



VICKSBURG UNDER SIEGE

From a bluff on the Mississippi's east bank, the big coastal guns of Vicksburg ruled a hairpin bend in the river. For two years, those cannons kept supplies flowing in from the western Confederacy to its field armies. In early 1863, Ulysses S. Grant got the job of capturing Vicksburg and splitting the Rebel states in two.

THE GAMBLE. Grant's overland march had been turned back by daring Confederate raids on his supply lines, so he moved by water instead. Grant camped his army just upstream from Vicksburg. Trouble was—he was on the wrong side of the river from the town. Its big guns and the surrounding swamps and bayous made it impossible to get to dry ground east of Vicksburg for an attack.

All winter and spring, Grant's army and the navy's gunboats tried one failed scheme after another to get at the city. Stump-clogged canals, floods, tangled forests, and Confederate gunners turned back every Yankee plan. Grant, by April, was ready to take a daring risk.

He would cross the river to dry land east and south of Vicksburg using the navy's steamboats. But first those transports had to pass by Vicksburg's bristling cannons. In the inky darkness of April 16, 1863, Admiral David Porter ran his gunboats and transports under the Rebel guns. An Iowan on one of the transports watched the Rebel gunners open up on his ship: "Their men...fire and yell as if every shot sunk a steamboat.... Down on the river it is a sheet of flame.... It was as if hell itself were loose that night on the Mississippi...."

Still, nearly all the Union ships made it through. After a quick march down the swampy west bank, Grant finally got his 41,000 men across the Mississippi. Vicksburg's commander, General John C. Pemberton, failed to attack when Grant came ashore.

Surprising the Rebels, Grant took his army inland, feeding his troops easily from the rich local farms and plantations. Pemberton couldn't cut Grant's supply lines—there were none. Instead, the Yankees defeated Pemberton twice in battles at Champion's Hill and Big Black River. Pemberton's 32,000 Confederates were soon trapped in Vicksburg's trenches.

A BLOODY STALEMATE. Grant thought he could smash through the seven-mile-long ring of Confederate defenses. On May 19, William T. Sherman's corps charged the earthworks, but the Yankees were soon pinned down under a fierce Confederate fire. One Union officer, Charles Ewing, was wounded while saving his regiment's flag. Three color bearers had been shot before him, and the banner had been shredded by fifty-five bullets.

BLACK COMBAT UNITS



For the first two years of the war, blacks helped the military efforts of both sides. In the South, many Confederate soldiers refused to do heavy manual labor. The government used slaves, rented from their owners, to build everything: trenches, roads, even prison camps. The Union, too, employed both free blacks and escaped slaves in its military work force. They drove wagons, unloaded supplies, and served on burial details.

At the start of the war, some Northern blacks formed volunteer companies and tried to enlist. But the army rejected them. It seemed that only white soldiers could fight to restore the Union and wipe out slavery. Later, though, as casualty lists lengthened and recruits evaporated, that position changed. Many Northern politicians began to call for blacks to fight in their own cause. President Lincoln authorized the full-scale recruitment of black soldiers in 1862.

After the first two regiments, the 54th and 55th Massachusetts, were organized, other units were formed in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut.

Along the Southern seacoast, freed slaves were eager to enlist in the fight. Black troops served in all theaters of the war. They fought at Milliken's Bend, Port Hudson, and Fort Pillow in the West and outside Richmond and Petersburg in the East.

The bravery of the 54th Massachusetts, in particular, won wide praise after a battle outside Charleston, South Carolina. During hand-to-hand combat, Sergeant William Carney rescued the U.S. flag, picking it up from a fallen color bearer, saving it from capture. Hit four times and covered with blood, he still managed to crawl back to the Union lines. Thirty years after his brave act, Carney was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.



The Stars and Stripes flies over Vicksburg's courthouse. The Union victory put the whole Mississippi River in Union hands.

Grant lost nearly a thousand men in the futile attack. Three days later, though, he tried again. An Iowa adjutant remembered: "It was a tornado of iron on our left, a hurricane of shot on our right. We passed through the mouth of hell. Every third man fell, either killed or wounded."

