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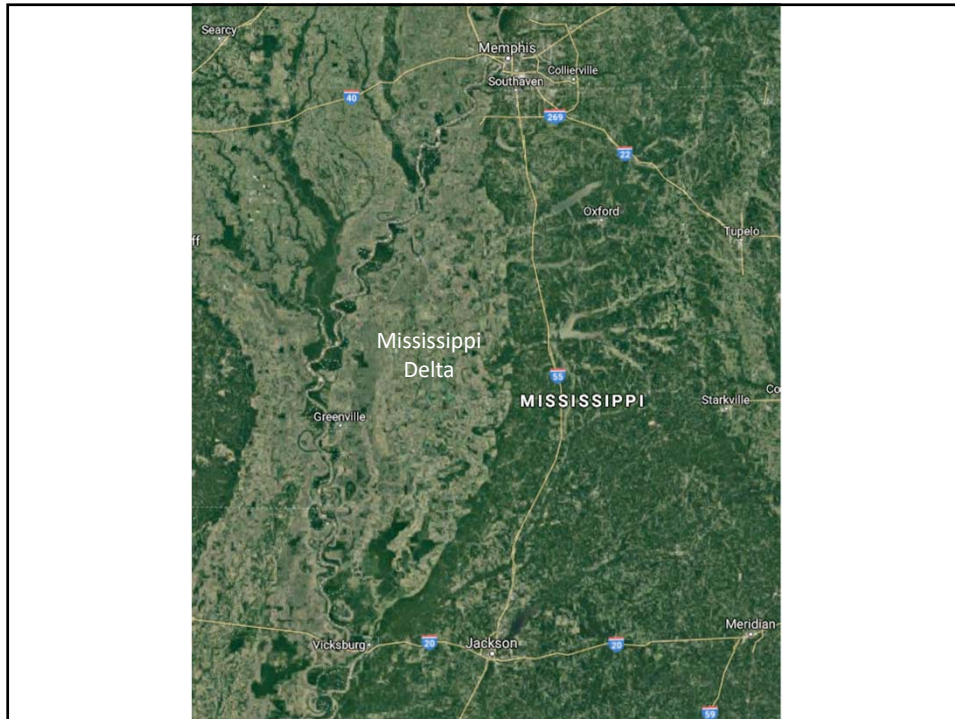
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The Mississippi Campaign:

