

Vicksburg Campaign
Parts 7, Siege Operations, and Part 8, Port Hudson
May 18 – July 9, 1863

Little Round Table, April 22 and June 24, 2021

Facilitator Notes

This is a different format than my usual Nooks 'n Crannies postings. This is a set of notes I pulled together to help me facilitate two segments of the Little Round Table's deep dive into the Vicksburg Campaign. There were eight segments in all (plus a ninth segment added on June 24, 2021). I did a lot of research for these two segments, mostly to educate myself on campaigns about which I knew precious little. I didn't want to lose it in my computer files after the segments were over, so I decided to add it to Nooks 'n Crannies "as is". It is an outline of sorts. The headers serve as facilitation guideposts with a lot of supporting detail if needed during discussions. (The 90-minute LRT sessions typically are designed for group discussions, not presentations as such.) There is a companion PowerPoint file of slides, each referenced in this outline. Together they comprise a detailed description of the two sieges, Vicksburg and Port Hudson, along with a healthy bibliography. I hope this approach works for you. If for any reason it does not, please don't hesitate to let me know. Thanks. –Emil, June 29, 2021

The Siege of Vicksburg

The Run-Up –

April 1863 opened with the Mississippi River effectively useless to both sides. The Confederacy's river forts blocked Union traffic downriver to New Orleans, while Confederate traffic from the Trans-Mississippi had been halted by Union vessels that had run the batteries at Port Hudson (March 14) and Vicksburg (April 16). This stalemate would end only when the Union ships were cleared from the river, which was beyond the capacity of the South, or the Confederate batteries were taken out by the Union army.

- The final phase of the latter process was underway by the end of the month.

[\[Perello, 153\]](#)

The Mississippi River flowed south through the Confederacy like a backbone. Indeed, economically, it was. The transportation network provided by the Mississippi River basin resembles a nervous system.

- Even at the outset of the war, Winfield Scott, the Union's first General-in-Chief, recognized the importance of securing the Mississippi— and New Orleans— for the North.
- President Abraham Lincoln agreed. Not only would Northern control of the river divide the Confederacy, it would clear shipment of produce by disgruntled Union midwestern farmers.
- Yet neither Scott, nor his successor George B. McClellan, made much headway toward claiming the waterway during the first year of the war.

Confederate leaders understood the river's importance as well.

- At the beginning of the war the primary concern of the Confederate government consisted of repelling Union invasions until the aggressors exhausted themselves.
- A dual objective was to retain territory — if the Confederacy could not hold itself together, it would fall.

The Mississippi River was one of four natural invasion routes into the Confederacy.

- The other three being—
 - the Tennessee River from its conjunction with the Ohio River south into northern Alabama,
 - the Tennessee corridor running south from Nashville into Georgia, and
 - the Confederacy's eastern seaboard from the Potomac River to Charleston, South Carolina.

[Chart: Map 19]

- Grant's Central Mississippi Advance (November 14 – December 21, 1862)
- Chickasaw Bayou (December 27-29)
- Lake Providence Expedition (February 3 – March 29, 1863)
- Yazoo Pass Expedition (February 3 – April 10)
- Steele's Bayou Expedition (March 14 – 17)
- River Crossing at Bruinsburg (April 29-30)

[Chart: Map 21a]

Battle of Champion Hill (May 16, 1863)

- Close run, but clear Union victory.
 - The Union lost some 2,450 killed, wounded, and captured; the Confederates 3,840.
- Effectively isolated Vicksburg (outer defenses of which were some 9 miles due west).
 - Split Pemberton from Johnston.
- Pemberton's options:
 - breakout in effort to link with Johnston (which would run counter to Davis's orders to hold Vicksburg), or
 - withdraw into defensive perimeter around Vicksburg (which would run counter to Johnston's orders to link up).
- Pemberton did the latter, which led the next day to the Battle of Big Black River Bridge along the way.

The Big Black River Bridge (May 17, 1863)

Retreating west toward Vicksburg, the Confederates reached the Big Black River railroad bridge the night of May 16, 1863.

- A delaying action to slow the Union force and buy time, not a determined defense.
- The Union lost 276 men; the Confederates some 1,750 (mostly captured), a loss that the Confederates could ill-afford.
- Pemberton's army pulled back into the city, and Grant came across the Big Black River in force.
- $3,840 + 1,750 = 5,590$, the equivalent of a full brigade.
- Vicksburg's outer defenses were some 6 miles due west.

As he rode westward with his demoralized and broken force, Pemberton may well have reflected on the rapidity with which disaster had overtaken him.

- For three months he had watched as Grant flailed about in the floodplain on various unsuccessful bayou expeditions.
- Then, on April 30, Grant was ashore on the east bank in force.
- Seventeen days and five battles later, Grant was chasing him into the fortifications of Vicksburg.
- Grant had conquered space and time, and hostile terrain and climate without adequate cavalry or adequate maps.
- Most of Grant's men had made the march on five days rations, and none had tents.
- Lincoln was effusive, "Whether General Grant shall or shall not consummate the capture of Vicksburg, his campaign from the beginning of this month ... is one of the most brilliant in the world."
- Years later, General Stephen Dooley, Grant's opponent at Champion Hill, declared it "bold and masterly [with] but few equals in this or any other war."

During the retreat from the Big Black, Pemberton remarked to one of his staff officers, "Just thirty years ago I began my military career by receiving my appointment to a cadetship at the U.S. Military Academy; and today—the same date—that career is ended in disaster and disgrace."

- One civilian who witnessed the arrival of Pemberton's army in Vicksburg that afternoon wrote, "I shall never forget that woeful sight of a beaten, demoralized army that came rushing back—humanity in the last throes of endurance. Wan, hollow-eyed, ragged, footsore, bloody—the men limped along, unarmed but followed by siege-guns, ambulances, gun-carriages, and wagons in aimless confusion."
 - Reminds me of that scene in "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" where Tuco finally catches up with Blondie.
- Another eyewitness observed, "Many of the troops declared their willingness to desert rather than serve under [Pemberton] again."

On May 18, Pemberton received an order from Johnston: "If Haynes Bluff is untenable, Vicksburg is of no value and cannot be held. If, therefore, you are invested in Vicksburg, you must ultimately surrender ... [I]f it is not too late, evacuate Vicksburg ... and march to the northeast."

- After receiving the universal support of his commanders, Pemberton told Johnston he would hold the city “as long as possible, with the firm hope that the government may yet be able to assist me in keeping this obstruction to the enemy’s free navigation of the Mississippi River. I still conceive it to be the most important point in the Confederacy.”
- Johnston, in return, advised Pemberton to hold out while he [Johnston] attempted to gather a relief force.
 - Indeed, he did labor to gather a force, but considering Bragg’s situation at Chickamauga and Lee’s situation in Virginia, reinforcements would not be easily obtained.
 - When he finally began to advance to relieve the fortress, only 31,000 troops were present for duty although he reportedly had 55,000 on paper.

In the meantime—

- Pemberton had four divisions together comprising some 30,000 men within his fortifications.
- Grant had three corps totaling some 50,000 men, with more on the way.

The Union army was in a jubilant mood. Since the landing at Bruinsburg, Grant’s troops had enjoyed one success after another. The Confederates manning the Vicksburg defenses had run from the battlefield on two consecutive days (May 16 and 17). One more push, it seemed, and Vicksburg would fall.

And this is where we’ll pick up the action this evening.

The Battlefield

[Chart: Map 22]

The city of Vicksburg is situated at the top of a line of bluffs that run along the east side of the Mississippi River.

- This high ground extended eastward from the river for some distance, but it was uneven and difficult to traverse because erosion had cut numerous deep ravines into the surface, with very steep sides, separated by narrow ridges.
- We had talked about this in detail back when we talked about Grant coming across the Mississippi at Bruinsburg and subsequent operations.

The main roads running into Vicksburg from the east ran along the crests of these ridges.

- The ridge followed by the Jackson Road, for example, ran out from the northeast corner of Vicksburg for a distance of about 2 miles, and it then joined another ridge, which ran off to the west of south on an irregular line for several miles from the Jackson Rd.
- The crest of this ridge was unbroken and nearly level for its entire length.

Between these two ridges, the country was broken up by numerous ravines through which flowed small streams that emptied into **Stout's Bayou**, which flowed southward around the line of the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley Railroad to empty into the Mississippi River south of Vicksburg.

- The Warrenton Road ran into Vicksburg along a ridge between the bayou and the Mississippi.

The Confederate line began on the right of the Warrenton Road about three miles south of Vicksburg, crossed Stout's Bayou, and then ran to the northeast without interruption along the ridge to the Jackson Road. From there, it continued northward to a deep ravine, filled with dense growth of canes and vines called **Glass Bayou**.

The line crossed the bayou and ran on along a ridge to the Graveyard Road, where it turned to the west and ran along another ridge for about two miles, ending on the Mississippi River at Fort Hill.

At the commanding points and salients on this line, the Confederates had constructed earthworks for artillery on an average of 200 yards apart. Between these works there were lines of entrenchments that ran unbroken for about eight miles, except at Glass Bayou and Stout's Bayou.

The Opposing Forces

[See OBs – The Confederate OB has unit strengths down to division level; the Union OB does not reflect any unit strengths as I have been unable to find any.]

Grant's Army of the Tennessee, some 49,000 strong at this point, had closed on Vicksburg's outer defenses east of the city and around to the north to the Yazoo River.

- Three corps: XV (Sherman), XVII (McPherson), and XIII (McClelland).
- The Union army at Vicksburg had some 220 cannons, organized into 89 separate batteries.
 - They had three objectives during the siege.
 - Keep the Confederate artillery suppressed.
 - Smash openings in the enemy earthworks.
 - Provide fire support for the men digging the approach trenches.
 - The Union artillery fulfilled all three of these missions by concentrating their cannon and laying down a withering amount of fire that quickly smashed any Confederate gun foolish enough to challenge them.

[Chart: Map 22 Supplement]

Pemberton's Army of Vicksburg had some 29,500 men (estimates vary), but at this point as many as 5,200 were not combat effective *[Fullerton, pg 516, note 147]*. As the siege went on, the number of ineffectives would grow.

- Pemberton was defending 360°.

- Two of Pemberton's four divisions opposing Grant, those of Generals Martin Luther Smith and John H. Forney, had not suffered the demoralizing defeats of the previous weeks. Pemberton had kept these 8,000 men in or near Vicksburg.
- Stockpiles of weapons and supplies were on hand to replace those lost on campaign.
- The fortifications themselves inspired confidence—ten major strongpoints and 102 artillery pieces covering all likely avenues of approach.
- Smith's division manned the northern face of the works on the Confederate left and Forney's occupied the center, where Union attack was most likely.
- Stevenson's battered division held the positions on the right where a Union attack was least likely to fall.
- Bowen's division constituted the reserve.
- 1,500 troops manned the city's two-mile-long river defenses, leaving Pemberton with something less than 23,000 men (after accounting for noncombat effectives) to deal with Grant.
- Pemberton employed 172 cannons: 103 fieldpieces, and 69 heavy guns.
 - Of this number, 37 of the heavy guns, along with 13 of the fieldpieces, served in the river batteries. The rest were employed in the landward defenses, spread throughout the eight miles of siege lines and averaging one gun every 250 yards.
- Confederate artillery emplaced in the landward defenses had two main missions during the siege.
 - The first was to provide defensive firepower to help break up any Union assault against the Confederate line. They were used in this role to good effect during the May 19 and 22 assaults.
 - The second mission was to hamper the work of the Union soldiers digging approaches toward their fortifications.
 - In this role they were generally *not* very effective. The guns in the Vicksburg defenses were so dispersed that the Confederates were unable to achieve artillery dominance at any point on the battlefield.
 - The Southern cannoners were also hampered by General Pemberton's orders to conserve ammunition for use against Union assaults on the earthworks, and by a shortage of friction primers needed to fire the guns.
 - The restrictions left the Southern artillerymen at a great disadvantage against their Union counterparts, who did mass their guns to great effect, inflicting numerous casualties with the shot and shell they pumped into the enemy line on a near-constant basis during the siege.
- To feed this army, cattle, sheep, and hogs on farms in the vicinity of Vicksburg had been seized and driven within the lines. Harvested corn was also expropriated.
 - Despite the efforts of the Department's and Pemberton's own commissaries, it was only enough, though, to last about 30 days. [[*Civil War Supply and Strategy: Feeding Men and Moving Armies*, Earl J. Hess; Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2020](#)]

Johnston's Relief Army was forming to the east, in and around Canton and Jackson.

- From the outset of the campaign, Johnston's primary goal was to combine forces against the invader.
- Johnston received substantial numbers of troops during this period, eventually bringing his force to almost 36,000 (including Loring's Division that became separated from Pemberton during the retreat from Champion Hill and made its way to Jackson).
 - From South Carolina (three brigades),
 - Port Hudson (two brigades), and
 - Tennessee (five infantry and three cavalry brigades).
- Johnston lacked transportation and supplies to move far beyond the Great Northern railroad between Jackson and Grenada.

Grant's greatest error was his failure to account for the psychological impact of the Confederate soldiers fighting behind prepared fortifications.

- "[Grant] failed to realize that a mob of men entering an entrenched line is automatically reorganized by the actual trench they occupy," wrote J. F. C. Fuller.
 - Behind the high walls of an earthen fort, an army on the run is "no longer a mob." With no chance to maneuver, the tactical options ordinarily open to commanders are radically reduced. Generalship, the supreme attribute of the Grant-led army, was neutralized.
 - As Fuller noted: "All of the men [in the fortifications] have to do is to turn about and open fire on the advancing attacker."
 - Actually, it was a mixed bag. The first troops making it back to the Vicksburg fortifications were badly disorganized. Pemberton looked upon them as little more than an armed mob. Those behind them were in increasingly better order. [\[Ninety-Eight Days, Grabau, 344-345\]](#)
- Grant saw things differently. He was in hot pursuit of a badly weakened army he had crushed at Champion Hill, and he was eager to avoid a long siege by rolling over Pemberton before Johnston was heavily reinforced and ready to hit him from the rear.

Vicksburg's land defenses were among the most formidable Grant would face in the war.

- Colonel William E. Strong, McPherson's staff officer, described them. "A long line of high, rugged, irregular bluffs, clearly cut against the sky, crowned with canon which appeared ominously from embracers to the right and left as far as the eye could see ... rifle pits, surmounted with head logs, ran along the bluffs, connecting fort with fort, filled with veteran infantry." In front of the elevated defenses and in the steep-sided ravines that led up to them were nearly impassable abatis, further strengthened in the hours before the Union assault with telegraph wire placed low to the ground to obstruct the attacking troops. Most of these ravines were thick with cane, willow, and rugged underbrush. [\[Miller, 420\]](#)

Grant's Army of the Tennessee had with it no siege train.

- Its operations during this campaign would have precluded the carrying of such materiel in the equipment of the army even had it been available.

May 18: Confederates strengthen their land defenses facing east as Grant closes in.

Pemberton's defensive line formed an 8-mile-long semicircle that enclosed the city, with both ends anchored on river bluffs north and south of town.

- Everywhere along the line the rebels held the high ground.
 - The long line of earthen fortifications erected on that side of the city in September 1862 had been heavily eroded by the elements.
 - Rebel infantry worked that night (May 18) and into the next morning to repair them, hacking away at the weather-beaten parapets, using bayonets as picks and crude wooden shovels. The men worked with energy but little hope.
- Nine widely spaced earthen forts had thick walls with embrasures for artillery, and all but one was fronted by a 7-foot-deep ditch, or moat, to impede assault forces seeking to surmount the outer walls of the bastions.