A few brave soldiers made it into the Rebel trenches, but most were shot down long before they reached the defenders. Another 3,200 men were soon out of action—100 of them killed. A reporter overheard Grant say quietly, "We'll have to dig our way in."

THE SIEGE. For the next six weeks, Grant's men shoveled their way toward the Rebel lines. More than 200 Union cannons kept up a steady bombardment. The falling shells kept the Rebel soldiers crouched in their trenches, and Vicksburg's civilians had to go underground. They dug hot, cramped caves in the yellow clay hillsides, so many that Union soldiers took to calling Vicksburg "Prairie Dog Village."

With food supplies running out and his soldiers fad-

ing fast, Pemberton had run out of choices. With no hope of rescue from General Joe Johnston's relief army, Pemberton asked Grant for surrender terms. On July 4, 1863, more than 30,000 Rebel soldiers stacked arms and marched out of fallen Vicksburg.

"The fiery shower of shells goes on, day and night.... People do nothing but eat what they can get, sleep when they can, and dodge the shells."

—A Vicksburg resident

Added to the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg the day before, Vicksburg's capture struck the South a deadly blow. Grant's victory had opened the Mississippi and cut the Confederacy in two.



CHICKAMAUGA; CHATTANOOGA

Since their narrow defeat at Shiloh in April 1862, the Confederates had had mixed success in Tennessee. After being forced back out of Kentucky in October 1862, Rebel General Braxton Bragg had surprised the Union Army of the Cumberland at Stones' River, south of Nashville.

TERRIBLE CHICKAMAUGA. The attack nearly destroyed the Yankees, but they managed to regroup and throw back the Confederates, who lost 12,000 men—a full third of their army. Union troops under General William Rosecrans then captured the key rail center of Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The two armies met again on September 19, 1863, when they stumbled into a bloody fight north of Chickamauga Creek just over the Tennessee line in Georgia. One soldier described the horror of the battle: *"...in that awful roar the voice of a man cannot be heard ten feet away. Men fall to the right and left. The line stumbles over corpses as it hurries on. There are flashes in the*

smoke cloud, terrible explosions in the air, and men are stepped on or leaped over as they throw up their arms and fall upon the grass..."

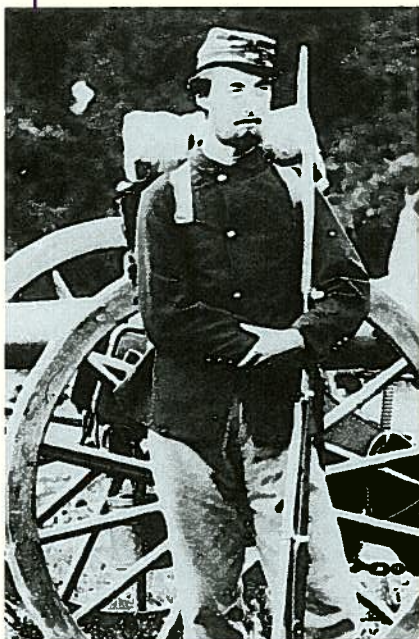
That night, in bitter cold, soldiers lay clutching their rifles, kept awake by the moans of the wounded from both sides. The following morning, the Confederates struck the Union left flank in a series of furious charges. Screaming the Rebel yell, Bragg's men surged up to the Yankees' log breastworks but were blown back by a whirlwind of rifle and canister fire.

Then disaster struck the Union forces. Rosecrans mistakenly ordered one of his divisions out of line to help his left flank, leaving a quarter-mile hole in the blue line. Confederate General James Longstreet chose that moment to hurl five of his divisions directly into the gap. The entire Federal right flank came apart in a panic. The few blue units that stood and fought were overwhelmed by the Confederate tidal wave.

Rosecrans and half his army choked the road back to Chattanooga in a flood of frightened men and panicked horses. But Union Major General George Thomas was not yet ready to leave the bloody slopes—his troops still hung on, grimly defending Snodgrass Hill. They fought nearly every brigade in Bragg's army that afternoon, dwindling from a force of 25,000 to fewer than 10,000. By the end of the day, George Thomas' stubbornness had saved what was left of the Federal army.

