

A BGES Field University Program:
War on the Mississippi 1863
The BGES' Signature Vicksburg Campaign
Study: Grant's Bayou Expeditions
Presented by Brig. Gen. James Parker Hills, Ret.
February 28-March 3, 2024; from Vicksburg, Mississippi

The Vicksburg Campaign is one of the world's truly magnificent military operations. Brilliantly conceptualized by Maj. Gen. U. S. Grant, it was prosecuted with focus and purpose from the point in which he undertook the objective of capturing Vicksburg until it was surrendered. During the period from December 1862 until the surrender on July 4, 1863, the campaign is filled with stirring and daring expeditions.

One such concept that history has forgotten is Grant's series of Bayou and River Expeditions from January 1863 to April 1863. Rather than hunker down for the winter, Grant kept his soldiers alert and fit for the demands of the active campaigning season by engaging in a cluster of winter and spring operations, several of which came close to ending the campaign months earlier. These joint operations with the Navy have largely been dismissed. Grant himself downplayed them in his memoirs. But careful study has shown these were robust and daring operations in which decisive success often rested on being at the right place at the right time and which failed as a result of bad luck generally beyond the control of Grant or his subordinates.

The sights of this campaign are still extant and many are pristine. This unique and singular tour, developed by the BGES more than 15 years ago, is the only one of its kind being offered. Treat yourself. You will leave with a new appreciation of the generalship of General Grant.

Wednesday, February 28, 2024

Check into the Holiday Inn Express in Vicksburg at 5 p.m. At 6:30 p.m., we will open the program with a two-hour working supper that includes another of Parker Hills' brand-new-for-BGES PowerPoint lectures, "A Series of Experiments."

Dinner is provided.

Thursday, February 29, 2024

Wheels up at 8 a.m. Today is a great photo op day as we take you to places no one else knows exist and that we have discovered over the years. We will go to a Mississippi River overlook to discuss the strategic meaning of Vicksburg and the Mississippi River to both the Federals and Confederacy. We also will discuss the first Union effort to take

Vicksburg in the late spring and summer of 1862, an operation chronicled by the legendary Ed Bearss in his 1960s book, *Rebel Victory at Vicksburg*.

We will then go visit the U.S.S. *Cairo* Museum. This singular gunboat gives substance to an understanding of the expeditions we will study over these four days. After a lunch in Vicksburg, we will visit the site of General Sherman's headquarters and discuss his attempts to convince Grant not to undertake this operation. Indeed, Sherman was negative on the entire campaign until the end, when success was assured.

The National Park Service maintains a small relic known as Grant's Canal, which, in reality, was the 1862 Williams Canal—an effort to bypass the stronghold of Vicksburg by diverting the Mississippi River.

We then will move farther into Louisiana to show you what today looks like a small drainage ditch but is known to history as the Duckport Canal. Nineteenth-century engineering is the headline story for both these stops, and we will show and tell you why they are important parts of the story.

Our last stop of the day is the wonderful antebellum venue of Lake Providence. Its importance is also an engineering question that again sought to bypass Vicksburg by using the lake and strongbacks to avoid the angry guns overlooking the Vicksburg fortress. The antebellum homes and the Lake itself make this a great way to end the day and it still has an important story that we will share when we return tomorrow en route to Arkansas Post.

Lunch is provided.

Friday, March 1, 2024

Today we will leave our hotel and overnight near Clarksdale. We hit the trail running and, as we head to Arkansas, we will show you a magnificent and important site: the Ashton Cut, just north of Lake Providence, where the Federal engineers blew a hole in the levee to create a channel that ultimately would allow Federal vessels above Vicksburg to take a shortcut to the Red River and reenter the Mississippi River just above Baton Rouge. The forensic footprint is obvious once we point it out to you and show the grown-over remains of the site where the Civil War era levee was blown up. It is an “aha” moment.

We then will go to the remote but important January 1862 operation that captured the Confederate Fort Hindman near the White River. The site has suffered dramatically over the past 162 years, and all that remains are the outer works. Still, this is an operation that, while initially was labeled by Grant as “a wild goose chase,” is a fine example of the controversial Maj. Gen. John McClernand's leadership capabilities. The capture interdicted Confederate operations that interfered with Federal river traffic on the Mississippi. It was a prelude to the Grant initiatives that we are studying. As we press farther to Helena, we will visit the obscure village of St. Charles, where the U.S.S.

Mound City met a disaster, on July 17, 1862, after being hit by a single round fired by a shore battery.

In Helena, we will enjoy the newly uncovered and militarily interesting July 4, 1863, battle there. Unable to gain a foothold to support the garrison at Vicksburg, Confederate forces attacked Helena on the same day that Vicksburg surrendered. This is a great Civil War preservation story. You will appreciate what you can see and experience. While there, we will also pay respects to two of Arkansas's finest officers who are buried there: Thomas C. Hindman and Pat Cleburne.

We will overnight near Clarksdale, where it is said that guitar player Robert Johnson sold his soul to the Devil at the intersection of Highways 61 and 49. In exchange, he got mastery of the legendary music style known as "The Blues." Perhaps we will get a whiff of the hellacious sulfur smell of the infernal regions!

Lunch, dinner, and hotel are included.

Saturday, March 2, 2024

Like Grant, we will turn our attention on a northern route to Vicksburg. The operation is known to history as the Yazoo Pass Expedition. Another BGES exclusive—we will take you to the precise point where the Federals blew a hole in the Mississippi River levee to access Moon Lake and Yazoo Pass before reaching the inland river structure, including the Coldwater and Tallahatchie Rivers (yes, we will see where Billy Joe McAllister jumped off the Tallahatchie River Bridge), that spiderwebbed its way to the lands immediately above Vicksburg.