[Chart: What is a redoubt, redan, and lunette?]

- Some of the forts were redan – triangular shaped fortifications with their apexes facing the enemy.
- Others were lunettes – two-sided works, pointy or crescent shaped, with an open back; and one of them, the Great Redoubt, was an enclosed square.
- The parapets or protective walls of most of the forts were 10 feet high and 15 feet thick.
- The rifle pits connecting the forts typically were 5 feet deep, with fire steps for sharpshooters.
- Some 122 artillery pieces were positioned at prominent points along a ridge facing the enemy.
- The evening of May 17, stately country homes on the eastern flanks of the city were burned to the ground to provide unimpeded avenues of fire, while soldiers patched up the land defenses.

[Chart: Map Union Supply Routes – also 21a Supplement]

Grant's first priority was to occupy the heights at Snyder's Bluff in order to reopen a river borne line of supply. He did this with Sherman's XV Corps advancing on the northerly route.

- Grant and Sherman rode together in person to stand on the high ground that Sherman had tried and failed to capture the previous December. He had finally reached the bluffs overlooking Chickasaw Bayou, although it required a five-month detour by way of Bruinsburg and Jackson to get there.
 - As Grant later remembered the moment, Sherman "turned to me, saying that up to this minute he had felt no positive assurance of success..." but that this was "the end of one of the greatest campaigns in history ... Vicksburg was not yet captured, and there was no telling what might happen before it was taken; but whether captured or not, this was a complete and successful campaign."

- Hayne's Bluff (north of Snyder's Bluff) was secured by 4th Iowa Cav.

But, of course, it was not over. With Snyder's Bluff in Union hands, and his supply situation assured, Grant turned his attention to taking Vicksburg.

- McPherson's XVII Corps reached the Union line outside Vicksburg on May 18 via the southerly route, soon followed by McClernand's XIII Corps.
- By midnight, Grant had all three corps in place on two roads and a rail line leading into Vicksburg from the north and east.

[Chart: Map 22a]

- The city was invested on three sides. Grant's left flank was open.
- "The city must fall in a day or two," wrote Admiral Porter to Grant from his dockage at Young's Point.
- The next morning, Grant determined to strike. "The enemy had been much demoralized by his defeats at Champion's Hill and the Big Black, and I believe he would not make much effort to hold Vicksburg." It was one of his worst calculations of the war.

Storming Vicksburg (May 19-22) – Going for the Knockout

[Chart: Blair's Assaults, May 19]

May 19: Hoping for a repeat of the Confederate collapse on the Big Black River, Grant launches a hasty attack against Vicksburg, with Blair's division of Sherman's XV Corps at Stockade Redan (NE corner of the defensive perimeter) constituting the main effort. The attack is handily repulsed.

- A *hasty attack* is an attack in which preparation time is traded for speed in order to exploit an opportunity.
 - In this case: Anxious for a quick victory, Grant made a hasty reconnaissance of the Vicksburg defenses and ordered an assault. Of his three corps, however, only one was in proper position to make the attack — Sherman's corps along the Graveyard Road, northeast of Vicksburg.
 - "Sometime before daylight on the morning of the 19th we were quietly aroused and instructed to prepare our breakfast without noise or unnecessary fire or light," wrote Sergeant J. J. Kellogg of the 113th Illinois infantry [Colonel Giles A. Smith's 1st Brigade]. "I hadn't had a good view of the Vicksburg fortifications before today, and now in the first light of the morning, while the men were eating and making preparations for the charge, I crept cautiously out on the crest of the hill and ... contemplated the defenses against which we had to charge." What Kellogg saw convinced him he would not live another day. When he returned to the company, he saw men preparing for their deaths — "entrusting their valuables with hasty instructions" to sick and wounded men

who would stay behind. Soldiers and other units up and down the Union lines did the same. "The men are not eager to charge." [\[Miller, 419-20\]](#)

- Following three rapid artillery salvos (the signal to advance) and with lines neatly dressed and battle flags blowing in the breeze above them, Blair's three brigades advanced at 2:00pm across rugged terrain, through abatis (obstructions of felled trees) laid out by the Confederates, toward Stockade Redan.
- Fresh Southern troops (M. L. Smith's division) defended the redan, and Blair's attack was unsuccessful.
 - Although the men of the 1st Battalion (commanded by Captain Edward Washington, grandnephew of George Washington), 13th US Infantry (once commanded by Sherman), planted their colors on the exterior slope of Stockade Redan, the attack was repulsed.
 - 13th US Infantry was part of Smith's 1st Bde/Blair's Division
 - Captain Washington was mortally wounded in crossfire of canister and shell, and 17 of his color bearers were cut down.
 - 43% of the battalion became casualties.
 - The 13th US Infantry, still in existence today, proudly uses the motto "First at Vicksburg."
- Sherman's corps lost 134 killed, 571 wounded, and 8 missing in the assault of May 19.
- McPherson and McClernand, whose corps were still largely moving up into position, suffered a combined total of 23 killed and 206 wounded.
 - Confederate losses unknown but presumed light.

His initial attempt to take Vicksburg having ended in bloody repulses, Grant knew he could settle into a siege and starve Confederates into submission, but he also faced a possible threat in his rear from Gen. Joseph E. Johnston.

May 20: Grant met with his corps commanders to plan a second attack, scheduled for May 22.

- After so much marching and fighting, Union troops were weary and hungry, and a few days rest was granted the men, that they may attend to some washing and cleaning up. [\[Crummer\]](#)

[Chart: 13-inch Mortar]

- To support his assault, Grant invited Porter to bombard the town with his mortars.
 - The day before, Vicksburg citizens had gathered on the bluffs facing the river and watched in silence as Federal tugs rounded the horseshoe bend above the city, pulling six small craft.
 - The tugs were headed straight for DeSoto Point, directly across from Vicksburg, where sailors lashed the scows to the shore.
 - Each floating platform carried a massive 13-inch siege mortar weighing over 17,000 pounds.

May 22: Grant still thought his army could successfully storm the Vicksburg defenses.

- Johnston was reinforcing at Canton presumably to attack Grant in the rear.
- If Grant could take Vicksburg now, Johnston's force could then be disposed of before it could be further reinforced; then Grant could aid Banks in taking port Hudson.
 - The temper of his men encouraged an assault; a dull dreary siege in the hot summer months was not enticing.
 - Furthermore, an investment would require many more troops than Grant now had, and while it was in progress, his long supply line down the Mississippi might be interdicted.
 - Reinforcements required elsewhere would have to be diverted to Vicksburg as long as this fortress held out.

[Chart: Assaults on Vicksburg, May 22]

- He ordered another attack along the entire line (all three corps), to commence *precisely* at 10:00am on May 22.
 - A prolonged artillery barrage, some two hours, would kick off the assault. Commanders were to synchronize their watches (a first in military history) and launch a simultaneous attack.
 - Grant asked Porter to have his gunboats shell the Confederate entrenchments vehemently and hurl mortar balls into the city the night before the attack to annoy the enemy (what we would call today harassment and interdiction (H&I) fire).
- According to J.F.C. Fuller, Grant committed another error by ordering a simultaneous assault all along the line rather than overwhelming key tactical points by fire, assaulting in between them, and then turning them by flank attacks.
- As described by Brig. General S. D. Lee, "Suddenly ... as if by magic, every gun and rifle stopped firing The silence was almost appalling, at the sudden cessation of the firing of so many field guns (about 180), and the crackling of so many thousands of sharpshooters' rifles. But the silence was only for a short time. Suddenly, there seemed to spring almost from the bowels of the earth, dense masses of Federal troops, in numerous columns of attack, and with the loud cheers and huzzahs, they rushed forward at a run with bayonets fixed, not firing a shot, headed for every salient advanced position along the Confederate lines. ... As they came within easy range (almost as soon as they started) the Confederate troops, some 9,938 men along the 3½ miles of assault, deliberately rose and stood in their trenches, pouring volley after volley into the advancing enemy; at the same time the troops in reserve advanced to the rear of the trenches, and fired over the heads of those in the trenches. Every field gun and howitzer belched forth continuously and incessantly double-shotted discharges of grape and canister. ..." [Fuller, "Grant", pg. 155]
- Some, such as Adam Badeau,* have supported the general assault, saying that the only possible chance of breaking through such defenses and defenders was amassing the troops so that the weight of the columns should be absolutely irresistible.

* An American author, Union Army officer, and diplomat. He is most famous for his service on Grant's staff during the war (but not during the Vicksburg campaign) and his subsequent three-volume biography of Grant. Badeau enjoyed a successful career as a writer, and assisted Grant with the research, fact checking, and editing when Grant authored his memoirs.

[Chart: Sherman's Assaults, Morning of May 22]

- In the north, Sherman ordered his men to attack straight down the Graveyard Road to avoid the difficult terrain and Southern obstructions.
 - Additionally, 150 volunteers, the Forlorn Hope, with rifles slung and carrying wooden planks to bridge the ditch in front of the redan and ladders to climb the wall, went ahead of the Federal infantry.
 - A *forlorn hope* is a band of soldiers, typically led by a junior officer with hopes of personal advancement should he survive, chosen to take the vanguard in a critical attack where the risk of casualties is high. Such a band is also known as the *enfants perdus* (French for 'lost children').
 - One of Grant's staff officers offered two months leave to every unmarried man volunteering.

[The description below is taken from "The Forlorn Hope at Vicksburg," Chris Mackowski, *Emerging Civil War*, December 18, 2020, [The Forlorn Hope at Vicksburg | Emerging Civil War.](#)]

- Sherman felt particularly battered after the May 19 assaults. His men had advanced across more than 150 yards of open ground, navigating a troublesome abatis-filled ravine, picking through felled trees, and dealing with several fences—all while heading straight at a massive redan that protected one of the main roads into the city.
- **Stockade Redan**, as it was called, had a seventeen-foot-tall exterior wall fronted by a six-foot-tall ditch. The crest of the wall was sixteen feet wide, and behind it, on firing platforms, stood Mississippi and Missouri troops from Brig. Gen. Louis Hébert and Brig. Gen. Francis Cockrell's brigades. The 36th Mississippi manned the wall while elements of three Missouri regiments stood inside the redan as reinforcements and to protect its flanks.
- Graveyard Road, one of the main avenues in Vicksburg, ran along the ditch on the redan's front face. The redan had been built specifically to protect the road.
- For the May 22 attack, Sherman changed his route of approach. Rather than cross the open ground, he would advance down the Graveyard Road itself—a route that would take him not at the wide-open front of the redan but toward a sharp angle in its construction.
 - The redan was shaped like a wide "V," and Graveyard Road ran straight at the exterior tip of the "V" before veering toward the right and running parallel to the redan's formidable exterior wall.
 - Because Confederates occupied the interior of this "V," they would not be able to bring as much firepower to bear on any force advancing directly down the road.

- Sherman chose Blair's division to spearhead his assault.
 - He stacked his brigades three deep, which would be followed by the brigades of Tuttle's division stacked similarly.
 - With Graveyard Road as their axis of advance, the massive column would charge Confederate defenses.
- In the vanguard, Blair assembled the *Forlorn Hope* of 150 volunteers—all single men—who would advance not with rifles but with lumber.
 - The first fifty would carry heavy timbers to be placed across the ditch, while the second fifty would carry planking to lay across timbers.
 - Thus, instant bridges would be made.
 - The third fifty would carry ladders so the infantry could more easily scale the redan's exterior wall.
 - All expected a high casualty rate.
- Preparations went smoothly. "All our field batteries were put in position and were covered by good epaulements (a barricade of earth like a rough parapet used mainly as cover from flanking fire); the troops were brought forward, in easy support, concealed by the shape of the ground," Sherman wrote.
 - He opened the morning with a bombardment to soften the Confederate line.
 - At 10:00, the Federal infantry started forward.
 - Sherman, watching from 200 yards away, noted the group of grim volunteers in the lead.
 - "A small party, that might be called a forlorn hope, provided with plank to cross the ditch, advanced at a run, up to the very ditch," he wrote, "the lines of infantry sprang from cover, and advanced rapidly in line of battle."
- The volunteers initially benefitted from the cover of the terrain, but at last, Graveyard Road rose from a swale, cut through a low ridge, and arched across 150 yards of open ground directly at the "V" of the redan.
 - The road cut through offered protection as the men double-timed through. Beyond, they spilled out into the open and began a mad sprint forward with their bridging materials.
- At first, "The rebel line, concealed by the parapet, showed no sign of unusual activity," Sherman recounted, "but as our troops came in fair view, the enemy rose behind their parapet and poured a furious fire upon our lines."
 - Many of the volunteers fell. Others dropped their loads and fled. Some made it all the way to the ditch, where they hunkered against the embankment in an effort to stay beneath the depressed barrels of the Confederate muskets.
- Meanwhile, the lead regiment of Blair's lead brigade, the 30th Ohio, rushed forward on the heels of the storming party.
 - They advanced said Blair, "with equal impetuosity and gallantry," but then trouble began. Casualties from the storming party littered the road, and as

casualties from the 30th Ohio fell alongside them, the road became littered with obstacles.

- As a result, the next regiment, the 37th Ohio, “faltered and gave way under fire of the enemy.” The column dispersed and took to ground. “The men lay down in the road and behind every inequality of ground which afforded them shelter,” Blair wrote, “and every effort . . . to rally them and urge them forward proved of no avail. . . . They refused to move, and remained in the road, blocking the way.”
- The 47th Ohio and 4th West Virginia, finding their advance blocked by the Buckeyes, abandoned the road and ascended a small rise on their left. There, they laid down covering fire so the men trapped in the road could withdraw.
- The volunteers from the Forlorn Hope found themselves trapped in the worst position of all, pinned between the redan and the fire coming from Ewing’s brigade.
 - One Federal even managed to climb to the top of the redan and plant his flag, which Confederates tried—unsuccessfully—to capture several times.
- Blair tried improvising by moving men around the bottleneck, but the new approach proved just as exposed.
 - Sherman later conceded the futility of the operation. “[F]or about two hours, we had a severe and bloody battle, but at every point we were repulsed,” he wrote. According to historians Leonard Fullenkamp, Stephen Bowman, and Jay Luvaas, “Less than 1,000 of Sherman’s 15,000 men had been committed to the attack, since there was no good avenue to push the remainder into the battle.”
- Sherman’s men did take part in another attack late in the day, meant as a diversion while McClellan tried to exploit a supposed opportunity.
 - Even with a brigade (Ransom’s brigade) of reinforcements from McPherson’s corps to extra weight, Sherman’s men made minimal gains.
 - Survivors had to wait until nightfall before they could withdraw to safety.
- Sherman’s account gave the action its name, “a forlorn hope,” although he did not use capital letters in describing it. Those would come later as the bravery of the men became enshrined in Vicksburg’s larger story over time.
 - Of the 150 men who rushed forward as the Forlorn Hope, 19 were killed and 34 were wounded.
 - Of the survivors, 78 later received the Medal of Honor for their heroism, cited specifically for “Gallantry in the charge of the ‘volunteer storming party.’”
- Sherman’s attack had ground to halt after about only 20 minutes. It accomplished nothing.