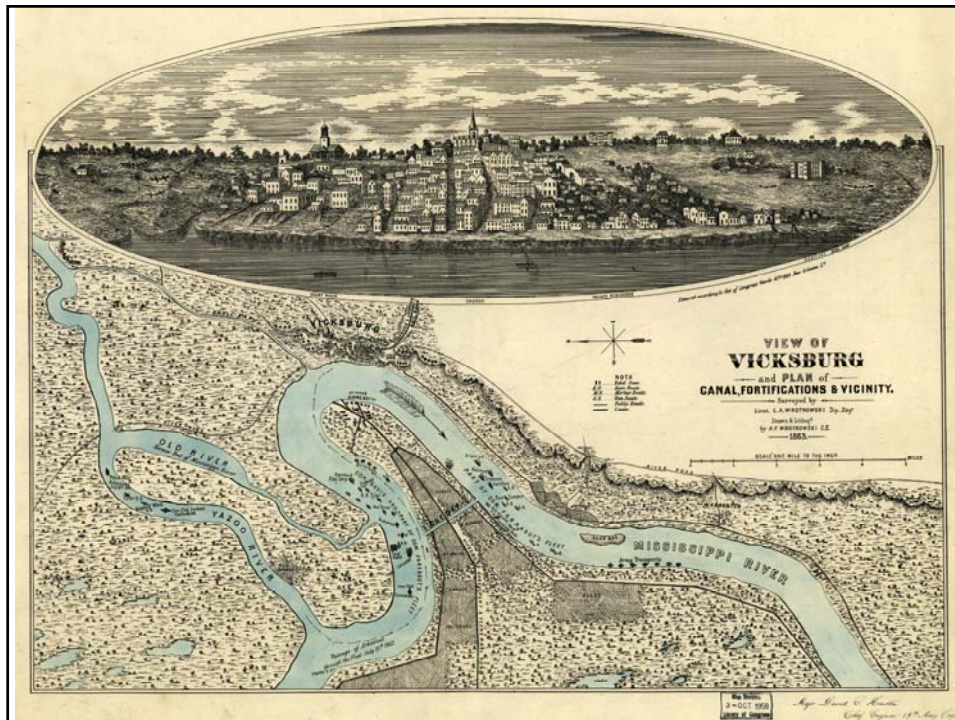
Part III: The Siege of Vicksburg

Presented by Howard Leemon

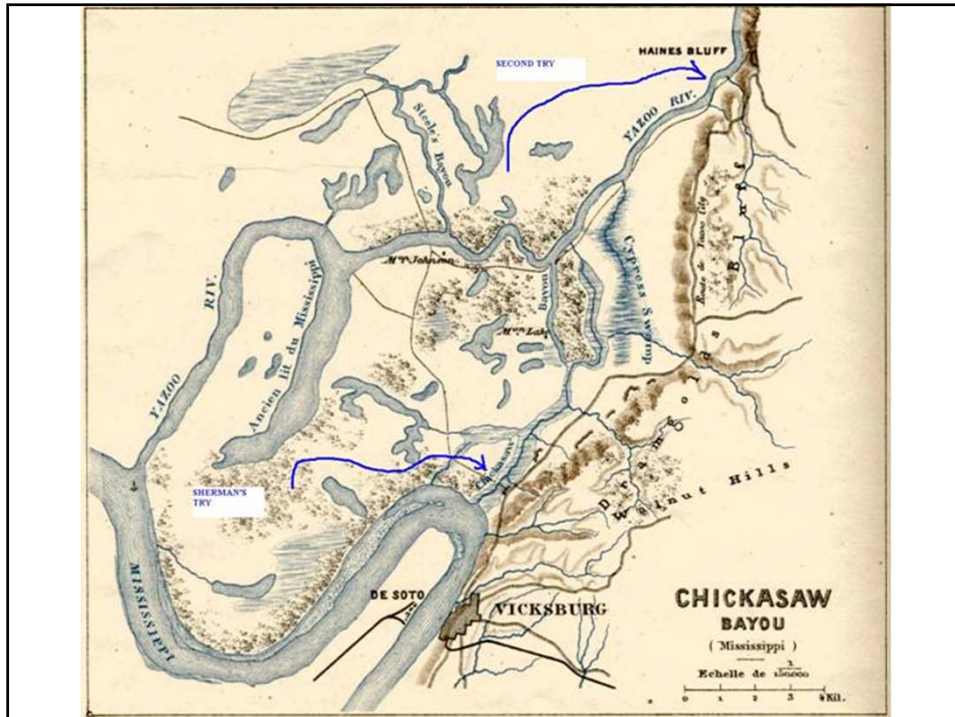
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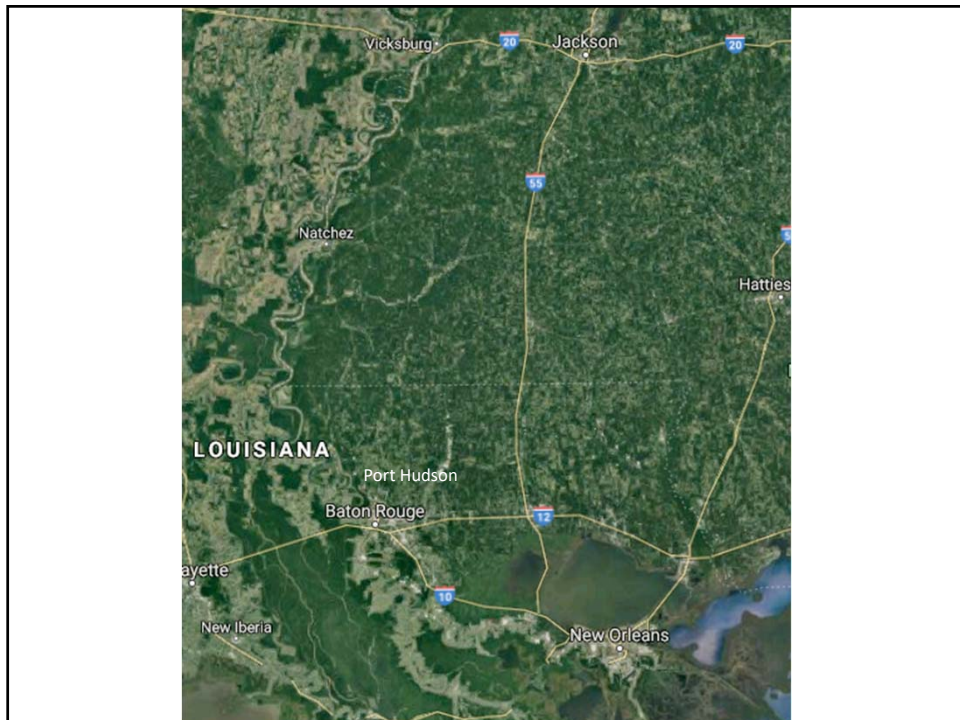
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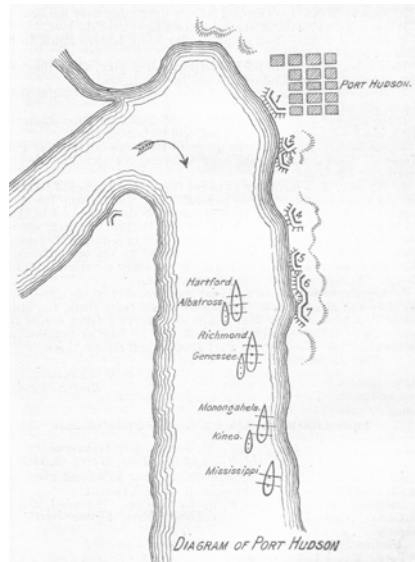


