the importance of unit and formation.\* The main teaching point, however, was purely tactical; that is, to show what a few feet of dirt can do to you or for you. It was some of the best and most effective “adventure training” that I have ever conducted, and I loved every minute of it. But it took a lot of “prep” time to stage a successful staff ride.

The preparation for such training required that I dig deeply into the best resource materials. For Vicksburg, *The Vicksburg Campaign*, by Ed Bearss, was at the time the only readily available source that provided the level of detail required. Of course, I could have retraced what Ed had already done by slogging through the Official Records, but as strange as it seems today, those 128 volumes were not readily available in the 1980s because the internet was still a glimmer in someone's eye.

Fortunately, I had purchased Ed's three marvelous volumes from the Vicksburg National Military Park bookstore soon after they were published in the early 1980s, and I had met Ed through a mutual friend and then Vicksburg NMP historian, Terry Winschel, around 1987. A year later, Ed was on tour in Vicksburg, and he participated in a book-signing at the park bookstore, where I was lucky enough to have my books signed. Those volumes are now quite well-worn, but they are still the source for me. I don't mind them being so tattered, because I have a pristine back-up set that was left me by my late friend, Warren Grabau. I happen to have been fortunate enough to have been able to call both of these men my friend; to learn at their feet; and to work with them both in the field and on writing projects.

In 1995, while I was still on active duty with the U.S. Army, and with many staff rides under my belt, I was asked by Len Riedel to conduct “civilian” staff rides for Blue and Gray Education Society (BGES). That initially concerned me because I had never trained civilians, and I felt that my training methods might be too demanding, both mentally and physically. My concerns were quickly allayed, however, because during the first minutes of the first BGES tour that I led, two things became evident: 1) The interest level of the participants was much greater than that of soldiers because BGES members had not been ordered to attend, they had paid to attend. 2) The attendees brought with them a level of knowledge of the subject that was generally much higher than that of the average soldier. In short, I had a good time because this was training that challenged everyone, including the instructor. I often worked with Ed Bearss on BGES tours, and that in itself was both phenomenal and challenging, because when you work with Ed, you had better bring your “A game.”

Then, in 2005, four years after I retired from active duty, Len asked that I organize a series of tours that would cover virtually all of *The Vicksburg Campaign* trilogy. That project turned out to be eight four-day tours, conducted twice a year, over a four-year period, because there was so much ground and material to cover. Additionally, much of that ground had never been toured. For example, no one had conducted tours of the December 1862 Forrest and Van Dorn cavalry raids that destroyed Grant's line of communication during his first attempt on Vicksburg, and no one had conducted tours of Grant's Bayou Expeditions of 1863.

Fortunately, I had a head start because in 2004 I had researched and written the copy for the BGES Van Dorn Raid markers in Holly Springs. And in 2005 I was busy writing a Vicksburg Campaign Driving Tour Guide with Warren Grabau. Warren and I had sniffed out most of the Bayou Expeditions the hard way, long before Google Earth and long before anyone had access to GPS on their cell phones. We ate dust and fed chiggers by driving the back roads and tromping the woods to arrive at the actual historical site, where we would obtain the coordinates by using a first-generation, hand-held GPS—a device that literally made you wait for several minutes for satellite reception.

It did not take me long to realize that the locations of many of the sites for the proposed BGES tours were unknown. Although the sites were mentioned in Ed's trilogy, they were just words on paper and no one knew exactly where they were. So, just as I did with Warren, I drove with Len, covering many a backwoods mile while scouting out old road beds and long-lost intersections. After all, the armies did not beam into the battlefields; they had to march to them, and to understand the campaign one had to understand the maneuver routes and the decision points along those routes. To delve into why a commander made a key decision, it was often necessary to know where that decision was made, because geography drives combat decisions. But the exploration was, and still is, exhilarating, particularly when what Len and I called a “Eureka moment” jumped up and slapped us in the face.

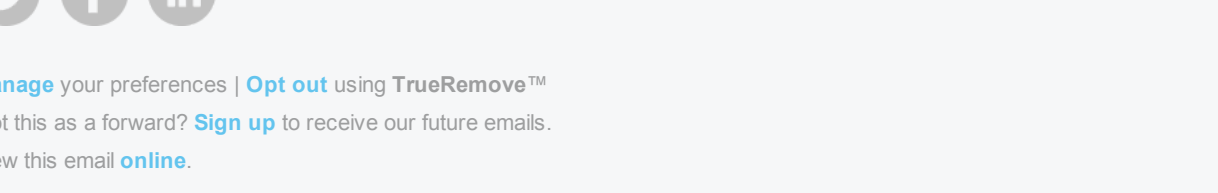
An example of a face-slapping “Eureka moment” was the day that Len and I found the Ashton Cut in Arkansas, 14 miles north of Lake Providence, Louisiana, just north of the Louisiana-Arkansas state line at the Mississippi River. This was one of Grant's unsuccessful attempts to circumvent the guns of Vicksburg, and it involved blowing up the Mississippi River levee to flood the flat cotton fields west for 2 miles to a meandering stream known as Bayou Macon. After floating across the fields to the bayou, the boats would then stream south, following a network of watercourses to the Red River, and then follow the Red to enter the Mississippi almost 100 miles south of Vicksburg. Only Ed's trilogy discussed this attempt, which was engineered by Gen. James McPherson. As such, this attempt has been virtually lost to history, Ed's work aside.