[Chart: McPherson’s Assaults, Morning of May 22]

- In the center, McPherson launched Logan’s partial division and they, too, were repulsed.
 - An Irish unit from Missouri, carrying scaling ladders, made it to the walls of the Great Redoubt, only to discover their ladders were too short.
 - One of the defenders in the Great Redoubt was Captain David Todd, brother-in-law to President Lincoln.

[Chart: McClelland's Assaults, Morning of May 22]

- In the south, McClelland's main objective was the 2nd Texas Lunette and the Railroad Redoubt.
 - The redoubt, surrounded by a ditch 10 feet deep and walls 20 feet high, offered inflating fire for rifles and artillery.
 - After bloody hand to hand fighting, Federals breached the redoubt, capturing a handful of prisoners.
 - The victory, however, was the only Confederate position carried that day.

[Chart: Shirley House]

- As to "one of [Grant's] worst calculations of the war, consider this account by Wilber Fisk Crummer, 1st Sgt of Company A, 45th Illinois Infantry: [[45th Illinois Infantry Regiment – Wikipedia](#)]

Shall we ever forget that desperate charge? No, and I believe had General Grant known at the time how strongly the enemy were entrenched and how valiantly they would fight, he would never have ordered that charge. He thought, no doubt, as we soldiers believed, that having been so successful in meeting the enemy recently, we could whip any armed force that opposed us.

May 22, the order was given to commence the attack at 10:00 AM. At that hour the battle opened; every piece of artillery was brought to bear on the works, sharpshooters at the same time began their paid, nothing could be heard but the continual shrieking of shells, the booming of cannon, and the sharp whiz the Minié ball.

At the time the assault was attempted our bivouac was in a ravine just east of the "White House" or "Shirley House". Running in front of the house was the main Jackson wagon line feeding into the city. For about 500 yards the road had been cut down in the ridge to a depth of a man's head, then the ridge sloped a little and the road opened out in plain view of the forts of the enemy not 200 yards distant. We marched in columns of four through this cut and the road until we reached the point where we would be exposed to the enemy's guns, then we were to deploy to the left along the slope of the hill, until the entire regiment was out of the road, when the word of the commanding officer – "By the right flank, charge" – we were to go over the enemy's works. As we came out of that road, Major Cowan gave the command "double quick," and we started across the open space. Major Cowan, commanding the regiment, fell at the first volley from the enemy, having only taken a step or two.

The enemy was watching, and the instant we appeared in sight, they opened into us an awful volley of shot and shell. There was no one to give the command to halt, or right face and charge; the Major was killed and the ranking Captain didn't know it.

We went as far in that hail of death as we thought would be sufficient for the regiment to form in line of battle, and then we dropped flat on the ground. Being First Sergeant of Company A of my regiment, I was at the head of the regiment with Major

Cowan when he started across at deadly piece of open ground, the Major falling by my side, but I kept right on at the head of the regiment until space enough was given the regiment to form in line under the brow of the hill. The ground sloped downhill from the enemy's parapet, and by flattening oneself about as flat as a hard tack, he was comparatively safe from the musketry fire of the enemy. The regiment came through, but the dead and wounded lay thick over that stretch of 200 yards.

The order to charge the works was, after a short time, given by the ranking Captain, and we started up the hill, to be met by a sweeping volley of musketry at short range, which mowed the men down in bunches. We could not return the fire, for the enemy or safe behind their breastworks. Some of our men reached the top of the parapet but fell as fast as they climbed up. No troops could face such a destructive fire from a protected enemy. Presently the order is given to fall back, and we retire under the brow of the Hill and remain there until after dark, when we took our usual place in the rear of the "[Shirley] House."

The charge of my regiment is but a picture of all other regiments that took part on that day. The assault was no more successful at other points of the line and the Union army suffered great loss. The works were strongly constructed and well arranged to sweep the approaches in every direction; their position was too strong, both naturally and artificially, to be taken by storm. Wherever the assault was attempted, the hillsides were covered with the slain and wounded, many of them lying in the hot sun during the day crying for water, which could not be taken to them.

Three thousand Union soldiers were killed or wounded in this disastrous charge; more men in this one charge were lost than were lost during the late Spanish war [this account was published in 1915]. The army was now made sadly true sure that over ground so rough and with such strong forts and entrenchments it could not hope to carry Vicksburg by storm. It clearly proved the great advantage an army has in having breastworks and entrenchments to cope with the enemy.

General Grant had had such wonderful success so far that he really thought his troops could walk up to and inside those fortifications. But the fact has been demonstrated that the loss of precious lives would be too great, and preparations for a siege were begun and the pick and shovel were brought into requisition.

Saps and rifle trenches were constructed and in these our sharpshooters were continually on the lookout for the hidden enemy. Before we had constructed our rifle pits so as to make them comparatively safe, our boys with their bayonets and a tin plate, dug little holes in the ground and on top of the earth placed a few fence rails. Between these rails our men could pick off the sharpshooters of the enemy and many a dual was had here between the pickets of the two armies.

** The 45th Regiment Illinois Volunteer Infantry, the "Washburn Lead [led] Mine Regiment", was organized at Galena, Illinois. It participated in many of the leading campaigns in the Western Theater.*

It was mustered into Federal service on December 25, 1861, taking its name from Elihu B. Washburne who represented northwestern Illinois in the US House of Representatives and from the fact that mining lead was a well-established industry in northwestern Illinois.

One member of the regiment, Wilbur Fisk Crummer, wrote a book about experiences titled [With Grant at Donelson, Shiloh and Vicksburg](#). Crummer's service ended in July 1863 when he was wounded, and the book does not cover what happened to the 45th after that time.

In the summer of 1863, the 45th was stationed near the Shirley house at Vicksburg (Crummer was wounded by Confederate sharpshooter while writing out a report in the Shirley house). When Union forces captured Vicksburg, the regiment was given the advance of the Union army for meritorious service and had the honor of being the first Federal regiment to march into Vicksburg, where the regiment's national flag was raised at the Vicksburg courthouse.

The regiment participated in all the battles of the Vicksburg campaign, forming a part of Logan's division. It took part in three charges against the Confederate works in May and June, the loss of to the regiment in the last assault being 83 officers and men killed and wounded. The regiment was detailed for Provost guard duty in Vicksburg on July 4, and continued to do such duty until October 14, when it was relieved to take part in the Canton raid...

[Battle Unit Details – The Civil War \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)

By 11:30 AM, Grant was convinced that the assault had failed.

- But now he began to receive optimistic messages from McClernand. The last of these arrived about 1:00 PM and indicated that two forts were in Union hands (actually, only one fort had been occupied temporarily). Grant, therefore, decided to continue the attack, ordering Sherman and McPherson to renew their assault and instructing McPherson to reinforce McClernand with one division. By dark it was obvious that he had not properly assessed the situation, for the federals were repulsed everywhere.
- Following this repulse of his troops on May 22, Grant did not order any additional frontal assaults.
- The attack cost Grant 502 killed, 2,550 wounded, and 147 missing.
 - Half of these he attributed to the prolongation of the battle (i.e., McClernand's fault).
 - Confederate losses are unknown but believed to be about 500.

Grant chose to undertake a siege.

The Siege

What is a siege? No definition in the DOD Glossary.

- A military operation in which enemy forces surround a town or building, cutting off essential supplies, with the aim of compelling the surrender of those inside.
 - Countless historical examples—
 - Masada (73-74 AD)
 - Massilia (413)
 - Acre (1103)

- Constantinople (1453)
 - Malta (1565)
 - The Alamo (1836)
 - Petersburg (1864-65)
 - Port Arthur (1904-05)
 - Przemyśl (1914-15) [[SHEH-mih-shuhl](#)]
 - Leningrad (1941-44)
 - Stalingrad (1942-43)
 - Bastogne (1944)
 - Sarajevo (1992-96)
 - Gibraltar – probably the most besieged city in history: 14 times through 1783)
- [\[List of sieges – Wikipedia\]](#)
- Characteristics of sieges—
 - Isolate the enemy.
 - Attrition
 - No resupply
 - No reinforcements
 - No coordination with relief forces or with chain of command
 - Force capitulation via resource shortages.
 - Food
 - Munitions
 - Medical supplies
 - Reinforcements
 - How does it differ from a blockade? Size of target.
 - **Sieges are not static.** While not characterized by maneuver, they are dynamic, hard fought battles nonetheless, as we shall see with this one.

To reduce the works by regular siege operations, Grant had to do two things—

- occupy the gap that then existed between the left of McClernand's 13th Corps and the Mississippi River near Warrenton,
- and provide suitable protection for the rear of his investment line against the Confederate forces that were forming under Johnston at Canton and Jackson.

Grant's army was too small to complete the investment and at the same time protect his rear without reinforcements, and the necessary troops were immediately ordered forward from Grant's own Department of the Tennessee and from the Departments of the Missouri and the Ohio.

[A detailed order of arrival and postings for reinforcing units is provided at Welcher, 892-894.]

On the Confederate side, the need for coordination was crucial, but it was taking considerable time to get messages from Pemberton to Johnston and back again.

- Pemberton's message of May 19, for example, in which he informed Johnston of the first assault and requested additional musket caps, included "An army will be necessary to relieve Vicksburg, and that quickly. Will it not be sent?"
- At the time, Johnston was falling back on Canton, approximately 15 miles northeast of Jackson. Pemberton's message was received and responded to by Johnston five days later, on May 24.
 - In his response, Johnston instructed Loring to forward the needed musket caps. He wrote, however, no news regarding the relief of Pemberton's beleaguered forces.

On May 23, the day after the failed second assault, Pemberton had some 29,500 troops (some 28,000 effectives); Johnston had some 10,000 at Jackson and 12,000 at Canton. Grant had approximately 51,000 men confronting Pemberton.

- Confederate reinforcements were closer to Johnston than those moving to Grant. The window of opportunity to relieve the garrison at Vicksburg was closing.

On May 25, a truce was agreed by both sides for the purpose of policing up bodies resulting from the May 22 attack.

- It also gave engineering officers on each side the opportunity to get a firsthand look at the ground through which the Union would sap and a closer look at the other side's lines.

Johnston's strategy for the relief of Vicksburg was based on the fundamental assumption that Pemberton's army was more valuable to the Confederacy than the city itself.

- He argued repeatedly that geographical sites, if lost, could be retaken later, but that an army lost was lost forever.
- His principal goal from the beginning was to save Pemberton's army from destruction.
 - Even before he left Tennessee, he had warned Pemberton that if the Yankees crossed to the East Bank of the Mississippi, he should concentrate his army and defeat them in open battle, though it meant the temporary evacuation of Vicksburg.
- The worst possible outcome was that the federal forces would surround Vicksburg with Pemberton's army inside the city.

Johnston began to position his forces. He faced daunting challenges; the troops arriving came without wagons, and a clear supply situation had yet to be established.

- There were no stores of supplies in the Jackson area despite the abundance of the surrounding countryside.
- In spite of his orders to Pemberton in April to consolidate his army, Johnston allowed *his* relief force to be split into two wings, with headquarters in Canton and Jackson.

[Chart: Map 21a, again]

There were two primary approaches by which Johnston could move toward Vicksburg.

- The first would be via Jackson and follow the southern Mississippi railroad.

- This route would pass Champion Hill, and the primary point of contention along this route would be the crossing of the Big Black River.
- Grant had a single brigade of infantry contesting those crossing points.
- The second route to Vicksburg ran through an area known as the Mechanicsburg corridor.
 - This was a strip of land bordered on the south by the Big Black River, on the north by the Yazoo River, and to the west by Vicksburg and the Mississippi River.
 - It ran from northeast to southwest and followed a ridge road founded by very fertile Mississippi bottomland.
 - Food to sustain an army could be found along the way.
 - Most importantly, the upper crossings of the Big Black River along this route were under Johnston's control.

Grant viewed Johnston's growing army of with alarm. He believed the Confederacy would make strong efforts to relieve the siege and realized that Union reinforcements would be needed.

- Grant informed Halleck that unless Banks could come to his assistance, large reinforcements would be required.
 - These demands were properly met, and a month later Grant's army numbered a bit over 71,000 men and 248 guns.

Grant was aware of the two approaches. Reacting to reports that heavy reinforcements were moving into the area, he sent Blair and 12,000 troops in the direction of Mechanicsburg on May 26.

- This was a dangerous course of action because Blair had no support and could possibly be destroyed in detail if Johnston reacted aggressively.
- Johnston had a force of equal size to Blair's at Canton, and another 10,000 men at Jackson under Loring.

Blair's force reached Mechanicsburg on May 29 and was opposed by little more than Confederate cavalry.

- Grant, however, began having second thoughts about the safety of Blair's force, and ordered him to return to Vicksburg that same day.
- The troops returned safely over the next several days, destroying what crops and stores of food they could find along the way.

On May 29, Johnston wrote Pemberton, "I am too weak to save Vicksburg. Can do no more than attempt to save you and your garrison." But he also warned that, "It will be impossible to extricate you unless you cooperate, and we make mutually supporting movements."

It was not until the evening of May 30 before Johnston reacted to Blair's presence.

- He asked Loring to move his troops from Jackson to Canton.
- He was still unsure of the validity of the information he had received and was moving cautiously.

The next day Johnston ordered W. H. T. Walker's division to Yazoo City (away from Blair) while Loring moved to Canton.

- In the meantime, Blair made his way back to safety in Vicksburg.

On June 1, Maj. General John C. Breckinridge arrived in Jackson from Middle Tennessee with a division of 5,500 men, now giving Johnston some 27,000 troops behind Grant's forces.

- Pemberton responded to Johnston's dispatch of May 25, providing a status report and update. Promising Johnston he would hold "the place as long as possible," he looked forward to the arrival of Johnston's relief force.

On June 3, Grant ordered Brig. General Nathan Kimball with two brigades and supporting cavalry to recon towards Sartartia and Mechanicsburg – brief skirmishing before returning to Hayne's Bluff.

Sartartia is a village in Yazoo County. The population was 68 as of the 2000 census. It is Mississippi's smallest incorporated municipality by population. Sartartia is a Choctaw word meaning "pumpkin place", likely due to the small gourds that grow in the area. In the early 1800s, Sartartia was a busy shipping point from which cotton was transported by steamboat to New Orleans along the Yazoo River. During the Civil War, Grant sailed a gunboat from Vicksburg and captured the village; the Wilson House on Plum Street was used as his headquarters during the occupation. The war also produced the "Sartartia Rifles", Company I of the 12th Mississippi Infantry, which, ironically, was not involved in the siege of Vicksburg.

On June 3, Brig. General William H. Jackson's division of 3,000 cavalrymen arrived in Canton.

- Absorbing those Mississippi cavalry units already in the Canton area brought the division to almost 4,400 cavalrymen.
- These would be the last of any significant reinforcements for Johnston and brought his forces to approximately 36,000 effectives.

Grant's reinforcements, however, were arriving also.

- Three brigades arrived on June 3rd from Memphis.
- Substantial reinforcements arrived over the next 11 days.

[Chart: Map 22b]

Getting back to the siege itself—

May 25: Grant issued Special Order No. 140, officially proclaiming the start of siege operations, though they had actually begun hours after the final assault on May 22.

- "Corps commanders will immediately commence the work of reducing the enemy by regular approaches ... every advantage will be taken ... to gain positions from which to start mines, trenches, or advanced batteries.
 - "It is desirable that no more loss of life shall be sustained in the reduction of Vicksburg."
 - A line of entrenchments parallel to the Confederate's works would be constructed from which saps were dug to provide approaches to the Confederate lines in order to reduce the distance for a later assault.