We will reach the staging area for the Federal attack on Fort Pemberton at Minter City. Had they succeeded, they would have entered the Yazoo River and then reached Satartia, where they might come through the back door of the Confederates' Vicksburg defenses.

We will finish the day discussing the fighting at Fort Pemberton and will discover one of history's mysteries—the fate of a historic vessel, *The Star of the West*.

We will return to the Holiday Inn Express at Vicksburg, where you will need to check in again or disperse to the hotel where you are staying. Breakfast and lunch are provided.

Sunday, March 3, 2024

Today is our final day; let's leave at 8 a.m. We will head to the Confederates' commanding battery positions at Haynes Bluff, which overlook the Yazoo River. Steele's Bayou Expedition is our next objective. The March 13, 1863, operation shows the brass nerve of Union admiral David D. Porter as we follow his deployment of gunboats (keep in mind the *Cairo*) up Steele's Bayou, to Muddy Bayou at Eagle Lake, and then into Black Bayou, where he pushed five *Cairo*-type gunboats into a narrow ditch—digging and kedging around corners for more than 3 miles.

Once we get to Black Bayou, the site of Sherman’s candlestick march on March 21, we move on to Hill Plantation, where Sherman encamped his supportive infantry force that was landed to support Porter’s gunboats. After lunch, we follow Porter to the confluence of Rolling Fork and Deer Creek. Recently, a tornado devastated Rolling Fork, but our story concerns the bayou cut, the Confederate defense against it and the physical features that brought Porter to a halt less than a mile from the entrance to the Yazoo River. As Porter is forced to abandon the effort, we will follow his retreat to Egremont Plantation, where the Confederates have blocked the bayou in each direction. Of course, Porter does deliver his fleet back to the Mississippi River, nearly averting disaster—so close, but yet a failure.

We will return to the hotel with a renewed understanding of the details of what Grant did. Will you think this was a productive set of operations, or was Grant sandbagging operations that didn’t turn out as he had hoped in 1863? This campaign is endlessly interesting as a study of men and machines, leadership and cowardice—as Carl von Clausewitz said in *On War*: “From the transport-driver and drummer up to the general, boldness is the noblest of virtues, the true steel which gives the weapon its edge and brilliancy.” These four “Experiments were clearly BOLD and arguably BRILLIANT.

This is a program you cannot get from anyone other than BGES.

Lunch is included.

About the Faculty:

Parker Hills is the nation’s leading historian on the Vicksburg 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 surely will leave with far more knowledge than when you arrived. Parker is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College, and he is in high demand with businesses and military organizations that want his leadership training. Hills is the founder of BattleFocus and is a retired general 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 Counter Drug Training Academy in Meridian, Mississippi.

Parker is the coauthor of *Receding Tide: Vicksburg and Gettysburg, The Campaigns that Changed the Civil War*. He also has 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 NMP. He has written the BGES monographs *A Study in Warfighting: Nathan Bedford Forrest and the Battle of Brices Crossroads (1995)* and *Grand Gulf to Raymond Driving Tour Guide (2020)*. He also is the driving force for Civil War preservation in the state of Mississippi, and largely through his efforts the Raymond Battlefield Park exists.

Hotel Information:

Our headquarters hotel will be the Holiday Inn Express, 4330 S. Frontage Rd., Vicksburg, MS (601-634-8777 or email: vickshie@gmail.com). Your registration fee includes your hotel on the night of March 1. We have set up a block of rooms at the HI Express at the rate of \$141.90 per night, inclusive of 10% tax. The cut-off day for reservations is January 27, 2024. The nights you would have to make reservations for are February 28 and 29 and March 2 and (if you elect to stay Sunday night) 3. You do not have to stay at our HQ hotel in Vicksburg.

Transportation:

The servicing airport is Jackson (JAN)). You may also fly into New Orleans (MSY) or Baton Rouge (BTR). All will require additional transportation to get to Vicksburg. You may also find rental cars useful. There is no public or timely transportation between any of the airports and Vicksburg.

Recommended Reading:

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

Edwin C. Bearss: *The Campaign for Vicksburg, Volume 1: Vicksburg is the Key*

Edwin C. Bearss and James Parker Hills: *Receding Tide: Vicksburg and Gettysburg, the Campaigns that Changed the Civil War*

Timothy B. Smith: *Bayou Battles for Vicksburg: The Swamp and River Expeditions, January 1-April 30, 1863*

Registration Form
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Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Registration includes the March 1 hotel, 4 lunches, a working dinner, a 90-minute PowerPoint presentation, a map packet, the academic program, support of a professional historian, a tour director, park admission, and transportation. We will also provide snacks and bottled water.

_____ Current BGES member \$995 single

_____ Current BGES member \$925 per person double occupancy

_____ Non-BGES member \$1,100 single

_____ Non-BGES member \$1,025 per person double occupancy

_____ 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 membership donation of \$ _____ (must be \$75 or more, which is tax-deductible; see *blueandgrayeducation.org* for levels).

_____ I am sending a deposit of \$300 per person plus any memberships. Total enclosed is \$ _____. I will pay the balance due before the event.

_____ Check enclosed.

Charge my (circle one) MC VISA AMEXP Discover \$_____

#_____

Exp: _____ CVV: _____

Signature: _____

Mail to BGES Seminars, P.O. Box 1176, Chatham, VA 24531; or fax credit card registrations to 434-432-0596. You may also register online at www.blueandgrayeducation.org.