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Port Hudson



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The Union Commanders

- MG James B McPherson was born 1828 in Ohio
- He graduated from West Point in 1853 first in his class, one that included Philip Sheridan, John Hood and John Schofield
- He was Lt Col and Chief Engineer for Grant at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, being promoted to BG after Shiloh and then to MG
- He was a favorite of Grant and Sherman and was close friends with Porter
- McClernand, as a result of his ambition, manner and behaviour, was isolated
- In early April, Charles Dana, Secretary of War Stanton's spy, arrived to investigate the rumours about Grant
- He was soon sending glowing reports about Grant, Sherman and McPherson, but rather negative ones about McClernand

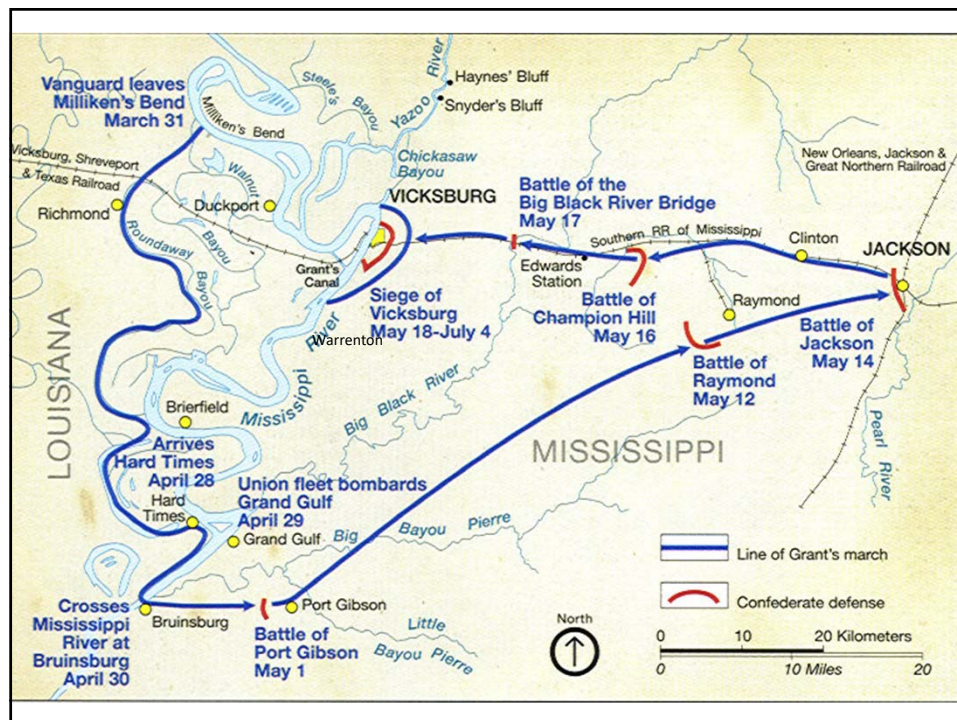


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Crossing the River

- With the gunboats and transports now below Vicksburg, McClernand's 4 divisions (XIII Corps) and McPherson's 3 divisions (XVII Corps) were moving south to Hard Times over the newly constructed road
- Grant's initial plan was cross over the river at either Warrenton or Grand Gulf, 5 miles further down the river
- From either point, there were good roads leading to Vicksburg and Jackson
- He had foreseen that the eastern side was likely to be well protected and he had already planned for diversions

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Diversions

- In early April one of Sherman's 3 divisions under Fred Steele had been sent 100 miles up the river to spend a week thrashing around in the Delta giving the impression that they were the advance contingent for another assault from the north
- They then returned to base in preparation for the next diversion
- 30 April Sherman set off up the Yazoo again with 10 regiments, 3 gunboats, 4 tinclads and 3 mortars
- Sherman's orders included the command that 'every man was to look as numerous as possible'
- Near Haynes Bluff they disembarked, marched and countermarched, with bands playing while the gunboats engaged in an artillery duel with the Confederate defenders
- Sherman continued the charade for a second day before withdrawing after dark to return to Milliken's Bend to prepare to move his XV Corps to Hard Times

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Grierson's Raid

- Grant had also decided to imitate the destructive Confederate cavalry raids that he had experienced at first hand
- The degree of difficulty would be very much greater since the Union forces would not be among friendly locals
- Col. Benjamin Grierson, a former music teacher who had hated horses after being kicked in the head and nearly killed by one as a child, commanded 1700 troopers from the 6th and 7th Illinois and 2nd Iowa Cavalry regiments and a 6-gun battery
- Their 2 week raid started from La Grange, east of Memphis, the day after Porter's first run past the guns of Vicksburg
- Their primary goal was to disrupt attempts to bring up reinforcements by damaging the railway leading into Jackson from the east and the south if possible
- The secondary goals were to create chaos, uncertainty and distraction while Grant crossed the river