- *Approaches, or saps* (deep trenches) give cover to assault troops and were dug in a zigzag pattern toward the rebel lines.
- Union artillery was placed as far forward as possible to protect the saps, silence Confederate artillery, and blow apart the Confederate defensive works.
- The work was pursued day and night, and no general assaults were planned until the approaches came within a stone's throw of the enemy forts.
- Grant said he "would out-camp the enemy."

[Chart: Siege of Vicksburg]

Grant now settled in for regular siege operations and methodically went about laying siege to the city.

- For six weeks Union soldiers did more digging than fighting.
 - They dug a line of fighting positions, paralleling the Confederate works, to protect themselves from enemy fire and to block any Confederate attempts to attack outward from their fortifications.
 - Digging was done primarily at night as the saps got within rifle range of Confederate positions.
 - The Confederates were required to constantly repair their crumbling defenses as they were continually bombarded.
 - At the same time, they tried to prevent the Union from breaching the defenses.
- "We were now as strong for defense against the garrison of Vicksburg as they were against us," Grant noted.

[Chart: Examples of saps, sap rollers, and gabion revetment]

- There were 13 saps, each named after the commander furnishing the guards and working parties.
 - Each was seven feet deep and roughly 8 feet wide, deep enough for a soldier to stand in without becoming an easy target for enemy rifleman and wide enough to accommodate a column of assault troops marching four abreast.
 - The work crews were protected from enemy fire by an improvised contraption called a sap-roller, a large barrel shaped bundle of cane bound together with quarter vines, packed with cotton, and laid on its side on the floor of the trench.
 - As the excavation move forward, digging parties used long poles to push the huge roller, or bullet stopper as they called it, to the head of the ditch.
 - Sappers also used gabions to shore up trench walls and provide protection from enemy bullets. These were cylindrical cane baskets, up to 10 feet tall, filled with dirt. *[Our troops in Afghanistan used gabions for the same purpose.]*

[Chart: Sharpshooter vs. Sharpshooter]

- Union sharpshooters were the most dangerous men on the siege line. They killed and maimed more enemy combatants, by far, than artillery or mortar fire.
- Federal riflemen were more effective than their Confederate counterparts because of the sheer volume of the fire.
 - By June, Grant would have nearly twice as many sharpshooters on the line as Pemberton.
 - Union sharpshooters had unlimited supplies of ammunition.
 - Although the Confederates never ran out of bullets, they had to conserve and often ran short of percussion caps as well.
 - The high ground gave the Confederates a decided advantage against foot soldiers assaulting fixed positions, but it worked against them once the battle settled into a siege.
 - When returning fire from behind the parapets, rebel rifleman had to expose their heads and shoulders to get off an accurate shot.
 - And firing down a steep slope on enemy rifleman hidden behind log in earthen barricades, they regularly overshot their targets.
- *“Not a man in the trenches on either side could show his head above the breastworks without being picked off by the sharpshooters. A hat held out for two minutes at a porthole was riddled with Minnie balls.” [Crummer]*

[Chart: Likeness of Union trench]

- When the lines came close together, sappers were reluctant to call in artillery support.
 - Instead, they used small wooden mortars, about four feet long, which they made by borrowing out tree trunks and reinforcing the wooden barrels with iron bands to prevent them from exploding. *[Haydon, 30-38]*
 - Grant states that at the outset “in no place were our lines more than 600 yards for the enemy.”
- On May 28, the sappers of Sherman’s corps had completed parallels within 80 yards of the Confederate fortifications.
 - By June 9, the forward saps had been pushed within 50 feet of the same position.
 - McPherson’s units had also reached a point within 100 yards of their objective.
 - June 20 saw Logan’s pioneers within 12 feet of the works opposite his line.
 - Grant’s chief engineer reported that by July 1 four federal approaches had actually reached the Confederate ditches.
 - About the same time, Carr’s approach was only 10 yards from the opposing works.
 - By the end of June, at no less than 10 points along the lines, the heads of regiments formed for assault could be placed within 5 to 120 yards of the enemy’s line.

- The lines grew so close that artillery range dispersion (“danger close”) came into play.
 - This danger was recognized by Grant, who distributed to the various corps and divisions maps showing the positions of advanced units.
 - These maps were issued to the artillery as “a guide in firing, to avoid throwing shot and shell in such direction as may endanger our own troops.”
 - Hence, the most effective fire of which the numerous federal batteries were capable could not be delivered against some of the outer Confederate works, principally the Third Louisiana redan.

[Chart: Hand Grenades]

- A destructive shower of musketry, grenades, and other hand missiles was maintained on engineers and infantrymen engaged in digging saps and parallels.
 - The relatively higher positions, as the distance between the forces shrink to a few yards, enabled the Confederates to hurl 6- and 12-pounder artillery shells with the lighted fuses as hand grenades into the Union saps and rifle pits.
- Union troop dug mines under Confederate fortifications.
 - The most noteworthy of these was in McPherson’s sector, where soldiers from Logan’s division (the 45th Illinois Infantry) dug a 45-foot tunnel underneath the 3d Louisiana Redoubt and packed it with 2,200 pounds of gunpowder.
 - On 25 June, they detonated the powder, blowing the fortification to bits. One of Logan’s brigades immediately charged into the crater, only to find that the defending Confederates of Forney’s division had previously vacated the redan and built another fortification immediately to its rear.
- As to artillery support:
 - When formal investment operations were begun, Grant’s heaviest ordinance consisted of six 30-pounder rifles and the field batteries attached to the various units of his army.

[Back-Up Charts: Types of Artillery at Vicksburg]

- He requested Porter to furnish several heavy caliber naval guns for mounting in batteries in rear of the city.
 - Porter supplied four 8-inch and two 9-inch pieces, which were placed in position in Grant’s lines.

[Chart: Federal Battery Sherman, June 1863]

- Altogether, including light and heavy field pieces and naval ordinance, the Union land forces had 168 guns in position by June 20, and the chief of artillery reported 10 days later that the number had been increased to 220.
- These numerous guns – superior numbers, range, and caliber to the ordinance of the defending force – soon gained for the Union army a definite fire superiority that succeeded in crippling and silencing many of the Confederate batteries and substantially weakened resistance to the federal siege operations.
 - During the six weeks of siege, Union artillery kept up a steady fire against both the fortifications and the town of Vicksburg itself.
 - Worse for the Confederates, they found that almost impossible to fire back. Every time a cannon barrel protruded from a rebel parapet it was met with crushing fire.
 - Toward the end of the siege, the Confederates were using hardly any of their 101 canons against the federal sappers or sharpshooters. Many of them had already been destroyed by Union fire, and a number had been withdrawn to places of safety in anticipation of the final Union assault.

[Chart: Coehorn mortar]

- But in all this formidable array of cannons, not a single mortar was available for use against the Confederate defenses from Grant's lines.
 - On June 20, Grant sent an urgent request to the Chief of Ordnance in Washington for 20 mortars, half of which were to be Coehorns (relatively lightweight mortars) and the remainder 8- and 10-inch siege weapons.
 - It appears the request was repeated, but either from lack of material, shortage of transportation, or inefficiency, the pieces were not forthcoming.
 - It was not until a month after Vicksburg fell that the large siege mortars finally arrived and even then, the Coehorns had not been received.
 - A few improvised Coehorns were built towards the end of the siege and were put into use.
 - These were sections of gum-tree logs with cylinders drilled into them and reinforced with iron bands.
 - They were charged with black powder and used to lob 6- or 12-pound shells over the Confederate parapets from a distance of 100 to 150 yards to discourage the sharp shooters.
 - They were effective.
 - In one case, reportedly some 468 rounds of 6- and 12-pound projectiles were fired from three such improvised Coehorns, producing over 90 Confederate casualties.
- Admiral Porter's mortar boats on the Mississippi River, though, joined in the bombardment, lofting their huge 200-pound shells into the city.

- There was little rest for either defenders or citizens as shells rained down day and night.
- The Confederate artillery could not retaliate in kind—Pemberton directed his gunners to conserve their ammunition for the inevitable Union assaults to come.
- Porter’s continuous bombing destroyed or damaged hundreds of houses, killed and maimed dozens of civilians, annihilated livestock, and depressed, yet did not shatter, civilian morale.
- The mortar assault began on May 20, when Porter’s crews hurled a 256-pound shell into the city nearly once every five minutes for most of the night.
 - By the end of the siege, some 22,000 shells had rained down upon Vicksburg.
- Vicksburg became among the most intensely bombarded cities of the war, second only behind Atlanta.
- In August 1863 the *New York Times* published a synopsis of the Union expenditure of artillery rounds during the siege of Vicksburg. Lt. Colonel William L. Duff, General Ulysses S. Grant’s chief of artillery, provided it. He stated that during the 47-day siege, the Union artillery fired 9,598 rounds during the May 19 assault, 10,754 rounds during the May 22 assault, and 111,614 rounds during the remainder of the siege. This averaged out to 653 rounds fired by each Union cannon during the siege.
- Major reinforcements flowed to Grant’s army.
 - Three divisions came in from Grant’s own XVI Corps in Tennessee, as well as one division from the Department of the Missouri and the IX Corps (two divisions) from the Department of the Ohio.
 - These additions raised Grant’s strength from 56,000 to about 77,000 troops.
- The monotonous siege dragged on, with men dying daily from mining, sniping, an artillery fire.

For McClernand, though, it was not so monotonous. The ongoing friction with Grant came to a head.

- Grant wanted to relieve McClernand after the May 22 assault but held off.
- On May 30, McClernand issued a congratulatory order to his troops, claiming most of the credit for the success of the campaign. This wound up in the newspapers.
 - Sherman and McPherson were furious, Sherman pointing out that if McClernand had led, it was usually in the wrong direction.
 - This kind of conduct was a violation of War Department regulations and gave Grant the opportunity to relieve McClernand.
- On June 18, Grant relieved McClernand and replaced him with Maj. General O. C. Ord (a West Pointer).

June 7-10: Forces under Maj. Gen. Richard Taylor (son of the former president) of the Department of the Trans-Mississippi, staged a series of disjointed attacks against the Union bases at Milliken’s Bend, Young’s Point, and Lake Providence in Louisiana.

- On May 13, Kirby Smith received a letter from Pemberton requesting he intervene in the defense of Vicksburg by attacking the Federal troops in Louisiana. *[Grabau, 190-194]*
- A few months earlier, these bases had been vital links in Grant's line of supply, but with the opening of the landing at Snyder's Bluff they had lost much of their significance.
 - By June, they were used primarily as training bases for recently raised regiments of black troops.
- The most significant of these attacks came at Milliken's Bend, where a brigade of Maj. General John G. Walker's Texas division surprised a Union garrison consisting of one Iowa regiment and a large number of black troops undergoing training.
 - The Texans drove through the Union defenses and were stopped only by fire from the ironclad Choctaw.
 - The Union troops at Milliken's Bend suffered a total of 652 casualties, including a number of black soldiers confiscated as runaway slaves.
 - Had General Kirby Smith assailed the Louisiana bases a few months earlier, he could have made a significant impact on the Vicksburg campaign. By June it was too late. As it was, they lacked the numerical strength to make a permanent lodgment.
- However, the engagements at Port Hudson and Milliken's Bend had a wider significance.
 - Charles A. Dana, a noted journalist, reported to the Secretary of War: "The sentiment in regard to the employment of negro troops has been revolutionized by the bravery of the blacks in the recent battle of Milliken's Bend. Prominent officers, who used in private to sneer at the idea, are now heartily in favor of it."

June 14: Grant's siege lines grow tighter.

- Twelve miles of Union works confronted Pemberton. The terrain that had blunted Grant's assaults in May was being negated by the siege efforts.
- By June 14, Pemberton reported to Johnston that Grant's siege approaches were within 25 yards of his works.
- Cannon fire from both the land and river battered the city daily.
- Union troops dug tunnels with the intent of setting off explosions designed to destroy the Confederate fortifications.

As it turned out, Grant did not need a large rearguard covering force.

- Any outside relief for Pemberton would have to come from Johnston, and he showed no inclination to attack Grant.
- Reinforcements raised Johnston's strength to almost 36,000 men, yet he limited his activity to sending messages—telling Richmond that he was too weak to attack and urging Pemberton to break out of Grant's siege lines on his own.

June 16-20: Clarifying Johnson's authority.

In the third week of May, Johnston had reported to President Davis the size of his army at 23,000 and that of Grant at 60,000 to 80,000 noting, "The odds against us will be very great. Can you not add 7,000?"

- Davis was surprised. He thought Johnston had an army of at least 30,000, and when he checked with Seddon, the Secretary of War confirmed it.
- Davis wired Johnston, "[Seddon] reports your whole force to be 34,000 exclusive of militia."
- Johnston responded that, "the Secretary of War is greatly mistaken," and sent an itemized return showing his total manpower to be 24,100 men as of June 1.
- President Davis had to accept Johnston's word for it though he likely suspected Johnston was minimizing his numbers in order to justify his inaction. [\[Symonds\]](#)

President Davis told Seddon to ask Johnston why he didn't simply order more troops to himself from Bragg's Army of Tennessee.

- Johnston in turn was surprised, for he did not think he had authority over Bragg's army, assuming that his orders to Mississippi had superseded his orders as commander of the Department of the West.
- He immediately wired Seddon to clarify his position.
 - Seddon replied that, yes, Johnston remained the commander of the whole Department as well as commander of the Relief Army in Mississippi.
 - Although this news now made it possible for Johnston to summon reinforcements, it did not solve his problem, for an effect he was being asked to make a decision he considered to be essentially a political one: whether is to strip Tennessee of its forces in order to save Mississippi.
- Far from resolving the confusion, this new information provoked along exchange of telegrams between Davis and Johnston that did little credit to the president or the general.
 - It was a silly quarrel. Johnston wanted to explain how reasonable it was for him to have drawn the conclusions that he did, but President Davis didn't want explanations or justifications; he wanted Johnson to acknowledge his error.
 - Johnson's continued stubbornness finally compelled President Davis to sit down and write a 15-page letter that was virtually a lecture, full of specific citations from official orders, in order to prove that Johnston's misunderstanding was completely unreasonable. *[Full text copy available in [Compelled to Appear in Print](#), pp. 62-67.]*
- One of the few rational voices in this flurry of telegraphic exchanges was Seddon, who urged Johnston, "You must rely on what you have... but I venture the suggestion that to relieve Vicksburg, speedy action is essential."
- The squabble between Johnston and Davis stretched well into July.

Food supplies inside the city were virtually exhausted, and the morale of soldiers and citizens alike was collapsing under the continuing bombardment.

- By mid-June Johnston had already reported to the government that there was no hope. "I consider saving Vicksburg hopeless," he wrote to Seddon.

- But the government was not willing to give up. “Vicksburg must not be lost without a desperate struggle... If better resources do not offer, you must attack,” Seddon replied.

June 20: William H. Tunard of Co K, 3rd Louisiana Infantry wrote in his memoir that, “At early dawn every gun along the line suddenly opened, keeping up a rapid and continuous fire. All concurred in the opinion that such a tremendous cannonading had never been equaled in their experience, and the volume of sound surpassed anything yet heard. It seemed as if heaven and earth trembled under the heavy concussion.”

June 22: With reinforcements swelling this numbers to some 77,000, Grant turned to secure himself from Johnston.