SURROUNDED IN CHATTANOOGA. The two days of fighting at Chickamauga Creek had devastated both armies. Their

GUNS AND BULLETS



The soldiers on both sides used a weapon called a "rifled musket." Older muskets from the Revolution and War of 1812 had smooth barrels and fired a round ball. Rifled muskets had longer, thinner, grooved barrels. These spun the conical bullet, or minié ball, so that it traveled farther and more accurately. The old muskets could barely hit a target at 100 yards; the new rifled muskets could shoot accurately up to 500 yards and kill out to a half mile.

Unfortunately for Civil War soldiers, their commanders' tactics did not keep up with their new weapons. In Napoleon's era, soldiers could march in solid ranks up to an enemy's line, absorb maybe just one killing volley, then rush their opponents before much more damage could be done.

Against Civil War rifled muskets, though, men in the attacking column could be killed by the

defenders while still half a mile away. A trained infantryman could get off at least two shots a minute, so the attackers would be hit again and again as they tried to close the range. The result, as happened at Chickamauga, was often a slaughter, especially when the defenders fired from behind earthworks.

Cavalrymen shot their opponents from the saddle with revolvers or slashed at riders with sabers. But cavalry were most effective when they fought dismounted, using rapid-firing carbines that could be loaded from the breech, or rear, of the barrel.

Bayonets, the long steel knives attached to the end of a rifle, were used more for appearance than effect in the Civil War. Most troops never got close enough to use them on the enemy. But if a charge did succeed, the defenders would usually run away rather than face a massed bayonet assault.

Union soldiers warm themselves by a small fire. As troops moved farther into enemy territory, their living conditions grew more brutal. More died from disease than from combat.

combined losses in killed, wounded, or captured soared to more than 30,000 men. The survivors of both armies were exhausted. The Yankees staggered safely back into the trenches around Chattanooga. The Confederates rested on the surrounding hills, hoping to starve their enemies into surrender. The hungry and nearly surrounded Union troops were betting their survival on the arrival of Ulysses S. Grant. If he didn't come soon, the game would be up.

"...we can die but once. This is the time and place."

*— Union commander
William H. Lytle,
killed at Chickamauga*

It took Grant nearly a month to reach Chattanooga. By then the Rebels had choked off nearly all supplies. One reporter wrote: "I have often seen hundreds of soldiers following behind the wagon trains...picking out of the mud the crumbs of bread...shaken loose as the wagons rattled by."

Once in Chattanooga, Grant quickly ordered a surprise night attack to open a new supply route. His grateful men called it "the Cracker Line," after the boxes of "hardtack" (hard crackers) rations that it now delivered. Fresh relief troops flooded in, too, from the Army of the Potomac.

BREAKING THE SIEGE. Grant was soon ready to go after Bragg and end the siege. First, the Union commander ordered Joe Hooker to sweep the Rebels off Lookout Mountain, where their guns pointed down on Chattanooga. On November 24, 1863, Hooker's men shoved the Confederates off Lookout in a fight obscured by a thick fog.

To the east, the main Confederate army looked down on Chattanooga from the heights of Missionary Ridge, strongly held with cannon and infantry. Grant ordered Thomas' troops to create a diversion in front of the ridge. In the meantime, General Sherman could strike Bragg's flank from the right and capture the heights.

Sherman found the heights swarming with Confederates who refused to budge. They pinned the Yankees down under a hail of bullets and cannon fire. Grant ordered Thomas' 25,000 troops to charge to take some of the pressure off Sherman. And Thomas' soldiers, who had saved the day at Chickamauga, once again stunned everyone on both sides.



Their orders were to stop at the base of the ridge, but these Yankees kept on going, scrambling right up the slope of the hill, right into the hotbed of Rebel fire.

Grant protested to Thomas that his men would be slaughtered, but before they could be stopped, the wild Yankee attack rolled right up Missionary Ridge. Men clambered over rocks, grabbed bushes, and stabbed bayonets into the ground as handholds, heading for the Rebel line. The Confederates on the crest panicked, and the Yankees tumbled over the breastworks and sent the defenders flying.