Len and I decided that the Ashton Cut needed to be found, shown, and discussed, so, since there were no maps to locate it, we spent two days in the search. On our first day, we almost ran out of gas on a Sunday afternoon in a cell-phone-free area, but we managed to coast into Lake Providence on fumes. All that day we stopped to query every local in this Arcadian area. In the process, we received a record number of “out-of-towners” were from. Finally, after an educated guess and using an Arkansas De Lorme Atlas to follow the “pig trails,” we found ourselves driving atop the Mississippi River levee in southern Arkansas. Paralleling the levee was a much smaller remnant of the 19th-century levee, and at almost exactly where we had calculated it should be, we spotted a huge gap in the old levee to our left, while to our right was a large “blue hole,” or sinkhole, that would have been the result of the raging waters of the Mississippi scouring out the landscape. It was unmistakably the spot where the Union engineers had blown the levee in March 1863, and it was a truly a “Eureka moment.” There are no markers, no cannon, and no monuments, only meadow muffs, but BGES has been there, and everyone who was present on that tour understands the Ashton Cut.

All of this is to say, the Vicksburg Campaign is in my blood. After all, I was born in the midst of the area over which the two armies marched and fought, and seven decades later I reside in the heart of it. The deeply cut bed of the old Jackson road runs 300 yards through a wooded area past my home in Clinton, and down this road two divisions of McPherson's 17th Corps, one division of McClelland's 13th Corps, and a day later two divisions of Sherman's 15th Corps marched west to Vicksburg. I can sit out on my back deck on a quiet night and almost hear the footsteps of those 25,000 soldiers marching. And, as an old soldier who has studied this campaign for decades, it is still not at all surprising to me that the U.S. Army considers the Vicksburg Campaign to be, “the greatest offensive campaign ever fought on American soil.”

*Parker Hills is the nation's leading historian on the Vicksburg Campaign. He is finishing his signature BGES Vicksburg series with a program that will take place in November 2020.*

\* For some strange reason, I was never asked by the Navy to conduct a military staff ride, although I would have loved to have trained some seamen at Grand Gulf or Steele's Bayou.



Vicksburg captured, by Currier & Ives | Library of Congress

## Reflections on Vicksburg

By Len Riedel

I first went to Vicksburg en route to my entry into the United States Air Force in December 1975. As I was driving from Lexington, Virginia, to San Antonio, this was a good place to stop, and I allowed time to get in and then spend the next day in the park before continuing on. I stayed at the Battlefield Inn, just outside the park—there weren't many choices back then. I recall a stunning young lady dressed in an antebellum dress greeting guests at a happy hour and posing for pictures. The next morning I had a breakfast buffet more memorable for the grits and chipped beef on toast than anything else—20 years later they were still serving it.

At the time I had not plunged deeply into the campaign or, for that matter, the Civil War as a whole, and to be honest it would be another dozen years before I would even start to think seriously about it. Of course, little did I know that in 1994 I would become fully involved, and in 1995 I made my dramatic entry into the era executing a subcontract with the old Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites (APCWS) to do a National Park Service Preservation Plan for a campaign that the Congressionally-chartered Civil War Sites Advisory Commission (CWSAC) would say: “We are impressed by the interpretive potential of the Vicksburg campaign.” The operative word was potential—it hadn't yet been harvested—so we plowed through the virgin soil, planted seeds, and commenced farming.

Well, this is an essay not a history, but the Vicksburg Campaign was indeed my full entry into Civil War education and preservation. The conference stepped on many bureaucratic toes and gored many a local oxen. Folks in Mississippi and Louisiana didn't take too kindly to strangers sticking their head in local business. But as good fortune would have it, the Governor of Mississippi, the late, Kirk Fordyce, was intrigued, and my report and recommendations formed the basis for the full expansion of the campaign and the fulfillment of the CWSAC's vision for it for nearly a quarter of a century. [Click here](#) to read the 1995 report that I rendered, and then compare it to the projects that have been successfully accomplished and continue to be undertaken. BGES and Vicksburg are totally and completely intertwined. We did monographs on Grant's Canals, Raymond, and Port Gibson, and a book with the National Geographic Society. Subsequent preservation plans pushed the state Department of Archives and History and legislature to allocate funds to tell the story and save the sites. We contributed canonical and interpretive signs for Earl Van Dorn's famous raid on Holly Springs—offending a very powerful local legend (general manager of the NFL's Minnesota Vikings) by telling him that U. S. Grant most assuredly didn't not sleep with his wife Julia in his multimillion dollar plantation home, nor did he own a first edition autographed set of Grant's Memoirs that had been sent by the President to the home in appreciation for the owner's hospitality during the war. Have you ever been offered as an hors d'oeuvre to a Great Dane? Down Zepher—down ... please....