- Grant organized his forces into 2 wings, each of which was larger than Johnston’s.
- The larger of the two – 43,000 men under his own command – surrounded the Vicksburg defenses to ensure that Pemberton remained well trapped.
- The other – 34,000 men under Sherman – faced east behind the Big Black River to prevent any interference by Johnston.
 - Sherman turned over the XV Corps to his senior division commander, Maj. General Frederick Steele.
- With only 23,000 men of his own, Johnston could not drive the Federals off or even fight his way in, had that been his object.
- With the establishment of Sherman’s defense line, opportunity for Johnston to relieve the garrison had passed by.

Despair had now entered Pemberton’s correspondence. He suggested, for the first time, that Grant be contacted regarding the surrender of the garrison, rather than attempting to cut a way out of Vicksburg.

- He suggested that the communication would come best from Johnston, who held the freedom of maneuver outside Vicksburg.
- In the meantime, Johnston continued to vacillate. He sent orders to his division commanders in mid-June indicating that the long-anticipated move on Vicksburg would soon commence.
 - A message from Davis, ironically, informing him of Grant’s reinforcements, caused Johnston to cancel his plans.

[Chart: Union mine causing a crater under...]

June 25: Following a mine explosion which destroys part of the Third Louisiana Redan, the federals launch a desperate attack into the crater, which is halted in hard fighting.

- *“The sap or trench is run to the [redan], and the [redan] is mined, the boys digging the dirt and carry it out in boxes. Great holes are dug underneath the Fort, and miners from the 45th Illinois regiment, who understand tamping, have charged the 2200 pounds of powder, and all was ready to light the fuse. Heavy artillery fire opens up all along the line, and at 2:30 PM the explosion takes place. [Crummer]*

[Chart: The Fight in the Crater...]

- *“When the smoke and dust had cleared away partly, a great saucer-shaped crater was seen, where before the A-shaped [redan] had been. It was large enough to hold 60 or 80 men. The 23rd Indiana and the 45th Illinois were in the trenches ready to charge; the command was given before the dust had fully settled; the 23rd Indiana charging to the left of the crater to the top of the works; the 45th Illinois up and into the crater.*
- *“The enemy had come up behind the big pile of earth thrown out by the explosion, and as we went into the crater, they met us with a terrible volley of musketry, but on the boys went, up and over the embankment with a cheer, the enemy falling back a few paces an inner or second line of breastworks, where are placed cannon loaded with grape and canister, and these cannon belched forth their death dealing missiles, in addition to the heavy musketry fire, with such telling effect that many of the brave boys fall to arise no more; the line waivers, staggers, and then falls back into the crater.*
- *“The enemy charge on us, but we repel them at the west bank of the crater, and a hand to hand conflict rages for hours; hand grenades and loaded shells are lighted and thrown over the parapet as you would play ball. These shells and hand grenades carry death, as many as a dozen men being killed and wanted at one explosion.*
- *“A wide embrasure in the embankment was made into which the regiment, led by Colonel Maltby, rushed in and at once planted our banner amid a terrific fire from the enemy. The colors of the regiment planted on the parapet of the [redan] were literally torn to pieces by the shots of the enemy. Two of the field officers, Lieutenant Colonel Smith and Major Fisk, are no more.*
- *“We fought at close range with the enemy over that embankment of earth, many of the men receiving bayonet wounds.*
- *“A cypress log, with portholes cut on the underside, was brought into the crater and in helping to place it on the parapet, Colonel Maltby was severely wounded by splinters from the log. A solid shot from a cannon hit the log, hurling it with terrific force against the Colonel and his small command.*
- *“A detail of about two companies would hold the crater for two hours or more, their rapid firing causing their rifles to become hot and foul, and the men weary and worn out, when two other companies would slip in and take their places.*
- *“Reports later said we attempted to hold the crater. I want to correct this history and say, as I have a right to say, for I was there and speak from what I know to be the facts, it was no attempt, it was an accomplished fact that we held it, but to our great loss, until the order was received to give it up.*
- *“The crater was at last given up and we resumed the ordinary duties of everyday life in the trenches and the camp.” [Crummer]*

June 27: Johnston turns to the Trans-Mississippi forces of Lt. General Edmund Kirby Smith for aid.

- In a message to Smith, Johnston stated that if Smith could send in cattle and reinforce the garrison with 8,000 men, Vicksburg could be saved.
 - However, he informed Pemberton that Smith's command had been "mismanaged."
- He also told Pemberton (in response to the note of June 22) that Pemberton himself would have to propose terms, should events lead to that eventuality.

28 June: Pemberton received a mysterious letter signed "Many Soldiers" stating that the army had reached the limits of endurance.

- "If you can't feed us, you had better surrender us."
- Pemberton knew that a general Union assault was coming, and he feared that his army was incapable of mounting a defense.

Also on June 28, *some Confederates threw over to the Union a small biscuit made of cornmeal and peas. To this was attached a very small piece of meat and a note stating that it was one day's rations. The note went on: "We are pretty hungry and dreadful dry. Old Pemberton has taken all the whiskey for the hospitals and our Southern Confederacy is so small just now that we are not in the manufacturing business. Give our compliments to General Grant and say to him that grub would be acceptable, but we will feel under particular obligations to him if he will send us a few bottles of good whiskey."* [\[Crummer\]](#)

July 1: A second mine destroys the 3rd Louisiana Redan.

- No charge follows, but a bombardment causes considerable Confederate casualties.

Grant orders preparations for a general assault on July 6, to follow the explosions of a number of mines.

- Pemberton circulates a letter to his divisional commanders asking the ability of their troops to fight their way out of Vicksburg.
- On the following day he requests their opinion on a future course of action.
 - Without resupply of food and ammunition, the garrison was doomed.
 - They council surrender.

[Chart: Grant's Conversation with Pemberton]

July 3: Hostilities cease when Pemberton sends out an offer to discuss surrender with Grant.

- Pemberton's force has been reduced to a state of starvation.
- Pemberton sent Bowen forward under a flag of truce.
 - Bowen had had a relationship with Grant prior to the war, and Pemberton hoped that sending Bowen would lead to better terms.
- Pemberton proposed an armistice and offered the surrender of the garrison.
- Grant's terms were simple: "The useless effusion of blood which you propose stopping by this course can be ended at any time you may choose, by an unconditional surrender of the city and the garrison."
- Pemberton and Grant met later in the day.

- The site of the meeting was between the lines of the two armies.
 - Bowen and a staff officer accompanied Pemberton; Grant brought a number of officers with him, including Ord and McPherson.
- Pemberton began by asking the terms Grant was willing to offer. Grant replied as was in his note: unconditional surrender.
 - The meeting did not go well, and Pemberton finally said that perhaps it would be better to close discussions and turned to leave.
 - Someone suggested that the subordinate officers talk about the terms.
 - While they did, Pemberton and Grant set in silence beneath an oak tree.
- Negotiations were concluded with an exchange of notes.
 - Grant decided to offer terms of parole.
 - The surrender would require all 29,500 prisoners North to prisoner of war camps.
 - Pemberton was uncomfortable with the terms, and the negotiated offer of parole to the Confederates might bring Pemberton to terms.
 - There was a large difference between being a prisoner of war in a federal prison camp and a paroled soldier in a Southern camp of instruction.
 - In addition, Grant did not have the logistical support to transport Pemberton's army north.
 - Finally, it was hoped that if they were paroled, many of the Southern soldiers would view themselves as out of the war and simply returned to their homes.
 - Grant offered to march a detachment of two divisions into Vicksburg the next morning (July 4) to act as guard, and after paroles were signed, allow the Confederates to march out of Vicksburg.
 - Officers would be allowed sidearms and clothing.
 - Staff officers could take one horse each.
 - Private soldiers could take their clothing.
 - All would be allowed to carry such provisions as they had (for Pemberton had tried to bluff Grant into believing the Confederates still had ample supplies).
 - Pemberton countered by requesting that the Confederate soldiers be allowed to march out of their lines, stack arms, and then permit Union troops to enter.
 - Grant assented.
 - In all, 29,500 soldiers and 172 cannons surrendered.
 - Throughout the 47-day siege, the Confederates loss 3,176 men, while the Union lost only 600.
 - For every Union casualty there were more than five Confederate dead or wounded.

[Chart: US flag raised over Vicksburg Courthouse]

July 4: Pemberton surrenders to Grant.

- What was left of his force marched out of their positions and stacked arms, hung their colors on the center, laid off their knapsacks, belts, and cartridge boxes, and marched down the road into the city.
 - “It was one of the saddest sights I ever beheld, and I can honestly say I pitied those brave men from the bottom of my heart,” wrote a Union officer.
- Union troops marched into the city as Porter’s gunboats tied up at Vicksburg’s waterfront.
- Inside the trenches and in the city, the men of the two armies affiliated at once.
 - Groups of Union and Confederate soldiers could be seen wherever there was a shady place; the Federal pumping the rebel and giving him a in return for the information hardtack and bacon, while the poor famished fellows accepted with a grateful look.

[Chart: Certificate of Parole]

- Each Confederate signed a document of parole, stating that he would not bear arms until “exchanged” for a Union soldier.
 - Five days rations were issued to the prisoners, consisting of bacon, hominy, peas, coffee, sugar, soap, salt, and crackers.
- Grant’s assumption that providing Pemberton’s soldiers with paroles would effectively dissolve his army was correct at least in part.
 - As the troops were marched towards Jackson, many simply left the ranks to return home, some never to fight again.
 - Pemberton tried to keep them together but had little success. Without arms to enforce his orders, his army melted away.

Johnston, who has spent the past six weeks organizing an army of relief, was probing Union lines along the Big Black River when he received word of the capitulation.

- He had finally been planning an attack on Sherman’s exterior line on July 6.
 - He had moved slowly towards Vicksburg. After remaining in place on July 3, he resolved to probe south of the railroad at Edwards Depot for an opening.

Conditions in the Ranks

Conditions within the Confederate lines had seriously deteriorated.

- “When the siege commenced, it had been announced that there were provisions enough stored away to subsist the army for six months,” noted one Confederate. In reality, such was not the case. Food rations were cut and cut again to conserve stockpiles.
- Many of the army’s draft animals were set loose in no-man’s-land because the Confederates lacked the fodder to keep them alive, while others were consigned to the stewpot.
- Malnutrition and disease decimated the Confederate ranks.
- Morale declined as the hoped-for relief from outside never materialized.

The prospect of Johnston's arrival with a rescuing army became the one great hope.

- Pemberton had announced from the outset of the siege that help was on the way.
 - "My men are in good health spirits," he wrote, "awaiting your arrival."
- President Davis, too, expected Johnston to fight his way into the city.
 - "Make a junction," he wired to Johnston, "and carry him munitions."
- Grant could hardly have hoped for anything better.
 - When a staff officer suggested that Johnston might try to fight his way into the city, Grant replied, "If Johnston tries to cut his way in, we will let him do it, and then see that he don't get out."

First Sergeant (aka Orderly Sergeant) Wilbur Fisk Crummer, about 20 years old, is shot in the right lung by a Confederate sniper on July 2.

- The regimental surgeon expected him to not last the night, but he survives.
- He is laid up for two years but was not mustered out until the war ended.
- He took part in eight or nine of the hardest-fought battles: Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Corinth, siege of Vicksburg, etc.
- In the summer of 1865, Mr. Crummer became a clerk in a county office at Galena and retained that post until elected County Clerk of Joe Daviess county, in 1869.
- He died in Cook County, Illinois on February 17, 1920, at age 76.

[*\[Maj Wilbur Fisk Crummer \(1843-1920\) – Find A Grave Memorial\]*](#)

Conditions Inside the City

For the citizens of Vicksburg, the siege was an equally trying experience.

- Even though only a handful of civilians were actually killed or wounded in the bombardment, the psychological toll was considerable.
 - "It was an awful and strange sight," wrote one Vicksburg diarist. "As I sat at my window, I saw the mortars from the west passing entirely over the house and the Parrott shells from the east passing by, crossing each other, and this terrible fire raging in the center."
 - "People do nothing but eat what they can get, sleep when they can, and dodge the shells," wrote another civilian.
- Sometimes, even the Confederate soldiers were moved by the plight of the civilians, despite their own tribulations. One sergeant observed that "delicate women and little children, with pale, careworn and hunger-pinched features, peered at the passer-by with wistful eyes from the caves in the hillsides."
- Many families spent their nights in "rat holes", hand-dug caves to provided protection from Porter's river bombardments.
 - By that time its citizens had excavated over 500 caves.
 - Locals called them bomb-proofs, but they were hardly that.
 - Cut out of the city soft, stoneless soil, they were unable to withstand direct mortar hit.

- Families typically covered the damp dirt floor with wooden planks, sometimes overlaid with strips of old carpet, and slept on mattresses placed on barrels.
- Candles at night were forbidden.
- Rats were a problem, as were malaria-carrying mosquitoes. Occasional snakes, too.
- When it rained, water seeped through the roof, and blankets and carpets had to be hung out.
- Sometimes the caves were desperately crowded, and always hot in close. Sometimes the cave had 20 or 25 people packed into it; no turning around for anybody; air so foul, sometimes, you couldn't have made a candle burn in it.
- Many families with caves preferred to live in them only when the bombs fell.

It soon became evident that there was not an abundant supply of rations, as the allowance, in the daily issue, was reduced considerably, although it was stated at first, that there was provision enough to last the garrison for six months. This was found to be a very egregious mistake.

After receiving rather short rations of cornbread and indifferent beef for a few days, we were somewhat surprised, one day, to see among the provisions sent up, that the only supply, in the way of bread, was made of peas. There is no question in regard to this "pea bread." It is rather a hard edible and was made of a well-known product of several of the Southern States called "cow peas," which is rather a small bean [a cousin to black-eyed peas], cultivated quite extensively as provender for animals. When properly and well prepared, it makes, what I consider, a very poor vegetable for the table, though some persons profess to be fond of it. Being introduced as a ration into the army, it was always our principal and regular vegetable; occasionally, we received rice and sweet potatoes.

There was a good supply of this pea in the commissariat at Vicksburg, and the idea grew out of the fertile brain of some official, that, if reduced to the form of meal, it would make an admirable substitute for bread. Sagacious and prolific genius! whether general or commissary—originator of this glorious conception! this altogether novel species of the hardest of "hard tack!" perhaps he never swallowed a particle of it. If he did, the truth and force of these comments will be appreciated.

The process of getting the pea into the form of bread was the same as that to which corn is subjected: the meal was ground at a large mill in the city and sent to the cooks in camp to be prepared. It was accordingly mixed with cold water and put through the form of baking; but the nature of it was such, that it never got done, and the longer it was cooked, the harder it became on the outside, which was natural, but, at the same time, it grew relatively softer on the inside, and, upon breaking it, you were sure to find raw pea-meal in the center. The cooks protested that it had been on the fire two good hours, but it was all to no purpose; yet, on the outside it was so hard, that one might have knocked down a full-grown steer with a chunk of it.

The experiment soon satisfied all parties, and, after giving us this bread for three days, it was abandoned. But it had already made a number of us sick. Peas were afterwards issued, boiled in camp, and still constituted about half our subsistence.