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- The raid exceed all of Grant's expectations with some extra luck
- Coincidentally, Col Abel Streight, under Rosecrans' command, led a simultaneous, but unsuccessful raid into Alabama, during which all the troops were taken prisoner by Bedford Forrest, but it kept Forrest busy far away from Vicksburg
- Grierson's main force rode over six hundred miles over routes no Union soldier had traveled before, arriving at Union-held Baton Rouge on 2 May
- They tore up railroads and burned cross ties on 3 separate lines, ripped up bridges and trestles, destroyed locomotives and commissary stores, burned Confederate storehouses, freed slaves, and inflicted ten times the casualties they received
- Detachments made feints confusing the Confederates as to his actual whereabouts, intent and direction
- Total Union casualties were 3 killed, 7 wounded, 9 missing

Crossing the River (2)

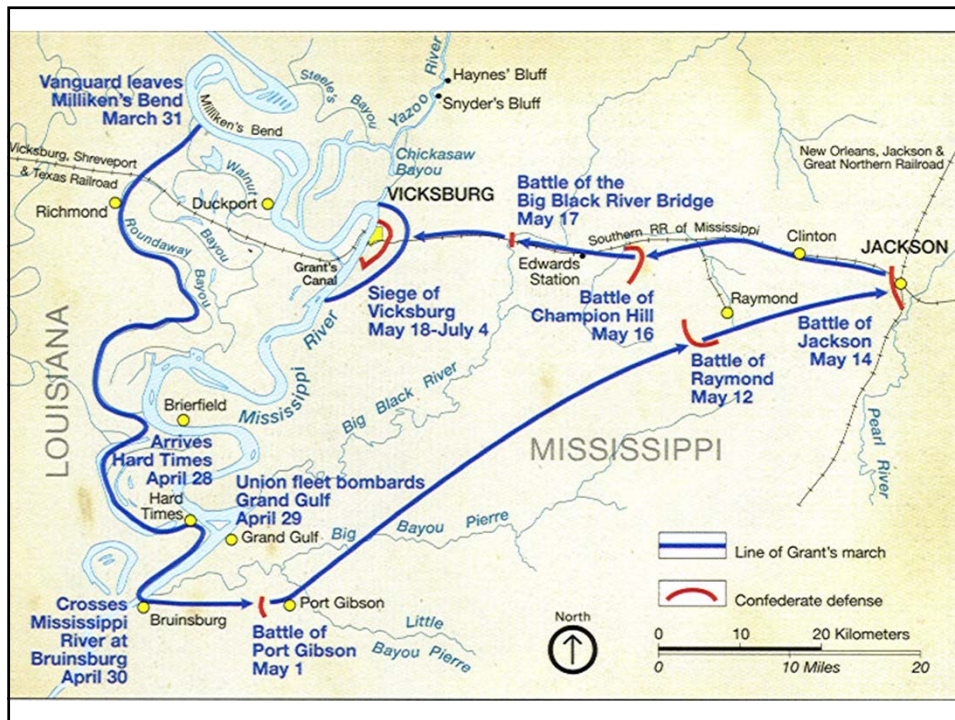
- 29 April Porter's gunboats attacked Grand Gulf but were repulsed with considerable damage
- Grant abandoned the option of landing there and looked further south
- Seeking local knowledge, Grant sent a detachment across the river and they came back with a helpful slave who advised them that the best place to land would be Bruinsburg, 10 miles below Grand Gulf, where there was a good road leading inland to Port Gibson and the land was well above the swamps so that an army could move through it easily - and the best houses and plantations were there
- 30 April, while Sherman was demonstrating against Haynes Bluff and Grierson was still distracting the Confederates, 23,000 troops in McClernand's 4 divisions and 1 of McPherson's disembarked on the eastern shore of the river without opposition
- The remainder of McPherson's divisions and Sherman's Corps would soon follow

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Battle of Port Gibson

- Moving east, McClernand's Corps encountered 4 Confederate brigades led by BG John Bowen from Grand Gulf that had taken up a strong defensive position with around 8000 troops
- Both flanks of the Confederates were turned but they retreated to an even stronger position and the battle developed into a stalemate
- When McPherson came up in the afternoon he quickly identified and directed another flanking move that forced a full retreat across the Bayou Pierre
- 2 May, Grant quickly maneuvered Bowen out of position by sending McPherson to cross the Bayou Pierre at a ford several miles upstream
- Realising that McPherson could cut him off from the bridge over the Big Black River, Bowen ordered the formidable defenses at Grand Gulf abandoned, the magazine exploded, and the heavy artillery destroyed
- Union gunboats arrived and took Grand Gulf without a shot although Porter did claim full credit