Bragg himself was nearly captured by the Yankees. His army was broken in two. The Confederates had lost another 6,700 men and any hopes they had of retaking Chattanooga. General Grant now had the initiative, and he would never give it back.



THE BLEEDING WAR

Alone among Union generals, Grant had been genuinely successful. Lincoln placed him in charge of all Union armies early in 1864.

ON THE MOVE. The Union commander planned out his strategy: Federal forces would make four moves against the Confederate field armies. One Union army would attack up the James River toward Richmond. Another would advance from Harpers Ferry up the Shenandoah Valley to capture this Rebel breadbasket. From Chattanooga, Sherman would march on the rail and industrial center of Atlanta. Grant himself would join Meade for a showdown in Virginia with Robert E. Lee.

Lee's strategy was also a simple one. Since he was outnumbered, he would try to entice Grant into attacking into the teeth of the strong Confederate defenses. Lee hoped he could fight Grant to a bloody draw, inflicting so many casualties that the North would weary of the war's high human cost. If Lincoln were defeated in the upcoming November elections, Lee believed the new

government might finally let the Southern states leave the Union in peace.

THE WILDERNESS. George Meade's Army of the Potomac, with Grant directing its movements, crossed Virginia's Rapidan River on May 4, 1864. Grant hoped to march quickly through the tangled, scrubby forest known as the Wilderness, site of the 1863 Union defeat at Chancellorsville. The Union soldiers camped amid the skeletons of those who died in that battle. Their bones had been washed from shallow graves by winter rains.

Lee aimed to catch Grant's 100,000-strong army in this Wilderness. Here the Yankee advantage in numbers—Lee had just 60,000—would be offset by dense woods.

On May 5, Lee's Army of Northern Virginia struck at Grant out of the tangled thickets. The Federals threw them back and counterattacked, but no general, not even Grant, could control an army in such a dense forest. The smoke from a hundred thousand rifles blanketed the thick underbrush, and muzzle flashes in the murk often were the only signs of the enemy.

Veterans remembered the Wilderness for the continuing, deafening roar of musketry—it overwhelmed orders, battle cries, and the screams of the wounded.

Soon, the heavy gunfire and shelling set the dry leaves and brush ablaze on the forest floor. The wounded

PRISONERS OF WAR

In every battle, gray and blue soldiers were left behind, cut off from friendly units or surrounded by enemies in the confusion of battle. If they were unlucky, they wound up as prisoners of war.



Occasionally, whole garrisons surrendered together. At Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, in 1862 during the Antietam campaign, Stonewall Jackson surrounded and captured

12,000 Union troops. Ulysses S. Grant took the "unconditional surrender" of more than 12,000 Confederates at Fort Donelson in Tennessee. All of these men were marched to prison camps, North and South.

Until 1864, these men were held for only a few months before being exchanged. Because most prisoners were held for only a short time, both sides failed to devote much attention to the care of prisoners. In Northern camps, the harsh weather, crowded conditions, and lack of blankets and shelter made thousands of Rebel prisoners sick. At Rock Island, Illinois, 1,800 Confederates died of raging smallpox. In Maryland, at Point Lookout, Rebel prisoners were reduced to catching rats to fill the gaps left by meager rations.

The prisoner exchange system broke down in early 1864, when Confederate authorities refused to free captured black soldiers in exchange for Southern soldiers. Instead,

captured blacks were returned to slavery in the South. General Grant ordered a halt to prisoner exchanges.

The Southern camps were, in many cases, not much worse than those up North. But food shortages in the South made conditions very harsh for Union prisoners, especially toward the close of the war. Two camps were particularly infamous. Belle Isle, a muddy pen in the James River in Richmond, was a deathtrap for thousands—90 percent of the survivors weighed less than 100 pounds.

Even worse was Andersonville, in Georgia. Designed for 10,000 prisoners, by August 1864 the stockade held 33,000 Yankees. Diseases, malnutrition, and lack of medical care killed them by the thousands. One day saw Union boys dying at a rate of one every eleven minutes. By war's end, 13,000 prisoners had been buried in Andersonville's mass graves.