We did not really suffer for provisions and got enough to live on sparingly. The corn having given out, four ounces of flour and the same of bacon were issued to us daily, with "cow peas"—about a-quarter of the regular army rations. Not taking very active exercise, we managed to get along tolerably well; and, though I ate no peas, it cannot be said that I actually suffered from hunger, but some of the hearty feeders of the mess did. It was better, perhaps, for the garrison that short rations were issued, as eating heartily in hot weather might have produced a greater amount of disease than actually existed.

The Federals found out by some means, through deserters I suppose, that we were eating pea-bread, and hallooed over for several nights afterwards, enquiring how long the pea-bread would hold out; if it was not about time to lower our colors; and asking us to come over and take a good cup of coffee and eat a biscuit with them. Some of the boys replied that they need not be uneasy about rations, as we had plenty of mules to fall back upon.

[Memoirs: Historical and Personal: Including the Campaigns of the First Missouri Confederate Brigade by Ephraim McD. Anderson, who served in Co. G, 2nd Missouri Infantry (CS)]

"During the last few weeks of June, conditions in Vicksburg worsened. "Many families of wealth had eaten the last mouthful of food in their possession, and the poor class of non-combatants were on the verge of starvation," according to a report. As soldiers' rations were reduced, malnutrition set in, and many soldiers ended up in the hospital (or remained ill at their posts), suffering from diseases exacerbated by hunger. Colonel Ashbel Smith of the 2nd Texas Infantry reported:

Our rations were reduced to little more than sufficient to sustain life. Five ounces of musty corn-meal and pea flour were nominally issued daily. In point of fact, this allowance did not exceed three ounces. All the unripe, half brown peaches, the green berries growing on the briars, all were carefully gathered and simmered in a little sugar and water, and used for food. Every eatable vegetable around the works was hunted up for greens. Some two or three men approached to succumb and die from inanition for want of food, but the health of the men did not seem to suffer immediately from want of rations, but all gradually emaciated and became weak, and toward the close of the siege many were found with swollen ankles and symptoms of incipient scurvy.

Captain Ferdinand O. Claiborne, of the 3rd Maryland Battery, recorded in his diary: "Our rations are growing more scarce every day and we must eventually come to mule meat. We have a quantity of bacon yet on hand, but breadstuff is the great desideratum. The men receive only one-quarter rations of breadstuffs such as rice, pea meal and rice flour—the corn has given out long since, rations of sugar, lard, molasses and tobacco are issued but this does not make amends for the want of bread, and the men are growing weaker every day."

On June 28, Pemberton received an anonymous letter signed “many soldiers.” It read, in part: “Our rations have been cut down to one biscuit and a small bit of bacon per day, not enough scarcely to keep soul and body together, much less to stand the hardships we are called upon to stand. If you can’t feed us, you had better surrender us, horrible as the idea is . . . This army is now ripe to mutiny unless it can be fed.” Deserters reported the same thing. Charles A. Dana wrote on June 29, to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton: “Two separate parties of deserters from Vicksburg agree in the statement that the provisions of the place are near the point of total exhaustion; that rations have now been reduced lower than ever; that extreme dissatisfaction exists among the garrison, and that it is agreed on all hands that the city will be surrendered on Saturday, July 4, if, indeed, it can hold on so long as that.”

<http://www.thehistoryreader.com/modern-history/may-18-1863-start-siege-starving-vicksburg/>

Casualties

[Chart: General Summary of Casualties – won’t vouch for accuracy]

The Beat Goes On...

[Chart: Chart 23]

On July 5, still unsure as to his plan of attack, he heard of the surrender of the Vicksburg garrison.

- He marched immediately for Jackson, and Sherman started after him as soon as the ceremony concluded.
- This is where we’ll pick up operations next month.

[Chart: Landscape of Vicksburg from the Mississippi River]

But for now, in closing, let’s ponder two questions—

- **What battle sealed Vicksburg’s fate? Champion Hill? Seems the obvious answer, but what about—**
 - Jackson – cuts Vicksburg’s MSR; effectively isolates it.
 - Bruinsburg – Grant is across the river and has room to maneuver.
 - Porter running the fleet past Vicksburg to link up with the army and ferry them across.
- **Who was responsible for the fall of Vicksburg?**
 - Davis blamed Johnston for not coming to Pemberton’s rescue.
 - Vicksburg fell, “from want of provisions inside, and general outside who wouldn’t fight.”
 - Pemberton put it onto Johnston.
 - On August 25th, Pemberton forwarded his campaign report directly to Richmond, bypassing Johnston. The report was the luminous, running to more than 80 pages in the

official records. Pemberton was surprisingly kind to Johnston, never coming directly forth and placing blame on his commander. But he did blame Johnston's activity:

"On May 25th, 34 days previous, [Johnston] had informed me that on the arrival of an expected division from Bragg's army [Breckenridge's division] he would "move to me." I supposed then, with my cooperation, to raise the siege. No subsequent dispatch from him sustained my understanding of this communication; all, without exception, of later date, spoke only of the possibility of extricating the garrison. His dispatch of July 3, received by me six days after the capitulation, held out no such hope, and I am fully and entirely satisfied that no efficient aid would have been given to me even to affect an evacuation. I do not mean or desire to be understood as implying that it might have been given me. I only express my conviction, that had I been able to hold the enemy at Bay for yet a month, I do not believe, anxious as I was to cooperate, that I would have been relieved by any force from the outside." [\[Compelled to Appear in Print, 68\]](#)

- Johnston blamed Pemberton for allowing himself to be trapped inside the city, although he reserved some of the blame for Davis, whom he held responsible for the unworkable command system in the West.
 - Concluding his lengthy report of November 1, 1863 to General Cooper, AG and IG, entitled *Rebel Operations in Mississippi and Louisiana*, General Johnston opined, "A proper regard for the good opinion of my government has compelled me, therefore, to throw aside that delicacy which I would gladly have observed toward a brother officer suffering much undeserved obloquy [*strong public criticism or verbal abuse*], and to show that in his short campaign, General Pemberton made not a single movement in obedience to my orders and regarded none of my instructions; and, finally, did not embrace the only opportunity to save his army, that given by my order to abandon Vicksburg." [\[The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events, with Documents, vol 7, pp 472-477\]](#)
- The real architect, of course, was Grant, whose command of the river, numerical superiority, and iron determination made Vicksburg fall a reality.
- Craig Symonds suggests a better question: Who was responsible for the loss of Pemberton's army?
 - He concludes that Pemberton is the only candidate. His decision to retreat into the city and defy a federal siege ensured that when Vicksburg did fall, the Federals would capture both the city and the army that defended it,
 - and for the Confederates, this was the great tragedy of the campaign: not only the loss of Vicksburg but also the loss of almost 30,000 Confederate troops from the strategic chess board.

Public perception of Pemberton dropped precipitously in the immediate aftermath of the surrender. His failure to hold the river fortress and his Northern roots made him an easy scapegoat.

- Mary Chestnut, whose prejudice extended to all Southern generals of Northern birth and never one to mince words, noted in June of 1862 that as a native born Yankee, Pemberton seemed to have no heart for the defense of Charleston. After the fall of Vicksburg, she considered him a “stupid log of a halfhearted Yankee.” [*Mary Chestnut’s Civil War*, C. Vann Woodward, ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981, pp 332 and 469]
- As long as Grant was unable to maneuver in front of Vicksburg, Pemberton’s strengths as an administrator enhanced his image. Once Grant crossed the Mississippi River, however, blame shifted to him.

Much was expected of Johnston.

- The officers and soldiers in his growing army near Jackson wrote home of their expectations that the relief of the Vicksburg Garrison was not only possible but expected.
- British observer Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Freemantle of the Coldstream Guards was quite impressed with Johnston while visiting his camps near Canton.
 - Johnston “had undoubtedly acquired the entire confidence of all of the officers and soldiers.”
 - Pemberton, on the other hand, was freely called a coward and traitor.
 - On the evening of May 22, when asked when he expected to start his campaign to relieve Vicksburg, Johnston said he was too weak at present and had no idea when he could attack Grant.
 - Freemantle concluded that in the absence of a forthcoming campaign in Mississippi he would continue his journey through the Confederacy.
 - In a little more than a month, he would view the Battle of Gettysburg with Lee’s army.

Pemberton asked for a court of inquiry to determine culpability for the loss of Vicksburg. The three members of the controversy would have welcomed such a court. The war, however, interfered and caused the action to be postponed indefinitely. It was never held.

In late July, Pemberton reported to Johnston after being paroled by Grant.

- Johnston was sitting outside his headquarters tent on a hill near Morton, Mississippi, when he noticed “a tall, handsome, dignified figure” coming up the hill toward him.
 - Johnston recognized Pemberton and jumped to his feet to greet him. He extended his hand, saying, “Well, Jack old boy, I am certainly glad to see you.”
 - Then the smile on Johnston’s face faded and he slowly lowered his hand, for Pemberton instead saluted “punctiliously.”
 - With a deadpan expression, he recited his prepared comment, “General Johnston, according to the terms of parole prescribed by General Grant, I was directed to report to you, Sir!”
 - Both men stood motionless facing each other, saying nothing. Finally, Pemberton saluted again, turned on his heel, and walked down the Hill.
 - They never met again.
-

Siege of Port Hudson

The Run-Up

[Chart: The Mississippi River Watershed]

From the beginning of the war, both sides made controlling the Mississippi River a major part of their strategy.

- The Confederacy wanted to keep using the river to transport needed supplies; the Union wanted to stop this supply route and drive a wedge that would divide Confederate states and territories.
- Particularly important to the South was the stretch of the Mississippi that included the mouth of the Red River.
 - This was the Confederacy's primary route for moving vital supplies between east and west.
 - The trans-Mississippi states provided thousands of recruits for depleted regiments serving east of the river.
 - Texas grain and beef cattle, Louisiana salt, sugar and molasses, and European products shipped via Mexico, all flowed down the Red River.
 - Small arms, cannon, ammunition and currency moved westward on the waterway.
- The Confederate government could not afford to lose so important a lifeline.

[Hewitt, "They Fought Splendidly, 6-7]

[Chart: Chart 36]

[Perello, 155-156]

At Vicksburg, Grant's Army of the Tennessee was embroiled in the campaign to take the city.

- A formidable task, he faced the Confederacy's third largest army stationed behind the barrier of the unbridged, unfordable Mississippi.
- To increase his strength, Grant called for reinforcements from neighboring departments, chiefly Maj. General Nathaniel Banks' Department of the Gulf, headquartered in New Orleans.

This put Banks in a tough spot.

- A third of his 35,000 men were tied up as garrisons along the gulf, in New Orleans, and west of the city in the cotton-rich region known as the La Fourche (named for the bayou running through it).
- If Banks were to join Grant with his field army (the Army of the Gulf), his department would be at the mercy of the Confederates to the west, north, and east.
 - New Orleans could well be recaptured, which would negate the value of capturing Vicksburg.

Instead of going directly to Grant's aid, Banks decided to go after Port Hudson.

- It would have to be taken eventually to open the Mississippi, and while there, Banks would remain close enough to New Orleans to prevent its loss.
- He would also tie down Confederates who might otherwise be free to oppose Grant.

Before moving on Port Hudson, Banks made a swing through western Louisiana, driving Confederate forces farther west, confiscating cotton, and liberating thousands of emancipated slaves.

- The Army of the Gulf converged on Port Hudson on May 26.
- Had he arrived a few days later, he would have found the place empty.
 - The garrison had been ordered to Vicksburg where Grant had crossed the river and invested the fortress.
- Now the Port Hudson garrison was trapped and had no choice but to defend their own post.

Banks had to choose between three methods of capturing the fort: storm, starve, or sap.

- Sapping was the classical method of reducing a fort by digging toward it, starvation the ultimate tool of any procedure.
- Using these methods, any fortress would fall sooner or later period the problem was that it usually ended up being later, and time is at a premium for banks.
 - In addition to concerns for New Orleans, he wanted to join grant as soon as possible.

Banks therefore opted for the fastest course of action: storming the place.

- This entailed launching an all-out assault, relying on numerical superiority to overwhelm the defenders.
- The prospects appeared good: there were 17,000 federals on hand against Confederate Maj. General Franklin Gardner's field force of 6,000.
- Banks resolved to attack on May 27.
 - May 19 and 22: Grant attacks Vicksburg.
 - May 25: Grant formally orders a siege to capture Vicksburg.

[\[Perello, 155-156\]](#)

The Campaign

April 29, 1862: New Orleans surrenders to Farragut.

- From the mouth of the river, a fleet commanded by Rear Admiral David G. Farragut fought its way through Confederate fortifications in the Mississippi River delta and captured New Orleans.
 - On April 25, Captain Theodorus Bailey, commander of one of Farragut's gunboat divisions, and Lieutenant George Perkins landed, walked to city hall, and demanded its surrender. Mayor John Monroe refused, but it was as good as done since there were no Confederate troops remaining in the city.
 - On May 1, Brig. General Benjamin Franklin Butler, Commander of the Department of the Gulf since March 20, establishes his headquarters in New Orleans.

May 7: Commander James Shedden Palmer occupies Baton Rouge.

May 13: Natchez surrenders to Captain Samuel Phillip Lee.

April 14-May 31: Farragut conducts operations on the Mississippi as far north as Vicksburg.

- Farragut returns to Vicksburg in late June; passes Vicksburg's batteries (the first of several times) to link up with Union river forces commanded by Colonel Alfred W. Ellet north of the city.

August 4: Battle of Baton Rouge.

- Confederate attack is repulsed.
- On August 8, Brig. General Benjamin Franklin Butler, Union military governor of New Orleans, orders Baton Rouge abandoned in order to concentrate his men in the defense of New Orleans.

August 17: Confederates begin fortifying Port Hudson.

The initial idea of fortifying the heights of Port Hudson came from General Pierre G. T. Beauregard, Commander, Army of the Mississippi.

- Writing to Maj. General Mansfield Lovell, Commander of the lower Mississippi in March 1862, Beauregard recommended, "...the fortification of Port Hudson as a measure of precaution against the fall of our defenses north of Memphis."
- In June 1862, Major General Earl Van Dorn wrote President Davis, "I want Baton Rouge and Port Hudson".
- A few days after the fall of Baton Rouge to the Union, Maj. General John C. Breckinridge with 4,000 men occupied Port Hudson with troops under the command of Brig. General Daniel Ruggles.
 - Soldiers of the 4th Louisiana Infantry arrived at the site on August 15, 1862.
 - Ruggles was in command only through August 29 when he was ordered by Breckinridge to move with some of his troops to the state of Mississippi to aid Van Dorn in his attempt to recapture Corinth (the Second Battle of Corinth).
 - He turned over command of Port Hudson to Brig. General William Nelson Rector Beall, whose garrison had whittled down to some 1,000 men.

The Fortress

[Chart: Port Hudson and Its Defenses]

Port Hudson was sited on an 80-foot (24 m) bluff on the east bank above a hairpin turn in the Mississippi River 25 miles (40 km) upriver from Baton Rouge.

- The hills and ridges in the area of the town represented extremely rough terrain, a maze of deep, thickly forested ravines, swamps, and cane brakes creating a natural fortress.
- The town was a port for shipping cotton (some 30,000 bales annually) and sugar downriver from the surrounding area. [*Miles 504*]

- Despite its importance, the city had only a few buildings and 200 people at the start of the war.

In 1841, a railroad was constructed to the town of Clinton, 19 miles (31 km) to the northeast.