But what of the campaign? As a newbie in the preservation movement, there certainly was a lot I didn't know that Vicksburg taught me—it brought me to Ed Bearss, a man central to the preservation of the campaign and, as all who know Ed understand, is its muse. His protégés and friends such as Warren Grabau and Terry Winschel also were instrumental in the storytelling surrounding this fabulous park and outdoor museum. Of course no one has had a bigger impact over the past 25 years than Parker Hills. His reflections precede mine in this newsletter.

Vicksburg is noteworthy to me for how much is still preserved in original form. Buildings like the Shaifer House at Port Gibson, Waverly at Raymond, and the reconstructed Coker House at Champion Hill all bear witness, but it is the relics in rivers like Big Black and the actual road beds so pristine that you might listen on a quiet night and hear the soldiers speaking and the campfires crackling as the sap in trees is burned and tears the wooden fibers yet. At Grand Gulf the relics of the time and the very important scenic byway to Raymond are the same grounds over which men and wagons trekked. When, there you are, literally in their tracks every step of the way, whether it is along Red Bone Ridge, through Grindstone Ford, or moving past Magnolia Church. Historic buildings in the little town of Raymond cast a shadow on modern day Yankees who also enter the town and walk the streets—if you take a quiet moment you might hear the distressed cackling of the town's ladies when the victorious Yankee marched into town and feasted on the homemade victuals that the town women had prepared for their Johnny Rebs.

Perhaps the most important thing I would like to say about Vicksburg is that Ed Bearss got it right in his three-volume trilogy and the other related books he wrote on the campaign. We know this because we adopted it as our bible for the longest and most comprehensive campaign study that any group in the past half century has ever done—more than 33 days over 8 different tours from the upper reaches of Tennessee down to New Orleans and everywhere in between (including Brashear City—today Morgan City, Louisiana). We found the old relics—the points where the Lake Providence Canal was cut and the Ashton Cut in Arkansas; we found the spot where Porter's Gun Boats entered Moon Lake; and we took a hard look at Arkansas Post, Oxford, Holly Springs, and Helena.

Vicksburg is a capsule of the Civil War. It is a masterful study of the art of war, the great constructs of strategy, and the backbreaking labor of brilliant maneuvers, as well as bold high risk and high return military operations. There are politics a plenty by they Earl Van Dorn or John Alexander McClelland or David Glasgow Farragut. The key is in the research preparation—it is not a simple task but rather an intellectual interchange brought to us by Ed's meticulous documentation and endless patience. It is a campaign that a national guard general can train leaders upon, a geological treasure chest that could intrigue a geologist like Warren Grabau, and a whole series of nuanced intrigues by they jury-rigged intelligence networks or eagle-eyed and well-spoken civilian diarists Emma Balfour, Sarah Morgan, and Emma Holmes. It is a community living in caves and eating rats under a relentless siege, it is a general with an affinity for drinking, slipping away to fall off the wagon in the small town of Sataria. It is a northern man married to a southern lady now a Confederate general with direct orders from the President of the Confederacy to defend Vicksburg to the last man—a President whose own home Hurricane is consumed by the campaign.

What I know is Vicksburg has yet to reveal all her treasures. Archaeology done on the Raymond battlefield has literally sprung long lost fence rails out of the ground and creek beds. Spent munitions and battlefield artists combined with contemporary writings have placed sketches in three-dimensional context, making it possible to literally stand in the tracks of the men who did the artwork.

That the surrender of Vicksburg cleaved off a major portion of the Confederate landmass and reopened the Mississippi River, solving a massive and nation-threatening blockade of western lands' commerce is reason enough. And then there are John Wayne and The Horse Soldiers ... my response is why make things up? The real story is that much more interesting. I think to tire of visiting Vicksburg and the Campaign is to tire of learning and to become bored with the Civil War. Me—I stopped counting, but I can say with authority that I have taken probably 100 trips to Mississippi in support of some aspect of this campaign, and I have never wasted a single one of them ... and then there was that 25-pound box of sweet potatoes for \$8 ... as I said, ever rewarding ... and then there is Cock of the Walk, best catfish flies ever ... and Rowdy's ... and Mr. D's ...

*Len Riedel is the Executive Director of the Blue and Gray Education Society.*

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