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A change of plan

- Grant had planned to send McClernand south to join up with Banks for an action against Port Hudson while he consolidated his position and built up a supply base at Grand Gulf
- There he received word from Banks that he would not be ready to move towards Port Gibson before 10 May and Grant was concerned that another month would go by
- While he would now have fewer troops than he had planned for, Grant would not have to face the situation of Banks outranking him
- He called for a rapid build up of supplies but one of the two tow boats and all its barges were sunk passing Vicksburg
- Declining to wait any longer, he decided to cut loose from the supply line taking only the basic needs (ammunition, hard tack, coffee, salt)
- Sherman's Corps was across the river and Grant now had 45,000 troops ready to move towards Jackson and get between Pemberton and any reinforcements

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Pemberton

- 16 April, with all of Grant's experiments having failed and Union troops moving out of sight across the river, Pemberton was happy, as Grant was likely heading back to Memphis
- A gala ball of celebration in Vicksburg was disrupted when the guns opened fire on Porter's fleet heading down river
- This was followed by Grierson's raid and then Sherman's feint against Haynes Bluff and Grant's crossing and the abandonment of Grand Gulf
- Pemberton wondered what was Grant going to do next?
- Jackson was the likely target but after that?
- Grand Gulf was not sustainable as a supply base
- The best location was to the north at Haynes Bluff but, to get there, Grant would have to spread his troops thinly to protect his ever longer supply line making him vulnerable to flank and rear attacks
- He was told that reinforcements were on the way, as was Johnston

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Grant

- 12 May, 3 Corps were put in motion
- Grant sent a wire to Halleck knowing that he would not approve but that the wire would take many days to get to him
- McClernand would take the left following the Big Black River to the railway connecting Vicksburg and Jackson
- McPherson would move against Jackson while Sherman would follow up in the rear ready to support either as needed
- At Raymond McPherson hit opposition of unknown strength: in fact it was 7 regiments who fought well before falling back
- In the evening, Grant revised his orders
- McPherson would go north to the rail line then east; Sherman would go east and then north; McClernand would act as the rear guard to support the other two
- After meeting little resistance from Confederates during the day, Grant revised his orders again, utilising his very flexible formation

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Grant (2)

- McPherson was to wreck the railroad before heading east in the morning; Sherman was to coordinate his movement for simultaneous arrival at Jackson from the south; McClellan was to head north and west to get in front of Pemberton if he moved east
- If Pemberton lunged southward to get in the army's rear and cut the supply line, it would take him out of the campaign altogether because there was no supply line and no rear in the usual sense - the Corps in the rear could quickly pivot to being in the front
- 14 May, after encountering brief resistance outside of Jackson, McPherson and Sherman entered the state capital
- Casualties were 48 KIA, 273 WIA, 11 MIA against total losses of 200 and 17 guns for the Confederates
- Johnston had been there the night before, but being heavily outnumbered, he had withdrawn

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Grant (3)

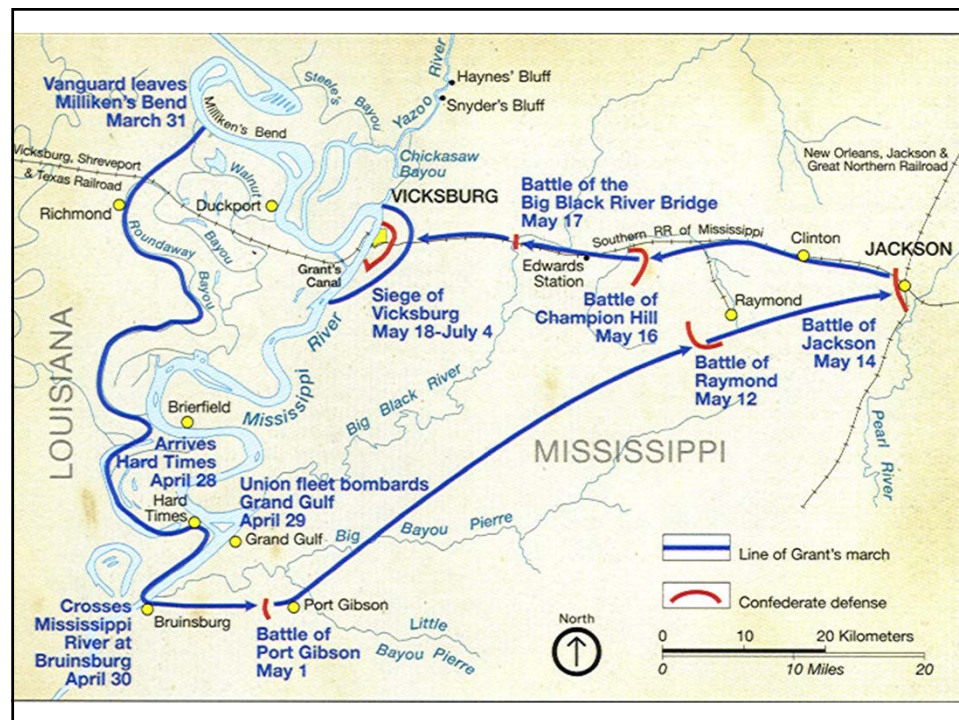
- As Grant was celebrating, Dana arrived with a despatch dated 5 May from Stanton in response to Dana's report on Grant's plan
- *"General Grant has full and absolute authority to enforce his own commands, to remove any person who, by ignorance, inaction or any cause, interferes with or delays his operations*
- *He has the full confidence of the Government, is expected to enforce his authority, and will be firmly and heartily supported; but he will be responsible for any failure to exert his powers*
- *You may communicate this to him"*
- This gave Grant protection against interference from Halleck as he had not joined up with Banks as advised
- But Dana's reports about McClellan also had the desired effect
- Grant was in good spirits and gave Sherman a task his troops would become very skilled at – destroying Jackson as a railway centre and a manufacturing city of military supplies