- The entire length of the Port Hudson and Clinton railroad was 21 miles (34 km). It did not connect with the New Orleans, Jackson, and Great Northern railroad that connected Louisiana with other states and with Camp Moore, the main mustering point for Confederate forces in the department. [[Clinton & Port Hudson Railroad \(csa-railroads.com\)](#)]
- By 1862 the railroad was run down, the track consisting of strips of iron nailed flat to rotten ties.
 - The entire rolling stock consisted of one locomotive, one passenger car, and six box and flat cars.
 - This train could accommodate only a few hundred troops at the most and was inadequate for hauling heavy guns and their ammunition.
- This lack of transport independent of the river would limit the defensibility of Port Hudson.

Initial plans for fortifications were drawn up with the assistance of Captain James Nocquet, Breckinridge's chief engineer.

- Along with loaning his engineering staff, Breckinridge also authorized Ruggles to gather needed supplies and tools using the Clinton and Port Hudson railroad, and whatever labor the area could provide for construction.
- Three different layouts for earthworks were considered: a central fort mounting cannon supported by angled outworks, a line of lunettes arranged along a 400-yard line, and a continuous ring of redoubts, trenches, and parapets surrounding the entire position.
 - The first option was rejected for concentrating the positions armament into too small a target, and thus making it too vulnerable to bombardment.
 - The third option was rejected because a siege was considered unlikely, and the task of building such extensive works too ambitious since the circumference of the ring would have been eight miles (13 km.) and required 35,000 men and 70 pieces of artillery for defense.
 - The line of lunettes was determined to be the best plan for the defense of the Port Hudson heights, and construction started on a 400-yard line of seven fronting the river.
 - Beall also constructed land works consisting of a continuous parapet and ditch that stretched for 4 1/2 miles.
 - The work preceded slowly and the defenses were crude, but bill believe the position could be held with only 20,000 men and 18 cannon.

[[Siege of Port Hudson - Wikipedia and Miles, 510](#)]

September 7: Porter responds to the new threat by bombarding the Confederate position with the USS Essex and the *Anglo-American*.

- The Union fleet did little damage to Port Hudson, but the *Essex* received significant damage.
- Porter reported 35 to 40 heavy guns at Port Hudson, a considerable exaggeration.

- During the lull in action when the Union delayed bringing more ships into the area, Beall slowly expanded the fortifications. This work was slowed because of interference from Union-controlled portions of the river and the inadequate rail and road system supporting his position. By this time, President Davis realized that connecting the Port Hudson and Clinton railway to Jackson would be invaluable in allowing reserves to be switched between Vicksburg and Port Hudson, depending upon which was most threatened. A desperate shortage of iron and transport within the Confederacy made such construction impossible. Beall asked President Davis to impose martial law in the region of Port Hudson in order to commandeer more workers for construction, but President Davis denied this also.

[\[Siege of Port Hudson - Wikipedia\]](#)

October and November: Port Hudson is reinforced.

- The Confederates withdrew most of their troops from Baton Rouge, which could not be defended against attack by gunboats, to Port Hudson, and additional cannon were requested.
- The garrison was strengthened considerably with the arrival of exchanged confederate prisoners from Island Number 10, who were familiar with heavy artillery.
- Soon there were 2,400 men at Port Hudson.
- Lining the bluffs were 13 heavy cannon, including one rifled 32-pounder, six rifled 24-pounders, one 8-inch and one 10-inch Columbia, two 42-pounder and two 24-pounder smoothbores, and a 30-pounder Parrot.

December 13: Newly promoted Maj. General Franklin Kitchell Gardner takes command at Port Hudson.

- Gardner immediately undertook an improvement to the defenses of Port Hudson.
 - He replaced a partially constructed system of lunettes with 4 miles (6.4 km) of earthworks extending from the Mississippi River on the southwestern corner of the fort, to the easternmost portion of the knoll on which Port Hudson stood.
 - Earthworks were not constructed completely around the northern side of the fortifications, as the steep embankments were considered sufficient defense.
 - In addition to the earthworks, Gardner instructed his men to create a series of abatis.

December 17: Maj. General Nathaniel Prentiss Banks reoccupies Baton Rouge.

- Banks assumed command of the Department (and the Army) of the Gulf upon his arrival in New Orleans on December 17, 1862
 - He brought to the command some 31,000 men.
 - On November 8, Banks had been assigned command of the Department of the Gulf, including Texas, and had been ordered to recruit and organize forces in the New England states with which to reinforce with Butler in Louisiana.
 - When this task was completed, he sailed for New Orleans to assume command of the department.

- Butler left for Lowell, Massachusetts on December 24, but his 12,000 troops remained behind.

The Army of the Gulf was constituted February 23, 1862, comprising, in a general way, the territory of the Gulf States occupied by the Federal troops. [Welcher, 28-29] Maj. General Benjamin F. Butler was the first commander. He was followed by Maj. Generals Nathaniel Prentiss Banks, Stephen Augustus Hurlbut, and Edward Richard Sprigg Canby, who commanded after the close of the war. There were many separate bodies of troops scattered over the department. These were consolidated organizationally into the Army of the Gulf, which was also commanded by Butler and, in turn, Banks, Hurlbut, and Canby. Just as the Department of the Gulf was spread over a large territory, so, too, was the Army of the Gulf.

Banks was born in Waltham, Massachusetts, January 30, 1816. He received a common-school education practiced law and was a prominent member of Congress from 1853 to 1857. He was elected Speaker of the House in the Massachusetts state legislature in 1856 [Warner, 18] and was governor of Massachusetts from 1858 until 1861, and when the Civil War broke out, he was president of the Illinois Central Railroad Company, but immediately offered his services to the Government. He was made Major General of Volunteers and was appointed to the command of the Department of Annapolis, and then to the Department of the Shenandoah. In the organization of the Army of the Potomac in March 1862, he was assigned to the Fifth Corps, but his force was detached April 4, 1862, and remained in the Shenandoah Valley, where Banks had command until that corps was merged in the Army of Virginia, June 26, 1862. After the Army of Virginia was discontinued, Banks was at the head of the Military District of Washington until October 27, 1862. He succeeded Butler in command of the Department of the Gulf and was actively engaged along the lower Mississippi and Red rivers. He resigned his commission after the disastrous Red River expedition of 1864 and was reelected to Congress. In 1890, owing to an increasing mental disorder, he was obliged to retire from public life. He died at his home in Waltham, September 1, 1894.

[Army And Department Of The Gulf \(civilwarhome.com\)](http://civilwarhome.com)

Fall 1862 – Winter 1863: Port Hudson is strengthened and reinforced.

- Neither Banks nor officials in Washington, DC, had been aware that Port Hudson had been fortified, but at that time it contained 12,000 men and 21 large cannon.
- Banks had 36,000 men to secure the Mississippi; but half of them had enlisted for only nine months, and he had to garrison points from Florida to Texas's Gulf coast to assist the blockading squadrons, the river forts, New Orleans, and other fortified places on the lower Mississippi.
- New Orleans faced serious threats from western Louisiana and Mobile to the east.
- Banks forces were organized as XIX Corps comprising four divisions—
 - First Div: Maj. General Christopher Columbus Auger,
 - Second Div: Brig. General Thomas West Sherman,
 - Third Div: Brig. General William Hemsley Emory (later, at Port Hudson, Brig. General Halbert Eleazer Paine), and
 - Fourth Div: Brig. General Cuvier Grover.
 - Each division had only about 5,000 men each for field ops; the rest were on occupations duties.

Note that Brig. General Godfrey Weitzel is depicted in some accounts and maps as a division commander, but up to and during the siege of Port Hudson he commanded the 2nd Brigade of Auger's First Div. Auger

was sick during the siege and immediately upon surrender, departed to the North (not to return to the Department of the Gulf), whereupon Weitzel assumed command of First Div. [Welcher, 316-317]

Mid-December: Confederate forces again abandon Baton Rouge.

Another brigade arrives at Port Hudson, bringing strength to some 11,000. [Miles, 518]

- Acceding to a request from Farragut, Banks sends 10,000 men under Cuvier to occupy Baton Rouge.
- In Baton Rouge, Grover felt he had not the strength, organization, or transportation to assault Port Hudson with his green troops.
- While Banks dug in at Baton Rouge, many of his men fell ill and died from the inhospitable conditions, which provided him with a further reason to delay the advance against Port Hudson.
- During January 1863 officials in Washington DC expected Banks to capture Port Hudson, then march north to join Grant and seize Vicksburg.

[Miles, 514-515]

As Gardner strengthened his command and gathered reinforcements from Pemberton sent by steamboat from Vicksburg, Banks dithered in New Orleans.

- He had little faith in the system of organization and military government left by Butler's command, and spent much time re-organizing the Union administration and establishing a more relaxed civil government to placate former Confederate backers in the city.
- Banks was a "political general" and felt more comfortable with political organizing and social affairs than leading armies into the field against reputedly formidable fortifications.
 - This lack of military zeal was noted by his officers.
 - Colonel Sidney A. Bean recorded in his diary that under Butler, "much was accomplished with small means. Now nothing is accomplished with great means."

February 22: Port Hudson is further reinforced with a fourth brigade, that of Brig. General Albert Rust, which brought effective strength to some 16,000.

[Chart: Port Hudson's Batteries]

March 13: Farragut had gathered his attack force to confront Port Hudson without Army support.

- Banks slow progress and the increased Confederate activity on the Mississippi in the area of Port Hudson caused Farragut's patience to run out.
- Farragut had made fairly elaborate preparations of the vessels themselves for a night attack resembling the Battle of Forts Jackson and St. Phillip, clearing the ships for action, whitewashing the gun decks to improve visibility for night action, and bringing up mortar boats for support. He also had the anchor chains of the attacking ships lashed to the sides of the attack ships as improvised armor. He did not however, make the systematic survey of defenses and sustained bombardment that supported the battle for the passage of the forts guarding New Orleans.

- The Confederate fortress was ready for the attack, having noticed increased naval activity downriver, and the ranging shots of the six mortar schooners which covered the advance of the Union fleet near Prophet's Island, three miles (4.3 km) downriver from Port Hudson. At this time the Confederates had over twenty cannon covering the river arranged in eleven batteries of artillery, including nine batteries of heavy coastal artillery.
- *Hartford* and *Albatross* ran aground on the eastern shore beneath the Rebel batteries. Despite remaining aground for ten minutes, the two lashed-together lead ships had passed the last Confederate gun position by 12:15 am and were out of range of Port Hudson by 12:45 am.
- The rest of the fleet was not so lucky.
 - *Genesee* and *Richmond* were next in the column. A trick of the wind cleared the smoke momentarily between the batteries and the ships, and *Richmond* was hammered by Rebel shot and shell. Just as *Richmond* made the turn in the river north of Port Hudson, a 6.4-inch (163 mm) solid conical shot tore through the starboard side, smashing both port and starboard boiler safety valves. This cut power to the engines and filled the ship with clouds of escaping steam. *Genesee* alone did not have enough power to stem the current, and both ships drifted back downriver.
 - *Monongahela* and *Kineo* were next in the column, and, also blinded by smoke, ran aground on the western shore. The impact separated the two ships. The stress of backing off the shore disabled *Monongahela's* engine, and a thirty-two-pounder (14.5 kg) round shot split *Kineo's* rudder post, disabling her steering. Both ships drifted downriver.
 - *Mississippi* was last in line and also ran aground on the western shore. The large steam paddle frigate was an irresistible target, and was riddled with shot, shell, and hot shot. The vessel being afire in many places, with flames endangering the magazine, Captain Smith ordered her abandoned. The garrison of Port Hudson cheered loudly as the ship went up in flames and drifted loose from the shore and back downriver at about 3 am, panicking the remainder of the Union fleet downriver at the threat of her magazine exploding. At 5:05 am, *Mississippi* disappeared in a terrific explosion, seen in New Orleans nearly 80 miles (129 km.) downriver.
- Though *Hartford* and *Albatross* passed upriver to blockade the Red River, General Gardner and the Port Hudson garrison regarded the battle as a victory. They had sustained only three enlisted men killed, and three officers and nineteen men wounded, compared to the seventy-eight killed or missing and thirty-five wounded on the Union fleet. The blockade of the Red River also had little effect on the strength of the Port Hudson position.

March 15: Banks demonstrates weakly against Port Hudson while Farragut attempts a passage of the batteries in order to blockade the Red River.

- Farragut moved his fleet up from the lower Mississippi with a goal of patrolling the river between Vicksburg and the mouth of the Red River.
- He asked Banks to demonstrate against Port Hudson while he passed the enemy batteries there as he made his way upstream.
- On March 13, Banks started the divisions of Grover, Emory, and Auger toward Port Hudson.
- Farragut, however, succeeded in passing the batteries unaided on the night of March 24, which freed up Banks.

[Chart: Atchafalaya River and Bayou Teche]

April 9 – May 14: Banks pursues a plan to reach the rear of Port Hudson by way of the Atchafalaya River and Bayou Teche, and Alexandria, Louisiana.

- Banks would use Grover's and Emory's divisions along with Weitzel's brigade from Auger's division against Confederate units (something under 5,000 men [\[Grabau, 191\]](#)) under the overall command of Maj. General Richard Taylor, son of former President Zachary Taylor.
 - At high water, the Atchafalaya River was navigable to the Red River above Simmesport, and Bayou Teche to Opelousas. [\[Wiki\]](#)
 - The Atchafalaya is a 137-mile-long distributary of the Mississippi and Red rivers. It flows south, just west of the Mississippi River.
 - A distributary is a waterway that branches off and flows away from a main channel. Distributaries are a common feature of river deltas. The opposite of a distributary is a tributary, which flows *towards* and joins another stream. Distributaries often occur inland on alluvial fans or where a tributary stream bifurcates as it nears its confluence with a larger stream.
 - Bayou Teche is a 125-mile-long waterway that flows south from Port Barre, Louisiana, to meet the lower Atchafalaya at Patterson.
 - If no sizeable naval forces could be moved above Port Hudson or below Vicksburg, these were the only routes to the Red River, which could enable the Union to bypass Port Hudson and cut off the supplies that supported the two remaining confederate bastions on the Mississippi.
 - This move would also secure the Red River and open a future route of invasion into Texas.
 - When that mission was accomplished, Banks could turn his attention to Port Hudson.
 - Additional time was wasted planning this campaign and collecting even more troops.
- Banks prevails in the battles of Fort Bisland (April 13-14) and Irish Bend (April 14), but fails to trap Taylor, who withdraws to Opelousas [\[Grabau, 191\]](#).

- His troops reach Alexandria on May 7, where he remains for several days while attempting to work out some method of cooperation with Grant in a campaign for opening the Mississippi River.
 - Taylor's forces retreated westward, deeper into Louisiana, toward Shreveport. [\[Grabau\]](#)
 - During the siege of Port Hudson, Taylor threatened Banks' communications with New Orleans but without significant effect.
- He learned, however, that Grant had crossed his army to the east side of the Mississippi River and was then moving toward the rear of Vicksburg, and that he could expect no help from that quarter.
- Banks then had several options available to him. He could—
 - follow Taylor's Confederate forces into western Louisiana towards Shreveport, in which direction they were then moving;
 - proceed on to Vicksburg to aid Grant;
 - return to his former positions; or,
 - move against Confederate fortifications at Port Hudson.
- He decided on the latter course. [\[Welcher, 315 and 722\]](#)

May 14-17, Banks began operations to surround Port Hudson.