General Grant (leaning over bench) consults a map with officers. He now had a hold on Lee's army and would not let go.

who were able crawled desperately to escape the flames. The rest suffocated or burned to death. In the choking smoke and growing darkness, the two armies grappled for position and a little sleep before dawn reignited the fight.

HANCOCK'S CHARGE. The next morning, Union General Winfield Scott Hancock, who had turned back Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg, drove deep into Lee's right flank. The Yankees were within sight of Rebel supply wagons. Robert E. Lee was standing in his stirrups, trying to rally his men at a small farm clearing. For a moment it looked as if Hancock's men would break Lee's army, but Longstreet came up with reinforcements just in time.

Lee tried to lead the Texas Brigade into the fight personally, but the men refused to go in unless Lee pulled himself out of danger. "Lee to the rear! Go back, General Lee, go back! We won't go unless you go back."

Then the Texans charged and drove Hancock's troops back into the thickets. Soon the Yankees were backed up to their own log breastworks, hanging on against the Rebels while the wooden barricades caught fire from the burning underbrush.

Late in the day, Longstreet and Gordon swept out of the Wilderness on both of Grant's flanks, smashing the Union lines on left and right. Only darkness and the acci-

dental wounding of Longstreet (shot by his own men, like Stonewall Jackson the year before) kept Grant's army from defeat at Lee's hands.

NO RETREAT. In two days of confused but savage fighting, Grant's army lost 17,600 men, more than twice Lee's casualties. The Union toll of killed and wounded was

"Whatever happens, we will not retreat."

*—Ulysses S. Grant
in a message to Lincoln*

worse than either Fredericksburg or Chancellorsville. But Grant, with 100,000 men, knew he could absorb such losses. Lee could find no replacements.

In the past, the Army of the Potomac would have retreated after such a savage fight to refit and regroup. But this was a new commander. On the evening of May 7, Grant started his army not north but south, in a move out of the Wilderness and around Lee's right flank. The Union soldiers knew what this meant—they were not turning back. "Our spirits rose," one soldier recalled. "We marched free. The men began to sing."



SPOTSYLVANIA; COLD HARBOR; PETERSBURG

After the blood-
letting at the Wilderness, Grant wanted to push past Lee
and move on to Richmond. But Lee knew what Grant
was after and moved again and again to thwart him.

SPOTSYLVANIA. First Grant marched southeast, aiming for the road junction of Spotsylvania Courthouse. Lee guessed his move and sent two corps racing ahead on parallel roads. The Confederates won the footrace and quickly dug in behind earth and log breastworks.

For the next four days Grant probed at Lee's entrenchments, while the Rebel commander hoped for a chance to smash Grant's attack. On May 12, 1864, Grant

sent two army corps—nearly 20,000 men—against a salient, a part of Lee's lines that jutted forward toward the Union army. Charging out of the predawn mist, the Yankees overran the position, breaking Lee's lines wide open. But a desperate counterattack directed by Lee himself stalled the Union attack. The two sides became locked in a brutal struggle that lasted nearly until midnight. One Union general remembered huge trees tumbling to the ground, cut in half from the incessant firing. "We had not only shot down an army, we had shot down a forest...."

Between them the two armies had lost 12,000 men. Early the next morning Lee was forced to order his army to fall back. The Rebels stood ever closer to Richmond, while Grant continued to dog them.

COLD HARBOR. From Spotsylvania, Grant pressed the Army of the Potomac to the southeast, forcing Lee back toward Richmond. While Grant could never trap Lee in the open to finish him off, the Confederate general was weakening in his retreat. The Army of Northern Virginia had lost so many division and corps commanders that Lee could no longer take the offensive—even when good opportunities to defeat Grant presented themselves.

On June 1, the two armies collided again ten miles northeast of Richmond, at a crossroads called Cold Harbor. Once again, Lee had time to dig in before Grant

LETTERS HOME

Most of the soldiers in the Civil War were raised in rural America. Some were not formally educated at all; many others were lucky if they got through the eighth grade in a one-room schoolhouse.

eve of battle. For too many, these poignant letters became a soldier's last words to his family and friends.