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Pemberton and Johnston

- Johnston had only 6000 troops at Jackson against 25000 Federals
- He was hopeful of receiving another 12-13000 but had to withdraw
- He called for Pemberton to meet up with him so that they could combine against Grant
- Pemberton was expecting that Johnston would come to meet up with him as he had brought 17,500 troops forward having left the remainder to man the Vicksburg defences
- In any case he now discovered that McClernand was heading his way with 4 divisions plus 1 from Sherman's Corps guarding the supply train
- Johnston was sending 3 messengers to ensure that one got through
- But one was a Union spy who had been publicly expelled from Memphis months earlier because of his loud support for secession
- Grant was able to read the communications between the two for the duration of the siege

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Battle of Champion Hill – 16 May

- Grant directed McPherson to head west to join up with McClernand and Sherman was to send one of his divisions while holding one to complete the work at Jackson
- Pemberton had positioned his 3 divisions in a strong position on Champion Hill east of the Big Black River
- McClernand was hesitating but Grant sent his northernmost division under Hovey into the attack while Logan's division (McPherson) probed to the north
- He was forced to call Logan back to support Hovey just as Logan was discovering that the Confederate flank was hanging in the air
- With Logan into the attack the Confederate line collapsed leaving Loring's division cut off to the south – it eventually joined Johnston
- Union losses were 2441 against Confederate losses of 3624, not including Loring's departure
- Grant again was unhappy with McClernand's performance

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Battle of Big Black River Bridge – 17 May

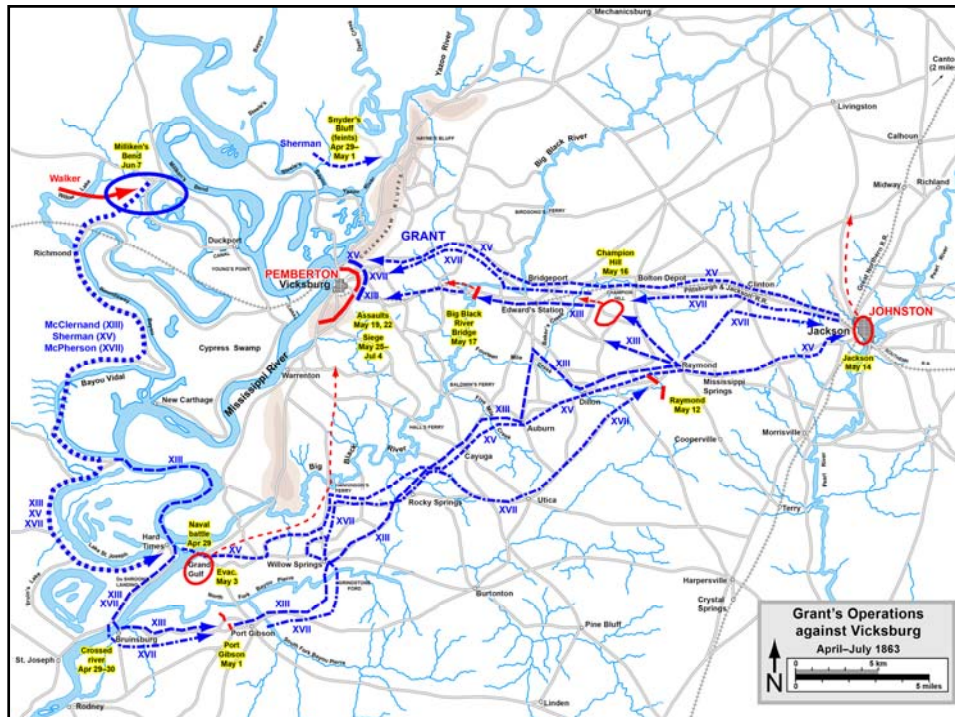
- The next day, the Union army found the Confederates in an even stronger position defending the railway bridge with a bayou protecting their front
- Pemberton had left it open hoping that Loring would turn up
- Seeing the strength of the position Grant sent Sherman to the north to look for another crossing
- McClernand needed some glory and attacked front on
- One of his brigades went through shoulder deep water losing 199 casualties in 3 minutes in "the most perilous and ludicrous charge" but, when they emerged, the Confederates broke, only to discover that the bridge had been burnt leaving 1200 of them prisoners
- Pemberton's skilfully drawn line had fallen apart at first contact and Sherman was now across the river to the north
- Confederate losses were 1751 against Grant's 279
- Pemberton had barely 1/3 of his original force remaining