- Banks learned that some Confederates had been moved from Port Hudson to support the forces defending Vicksburg.
- Dividing his forces into two columns, one group approach from Alexandria while the remainder of XIX Corps advanced north from Baton Rouge.
 - The columns combined numbered about 30,000 men, outnumbering the Confederates four to one.
 - XIX Corps was composed of about equal parts of regiments from New England (mostly nine-month enlistments) and New York (mostly three-year enlistments), with a smattering from other states, including three white and an increasing number of black regiments raised in Louisiana.
 - Of Banks' 62 infantry regiments, only 36 were present on May 26, rising to 51 two weeks later.
 - His eleven brigades present formed four divisions; A Provisional (later called the Fifth) division was formed by taking one brigade each from First and Fourth Divisions, but never served as an independent unit.
 - By this time, Gardner's' troop strength had been reduced to 7,000, the majority of his forces having been ordered to Vicksburg.
 - In addition to the 1,000 heavy artillery men along the river, Gardner disposed of 5,500 infantry in 13 regiments and six battalions, one 200 man battalion of dismounted cavalry, and seven batteries containing 31 field pieces.

- Two additional batteries and eventually some heavy artillery men were pressed into service as infantry.
- His 1,500 mounted cavalry, useless in the siege, had been sent away.
- About half the garrison were Arkansans; the rest evenly provided by Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

[Perello, 156]

May 21: Johnston orders Gardner to evacuate Port Hudson and proceed to Jackson, but Gardner refuses to comply.

- He was in the process of doing so when word came that 12,000 of Banks's troops had landed north of Port Hudson, while another 20,000 were approaching from the south.
- Gardner was surrounded, and an escape was impossible.
 - Maj. General Christopher C. Augur's division advanced along Plains Store Road.
 - Early in the morning, they came to the intersection of Plains Store and Bayou Sara roads on the way to secure a landing on the river for Banks.
 - Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson's cavalry, in the lead, encountered Confederate forces under the command of Colonel Frank P. Powers and skirmishing ensued.
 - As the morning progressed, the Union infantry approached the crossroads and came under fire, bringing on a general engagement.
 - At noon, Colonel W. R. Miles set out for Plains Store with Confederate reinforcements.
 - By the time Miles arrived in the area late in the day, the fighting had ceased, the Confederate forces had retreated, and the federals were preparing camps for the night.
 - Miles attacked the Union forces and, at first, drove them, but they regrouped and counterattacked. Miles could not stand against the overwhelming Union force and retired into the Port Hudson perimeter.
 - The battle ended, and the last Confederate escape route from Fort Hudson was closed.
 - The Union victory resulted in 150 Union casualties and 100 Confederate.
- Gardner settled in for a long siege.

May 23: Port Hudson is besieged.

[Chart: Initial Union Batteries]

[Chart: 27 May Morning and Afternoon]

[Perello has an excellent, concise description of the May 27 assaults at pp. 156-163.]

May 27: Banks' first assault is repulsed.

- Banks' assault opened with a naval bombardment from vessels located both upstream and downstream from the fort.
- The infantry assaults that followed were directed against the weakly fortified left (northern) side of Gardner's perimeter.

- The Union attacks went in piecemeal, and none succeeded.
 - Timely reinforcements from the center allowed the Confederates to repulse several assaults.
- The fighting ended on the left wing before the remaining two Union divisions advanced against the Confederate center.
- Banks' force labored under some significant handicaps.
 - Many of his men were 90-day volunteers whose enlistments would expire at the end of August.
 - A high proportion of his force had not before seen combat.
 - Banks had several ineffective regimental commanders who would prove unreliable in the coming action.
 - The daylong assault went poorly from the beginning.
 - A coordinated advance instead proceeded in piecemeal fashion.
 - Union soldiers foundered over the difficult terrain.
- Banks had taken 1,995 casualties, including almost 300 fatalities' Gardner's total casualties numbered 235.
- Among the more noteworthy actions was the stout, though unsuccessful, assault made by the 1st and 3d Louisiana Native Guards, composed of African American troops.
 - This was the first time that black troops had been used in a meaningful, front-line combat situation.
 - Free blacks from New Orleans composed a majority of the First Louisiana Native Guards, including the line officers.
 - Former slaves commanded by white officers composed the Third Louisiana Native Guards.
- Banks resumed his attacks later in the day along the southern portion of the perimeter, but the delay between assaults allowed Gardner to shift forces and successfully repulse all attacks.

[\[Siege of Port Hudson | 64 Parishes\]](#)

In the fall of 1862 there were at least three Union regiments of African Americans raised in New Orleans, Louisiana: the First, Second, and Third Louisiana Native Guard. These units later became the First, Second, and Third Infantry, Corps d'Afrique, and then the Seventy-third, Seventy-fourth, and Seventy-fifth United States Colored Infantry (USCI). The First South Carolina Infantry (African Descent) was not officially organized until January 1863; however, three companies of the regiment were on coastal expeditions as early as November 1862. They would become the Thirty-third USCI. Similarly, the First Kansas Colored Infantry (later the Seventy-ninth [new] USCI) was not mustered into service until January 1863, even though the regiment had already participated in the action at Island Mound, Missouri, on October 27, 1862. These early unofficial regiments received little federal support, but they showed the strength of African Americans' desire to fight for freedom.

The first official authorization to employ African Americans in federal service was the Second Confiscation and Militia Act of July 17, 1862. This act allowed President Abraham Lincoln to receive into the military service persons of African descent and gave permission to use them for any purpose "he may judge best for the public welfare." However, the President did not authorize use of African Americans in combat until issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863: "And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions,

stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service." With these words the Union army changed.

In late January 1863, Governor John Andrew of Massachusetts received permission to raise a regiment of African American soldiers. This was the first black regiment to be organized in the North. The pace of organizing additional regiments, however, was very slow. In an effort to change this, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton sent Gen. Lorenzo Thomas to the lower Mississippi valley in March to recruit African Americans. Thomas was given broad authority. He was to explain the administration's policy regarding these new recruits, and he was to find volunteers to raise and command them. Stanton wanted all officers of such units to be white, but that policy was softened to allow African American surgeons and chaplains. By the end of the war, there were at least eighty-seven African American officers in the Union army. Thomas's endeavor was very successful, and on May 22, 1863, the Bureau of Colored Troops was established to coordinate and organize regiments from all parts of the country. Created under War Department General Order No. 143, the bureau was responsible for handling "all matters relating to the organization of Colored Troops." The bureau was directly under the Adjutant General's Office, and its procedures and rules were specific and strict. All African American regiments were now to be designated United States Colored Troops (USCT). At this time there were some African American regiments with state names and a few regiments in the Department of the Gulf designated as Corps d'Afrique. All these were ultimately assimilated into the USCT, even though a small number of the regiments retained their state designations. "Black Soldiers in the Civil War: Preserving the Legacy of United States Colored Troops", Budge Weidman, [Black Soldiers in the Civil War | National Archives](#)

June 1: Union engineers began building breastworks and fortifications, digging sap trenches, and positioning artillery for long-term bombardments.

- Several miles downriver, Union mortar boats kept up a constant barrage.
- In the course of the following weeks, Union soldiers and Confederate soldiers and civilians suffered alike.
- Union troops were poorly provisioned and housed, having come to Port Hudson unprepared for the long stay in the intense heat.
- Inside Port Hudson, the Confederates found their food reserves dwindling with every passing day.
 - Reduced to eating mules, cats, rats, and marginally nutritious grains, disease and fatigue grew prevalent in the ranks.
 - Such conditions led to waning morale in both armies, but more severely in the Union trenches where the 90-day men's enlistments would soon expire.
 - Many of these green recruits began shirking dangerous duty.

June 14: Following a heavy bombardment and a rejected surrender demand, another attack, firmly beaten off, Banks determines to starve the fortress into submission.

- The Union army attacked again at 4 A.M. The Confederates had greatly strengthened their fortifications.
 - Many Confederates had increased their firepower. Men had gathered up weapons dropped by the Federals on May 27 and now had two guns--a rifle for long range and a musket loaded with buck and ball for close work.

- The major Union effort was against the Confederate center, concentrated on a portion of the earthworks known as the Priest Cap.
 - The first assault hit the right face of the work. Some Federals got up to the Confederate trenches, and there was fierce hand-to-hand fighting.
 - Repeated assaults failed to overrun the position.
 - This first Union attack had ended by 8 o'clock.
- Soon a second assault hit the left flank of the Priest Cap. Again, there was hard fighting, but the Federals could not break through.
 - By 10 o'clock, the Union attacks on the Priest Cap had failed.
- To distract the Confederates, Banks ordered an attack on the Confederate right flank.
 - Union troops tried to break through at a position called the Citadel and the works just northeast of it. Here again the Confederates stopped the attackers.
 - By 11 o'clock, all Union attacks had ceased.
- Union losses on June 14 were greater than those on May 27. The Confederates inflicted some 1,800 casualties on the Union troops while losing fewer than 200.

Banks contented himself with regular siege operations after the failure of the June 14 assaults.

- The Federals kept up an almost constant artillery bombardment on the Confederate lines. To protect themselves, the defenders dug holes up under the sides of their trenches and in nearby ravines.
 - One Arkansan wrote in his diary that when the bombardments began, "The word then was 'rats to your holes'."
- Union sharpshooters kept the Confederate soldiers pinned down during daylight hours.
 - That same Arkansan recorded, "We are situated in a ditch, where we are compelled to sit or lie down; and when we move we crawl."
 - Most Confederate casualties fell with head wounds when they tried to peer over the parapets. The Southern sharpshooters became very proficient as well.
 - One gully occupied by Union soldiers gained the nickname Dead Man's Corner.

By late June, the Confederates had begun to run out of food.

- Union artillery fire destroyed their grist mill. The Confederates improvised by using a locomotive.
 - Placing it on blocks, they attached a belt around a rear wheel. Starting the engine, they were able to get a mill going. Union attempts to knock out the engine with artillery fire failed.
- When Union shells destroyed a warehouse, the Confederates moved their supply of peas to the little Methodist church in town. The peas filled the structure to the tops of the pews.
- Beef supplies were gone by late June. The Confederates began to look for substitutes.
 - A member of the garrison wrote shortly after the surrender: "The last quarter ration of beef had been given out to the troops on the 29th of June."

- On the 1st of July, at the request of many officers, a wounded mule was killed and cut up for experimental eating. All those who partook of it spoke highly of the dish.
 - The flesh of mules is of a darker color than beef, of a finer grain, quite tender and juicy, and has a flavor something between that of beef and venison.
 - There was an immediate demand for this kind of food, and the number of mules killed by the commissariat daily increased.
 - Some horses were also slaughtered, and their flesh was found to be very good eating, but not equal to mule.
 - Rats, of which there were plenty about the deserted camps, were also caught by many officers and men, and were found to be quite a luxury—superior, in the opinion of those who eat them, to spring chicken.
- Historian Bell I. Wiley wrote that the deprivation experienced by the Confederates at Port Hudson was worse than by the men at Vicksburg.
- Gardner and his officers sought means to keep up morale.
 - One Confederate recalled: "The sugar and molasses was put to good use by the troops in making a weak description of beer, which was constantly kept at the lines by the barrel-full, and drank by the soldiers in preference to the miserable water with which they were generally supplied. This was a very pleasant and healthful beverage and went far to recompense the men for the lack of almost every other comfort or luxury."
 - The conditions became too much for many Confederates, and hundreds deserted as the siege progressed.
- Morale became low in the Union army as well.
 - Twenty of Banks' regiments had enlisted for nine months, and their terms of service ended in mid- to late-June.
 - Many of these soldiers felt they had been sacrificed in the assaults of May 27 and June 14.
 - They openly expressed their discontent on several occasions.
 - Relations between the nine-month men and the three-year troops became strained.
 - One regiment [4th Massachusetts] mutinied and was disarmed.
 - Other regiments came close to mutiny, and Banks placed a number of officers and enlisted men under arrest.
 - Discontent with Banks' leadership was not limited to the nine-month units.
 - One soldier wrote, "We are poorly led and uselessly slaughtered. All of the brains are within and not before Port Hudson."

[*\[Siege of Port Hudson - Wikipedia and The Siege of Port Hudson: "Forty Days and Nights in the Wilderness of Death" \(Teaching with Historic Places\) \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)\]*](#)

July 7: News reaches Port Hudson that Vicksburg has capitulated.

- Surrender talks are conducted the following day.

July 9: Confederate forces at Port Hudson stack arms.

- In the end, the Union suffered an estimated 5,000 killed and wounded, along with another 5,000 dead of disease.
- Confederate losses totaled some 7,500 — 750 killed and wounded, 200 dead of disease, and 6,500 taken prisoner.

Why was the siege of Port Hudson important?

- Port Hudson's surrender was the final blow in a week of catastrophe for the Confederacy.
 - On July 3, 1863, General Robert E. Lee's second invasion of the North was turned back at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.
 - The following day Vicksburg surrendered, and a Confederate drive through Arkansas was halted at Helena.
 - Five days later came the surrender of Port Hudson.
- The surrender of Port Hudson's Confederate garrison gave the North undisputed control of the Mississippi River.
- Port Hudson was also the longest "genuine" siege in American military history — 48 days.
- Finally, at Port Hudson, black soldiers in the regular United States army first participated in a major assault and demonstrated that they would and could fight with discipline and valor for their freedom from slavery.
 - Their example was used as propaganda to recruit more blacks into the Union army.
 - At the time, this episode was more celebrated than the attack of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry against Fort Wagner near Charleston.
 - Eventually nearly 180,000 blacks served.

[Hewitt, "Port Hudson, Louisiana"]

Gardner's command of Port Hudson is considered by many military historians as an example of an outstanding defense of a fortification besieged by a much larger army.

- Major General Richard Taylor, who commanded the Confederacy's Western District of Louisiana during the Siege of Port Hudson, considered Gardner a victim of the faulty Confederate military policy of immobilizing a large fighting force within a stationary fortification.
 - This was the same defensive policy followed by Pemberton at Vicksburg, and it created the same unfortunate results for the Confederacy at Port Hudson as it did at Vicksburg.
- Confederate soldiers idolized Gardner, and newspapers called him a good fighter. However, he was criticized for the caretaking of his troops.
- Historian John D. Winter, in *The Civil War in Louisiana* (1963), described Gardner's surrender at Port Hudson, accordingly:

"Gardner had defended Port Hudson to the utmost of his ability. After more than forty days of merciless pounding from the [Union] fleet and land batteries, his men were exhausted and dispirited. Improperly clothed, sheltered, and fed, they sickened, and there was no medicine for them. Hope that Johnston would send relief grew fainter as each day of the siege progressed. As Gardner's meager supply of ammunition was nearly exhausted, many of his guns were wrecked, and his food stock was dangerously low, the news of the surrender of Vicksburg decided the fate of Port Hudson [too]."

Why has Port Hudson gotten less attention than Vicksburg?

- The 48-day siege of port Hudson was the longest in American history.
- The beleaguered Confederates, fewer and number and poorer an arms and supplies than their comrades in Vicksburg, fought desperately under the most wretched conditions imaginable defend off two determined, albeit poorly executed, assaults.
- The capitulation of Port Hudson was overshadowed by the surrender of Vicksburg and the crushing confederate defeated Gettysburg, which occurred simultaneously.
- Port Hudson lacks Vicksburg's antebellum constituency. Never settled by rich planters, the town was in decline even as the Civil War started.

[Miles, 503]

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