The following letter was written by Major Sullivan Ballou of the Union's 2nd Rhode Island Regiment to his wife in Smithfield.

"Dear Sarah:

The indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days, perhaps tomorrow and lest I should not be able to write again, I feel impelled to write a few lines that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more....

I have no misgiving about, or lack of confidence in the cause in which I am engaged and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American Civilization now leans on the triumph of the Government, and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and sufferings of the Revolution.

And I am willing—perfectly willing—to lay down all my joys in this life, to help maintain this Government, and to pay that debt.

Sarah, my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me with mighty cables that nothing but Omnipotence can break; and yet my love of Country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly with all these chains to the battle field.

But, Oh, Sarah! if the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they loved, I shall always be near you...and if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath, as the cool air fans your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by. Sarah, do not mourn me dead; think I am gone and wait for me, for we shall meet again...."

Major Ballou did not survive the campaign. He was killed on July 21, 1861.



It was surprising, then, how many wrote letters home and how frequently they put pen to paper. Just like today, soldiers wrote to break the monotony and to make sure that they received mail in return. Many soldiers tried to put down their most private thoughts on the



A Confederate soldier lies dead in the trenches at Petersburg, Virginia. Lee's army held on but could no longer attack.

could strike with his superior numbers. Grant did little to prepare for battle. He simply ordered the troops to advance at dawn. Grant's generals were left to figure out for themselves a way to break through Lee's lines. The lack of a real plan left its impression on the Union ranks. The night before the attack a Union staff officer saw the men "calmly writing their names and home addresses on slips of paper and pinning them on the backs of their coats, so that their bodies might be recognized...."

In the gray light of dawn, half of Grant's army, more than 60,000 men, came pounding toward the Rebel lines, screaming as they ran. When the attackers got within rifle range, Lee's empty-looking trenches suddenly filled with black slouch hats, and muskets appeared over the parapets. All at once, the Rebel lines blazed with a solid sheet of flame. "It seemed more like a volcanic blast than a battle," one Union officer wrote.

The Yankees didn't stand a chance in that crossfire. Only a few made it to the Rebel trenches, and they were quickly thrown back. The attack was a complete failure. In the first eight minutes, 7,000 of Grant's men were killed or wounded. It was the only attack Grant would ever admit regretting.

THE SIEGE OF PETERSBURG. Just south of Richmond, the town of Petersburg was Lee's lifeline. If Grant could capture its rail lines, he would cut off the Rebel capital and force Lee to come out and fight. Grant's failure at Cold Harbor had convinced him not to try to go through Lee's army. Now he planned yet another march around it.

Grant's army slipped away from Lee in mid-June, dropping down across the James River to come up at Petersburg. On June 15, before Lee could react, 18,000 Yankee troops were approaching the town's hollow defense lines. That evening a regiment brushed aside a few Confederates and captured over a mile of their trenches. Richmond's back door was now wide open.

But it soon slammed shut. Rebel General Beauregard managed to plug the gap, holding the line against a series of badly run Union attacks. On June 18, the lead elements of Lee's army filed into a new defense line closer to Petersburg, throwing up a wall before Grant's advance.

During the rest of that summer of 1864, the two armies dug their parallel trenches farther south and west around Petersburg. Grant tried to cut the rail lines into the city from the south. Lee counterattacked, keeping Union troops from reaching his last two railroads.

In July, Lee sent Jubal Early on a raid into Maryland, hoping to draw Grant off to defend Washington. On July 12, "Old Jube" and his 10,000 gray infantry were inside the District of Columbia, testing the strength of the Union defense lines around the city. Early's men were turned back by reinforcements rushed north by Grant.

Rebels did succeed, however, in bringing President Lincoln under fire as he stood on the walls of Fort Stevens, observing the attack. "Get down, you damn fool!" a Union officer scolded Lincoln as the bullets whizzed by, hitting a man not three feet away.