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The siege begins

- The Confederates withdrew into Vicksburg while the 3 Union Corps came forward: Sherman to the north; McPherson in the centre; and McClernand to the south
- Sherman found Haynes Bluff unoccupied with its guns spiked where his attack had failed 5 months earlier
- Grant now had his supply base north of Vicksburg
- Sherman finally understood what Grant had been trying to achieve
- *"Until this moment I never thought your expedition a success*
- *I could never see the end clearly until now*
- *But this is a campaign. This is a success if we never take the town"*
- In 20 days they had marched 180 miles, won 5 battles, occupied a southern capital, inflicted over 7000 casualties with less than 4500 of their own, seized 50 guns and found 2 dozen spiked
- Grant was not ready to let up just yet

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The siege

- 19 May Grant prepared his army for a full frontal assault across the whole Confederate defensive line starting at 2 pm
- It failed almost immediately it started with the attackers being repulsed with withering fire with losses of 942 against less than 200 confederates
- Many had to wait until dark before they could pull back
- It was agreed that they would attack again this time with better reconnaissance and with better artillery support in concert with the navy
- 22 May a major assault was launched using synchronised watches – a first – because of the terrific noise
- The fighting was fierce but the outcome was the same with a much higher casualty rate – 3199
- As usual, Grant blamed McClernand, with some justification, for encouraging a second assault on the day by a misleading report

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The siege (2)

- Grant later justified these assaults and the associated losses on the grounds that the troops had been enthusiastic after their string of victories and were keen to try
- His view was that they would not have so readily settled into a long and boring siege if they hadn't been given the opportunity to find out how difficult it was to attack well-designed fortifications
- In the meantime the navy cleared out any remaining Confederate forces including boats, completed or still being built in the Yazoo river system
- Vicksburg was completely cut off but still able to defend itself on the river and land sides
- Pemberton had wisely gathered as much food as he could previously so he could sustain a siege for quite some time as long as Johnston could come to his assistance

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Port Hudson

- Banks had not been able to coordinate with Grant because he had gone off up the Teche River to Alexandria on a largely successful expedition before heading back down the Red River to invest Port Hudson on 26 May
- His experience of attacking the Confederate defences was no different to Grant's – he was repulsed with considerable losses
- He also settled into a siege
- Halleck ordered him to break off the siege and head north to join up with Grant
- Banks was eventually able to convince him that that would leave his rear exposed and risk losing New Orleans and Baton Rouge
- Banks was also in a difficult position with many men on 9-month enlistments coming to the end of their service

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The siege (3)

- The Union line covered 12 miles and Grant's existing 3 Corps were not sufficient to provide full investment while also being exposed to a possible attack from the rear by Johnston
- With a secure river route, Grant was able to call up reinforcements and eventually he had 77,000 troops in place which allowed him to face both inwards towards Vicksburg and outwards towards wherever Johnston might come from
- With the navy, Grant had 220 guns delivering shells onto Vicksburg every day with little let up
- The Confederates were obliged to restrict their firing to actual battles
- They dug into the hills of Vicksburg giving rise to the name of Prairie Dog Town - and food was starting to run low
- Johnston's numbers were slowly increasing but they were poorly equipped to take on the Union troops
- By mid June he had 31,000 troops – he hovered but did not attack

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Battle of Milliken's Bend

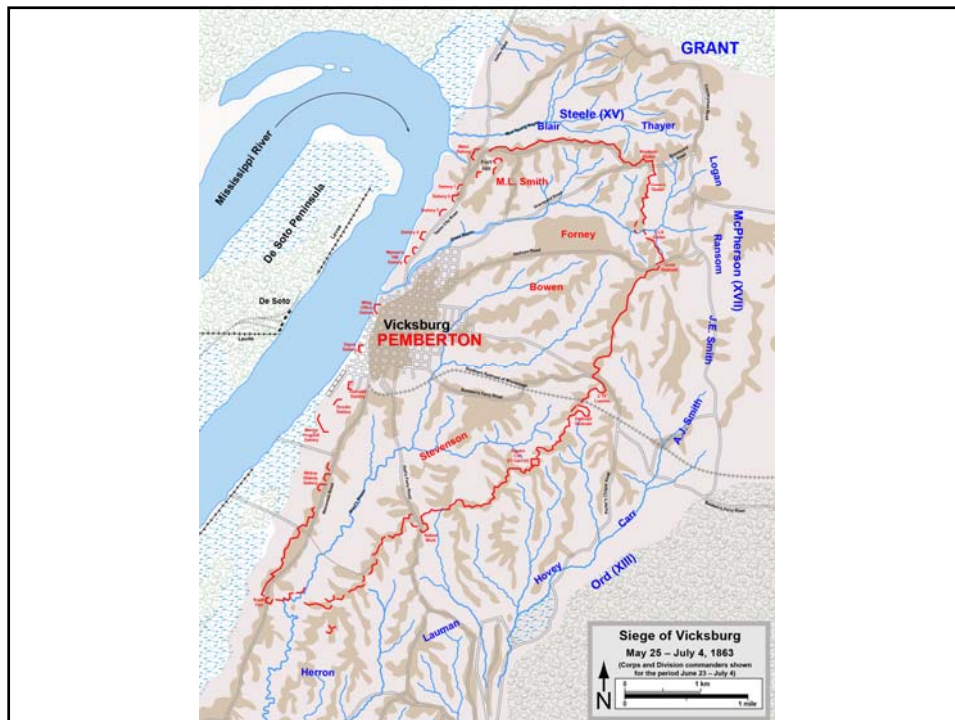
- Grant had recruited black troops but, not having a lot of confidence in their fighting abilities, had neither given them much training nor given them modern weapons
- They were put in charge of the supply depots at Milliken's Bend and Young's Point, although the Yazoo bases were now more important
- 7 June they came under attack from Confederate troops from the Trans-Mississippi
- Union losses were heavy – 652 to 185 on the Confederate side – before the gunboats joined the fight and drove the enemy away
- But the black troops had fought bravely and the respect for them grew enormously among the Union troops
- On the Confederate side there was evidence of surrendering black troops being killed in cold blood - and not for the last time

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Grant (4)

- Boredom was a problem for the Union forces even for Grant
- Many years later it was reported by one of the senior officers that Grant went on a 2 day bender while down on the river
- Supposedly this was covered up by everybody including Dana and his Chief of Staff Rawlings but it is disputed whether it actually took place
- McClernand remained a problem until one of Shermans' commanders read a congratulatory order he had issued in a Memphis newspaper claiming the credit for the coming victory
- A War Department order issued a year before forbade the publication of all official letters and reports
- When McClernand was challenged he admitted he had written it
- 18 June - *"MG John A McClernand is hereby relieved from command of the Thirteen Army"*
- A senior officer couldn't wait and delivered it at midnight
- That was the end of McClernand's military and political ambitions

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The surrender

- 3 July, 2 high ranking Confederates sought terms under a flag of truce
- Grant's response was, as expected, unconditional surrender
- However, the Confederates had broken the wig-wag code between the army and the navy and knew that the latter did not want to transport more than 30,000 captives north to POW camps/prisons
- Pemberton came out to meet with Grant and a difficult encounter ensued between the two
- Grant agreed to send an offer that night
- He agreed that the prisoners would be paroled being careful to restrict the 'personal property' that they could bring out – i.e. slaves
- He also ensured that the Union soldiers communicated directly across the trenches to put pressure on Pemberton
- Pemberton accepted - the surrender was set for the next day: 4 July

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The surrender (2)

- The surrender was quite low key and there was a lot of fraternisation
- Any cheering was directed towards the defenders in acknowledgement of their defensive efforts
- Grant provided supplies to the starving troops
- He justified the paroles offered on the grounds that demoralised troops would contribute to an overall loss of morale in the South
- The troops broke into some of the hoarders' supplies and distributed them to the townspeople
- Total casualties for the Confederates were 2872 (siege), 9091 overall
- 27,230 enlisted men, 2166 officers and 115 civilian employees were taken prisoner and, mostly, paroled
- 1 officer and 708 men preferred to go north as prisoners
- Union casualties were 4910 (siege), 10142 overall
- 172 cannon were captured and nearly 60,000 muskets and rifles

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Port Hudson (2)

- Banks did not need to fight to take Port Hudson
- All he had to do was to convince them that Vicksburg had actually surrendered
- Under a flag of truce, Banks presented his opponent with Grant's dispatch from Vicksburg
- There was no longer any justification for the Confederates to try to hold and the surrender was finalised on 9 July
- Banks similarly paroled the majority of his captives

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The aftermath

- Porter lost no time getting a wire away to Secretary Welles who passed it straight on to Lincoln
- *"I have the honor to inform you that Vicksburg has surrendered to the US forces on this 4th day of July"*
- Grant was made MG in the Regular Army from 4 July; Sherman and McPherson were similarly promoted
- While Halleck and others were concerned about paroling the prisoners, Lincoln quickly understood Grant's reasoning
- Lincoln wrote to Grant explaining that he had doubted nearly every decision that Grant had made during his campaign but ended with *"I now wish to make the personal acknowledgement that you were right and I was wrong"*
- An unarmed ship made the trip to New Orleans and Lincoln announced that *"The Father of Waters again goes unvexed to the sea"*
- The Confederacy had been split in two and Lincoln knew he had a general who knew how to win

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References

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