

# The Sentinel

## Vicksburg: Was the War Won Here?

Greg Biggs of the Clarksville, Tennessee, Civil War Roundtable graciously took the long drive to Bloomington to share his thoughts on the Vicksburg Campaign and its importance in the outcome of the Civil War. As any buff will tell you, two of the most important events of the war, the culmination of Grant's siege at Vicksburg and the Battle of Gettysburg in the Eastern Theater, essentially happened simultaneously. For most of the years since April 1865 history and its "keepers" have placed huge importance on Gettysburg. Vicksburg, while acknowledged as crucial in the war effort, always drew "second banana" status. Greg's contention, and one that is gaining ground in historical circles every year now, is that Gettysburg was at least the second-most important event and perhaps even third. Vicksburg is, he says, perhaps the single most important event because it cut the Confederacy in two, made the trans-Mississippi area a non-factor, and elevated the Generals that Lincoln had been seeking for two years—Grant, and his colleague Sherman—to positions where they could wage the kind of campaign that their commander-in-chief had wanted for some time.

There isn't room in this short article to cover the details of the Vicksburg Campaign as ably as Gregg did in his presentation. Not only was it a long campaign, it was also complicated by the machinations (or lack thereof) of the Confederates and their inability to recognize the basic goal they should have had—to save what they could of the CSA force in the west and live to fight another day. Instead, they chose to take a defensive action in what was, in the end, the "island" of the city of Vicksburg, surrounded on all four sides by either Union naval or ground forces. Rather than explore details, let's look at some of the significant factors of the campaign and interesting points to ponder surrounding it.

**The River** — Because of the importance of the Mississippi River in the movement of critical foods from the Midwest, especially King Corn, controlling this waterway was crucial. While the Confederacy certainly knew this to some extent, it did not take it seriously enough. As soon as Grant was able to make it past the defenses on the river at Vicksburg, the South was divided and would never reunite. Once this happened, it became obvious to Grant that what he had to do was to concentrate on the Confederate forces there. He no longer had to worry about the trans-Mississippi assisting in any defense east of the river. Had the South recognized this earlier and concentrated their forces on one side of the river or the other,

they may well have been successful against the Union

**The Myth of Southern Recognition** — Many have argued, and continue to do so, that the South could have won the war had they received diplomatic recognition and, thus, aid from a major foreign power most often identified as Great Britain. It is Greg's contention that that notion was simply a pipe dream and would never have happened. The Confederacy had already lost large chunks of territory it controlled in Kentucky and Tennessee. The loss of Vicksburg sealed its fate, since no foreign power would recognize a new nation with ill-defined and even fluid borders.



Greg Biggs

**Ulysses Grant** — Although continually assailed by accusations of drunkenness and ill-advised tactics, Grant was perhaps the Union's best weapon, if for no other reason than his dogged determination to get the job done he was sent to do—conquer the forces at Vicksburg. First, he tried the DeSoto Canal bypass of the city. When that didn't work, he tried the Yazoo Pass route, then the Steele's Bayou Route. Virtually all other Union commanders before, east or west, would have given up when all these failed. Not Grant. He next chose to drop south of the city and work his way northward. This worked, representing a focused determination that was the quality that eventually sent Grant east to win the war for Lincoln. Grant also paid attention to detail. He made sure his supply lines remained intact. He remained very mobile at all times, and he cooperated extremely well with the Navy. When the Army and Navy worked together during the war, they were successful.

**Confederate Leaders' Ineptitude** — Southern leaders simply made mistake after mistake. Had CSA commanding General John C. Pemberton decided to go after Grant as soon as he crossed the river and headed toward Jackson, chances are good he could have beaten him. Pemberton and Confederate President Jeff Davis failed to recognize that when Grant bypassed Vicksburg they had lost control of the Mississippi River and that the city had become indefensible. At that point they could have decided that it was more important to save whatever forces they had by abandoning Vicksburg and live to

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## Vicksburg, continued

fight another day. But they both stubbornly, and foolishly, held on to the belief that Vicksburg was the bastion of the South and key to its survival. Moreover, Davis as micro-manager refused to create military departments that both made sense and cooperated with each other. The South became a victim of “localitis” in his management style.



Before the October meeting, guest speaker Greg Biggs chats with Roundtable members Kevin Shiftlet, John Crosby and Steve Rolfe,

## Civil War's 150<sup>th</sup> is Here!

[From *Civil War Traveler*] This is the 150th anniversary of John Brown's Raid at Harpers Ferry, and for many this event begins the sesquicentennial commemoration of the Civil War. Special programs are scheduled at the park and at various other locations until the end of the year. A major exhibition, “The Portent: John Brown's Raid in American Memory,” opens October 10 at the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond. For details and links, go to [www.civilwartraveler.com](http://www.civilwartraveler.com).

## By the way . . .

- Clicking on a web page address listed in *The Sentinel* will link to the site via your browser.
- Our web master Rick Watson is developing a new website for the Roundtable with a new and shorter address.
- Our web page is a great place to find and read old copies of *The Sentinel*.

## Next Month

Join us on Tuesday, November 10, at 7:00 p.m. at the Monroe County History Center for the first of our new series, *Legacy Profiles*, to hear two members and frequent presenters talk about their families in the war. Corporal Charles Thomas Shanner, Company A, 63rd Regular Indiana Volunteers, was the great, great grandfather of John Crosby, and Captain Ephraim W. Wiley, Company H, 8th Maine Volunteers, was the grandfather of MCCWR President David Wiley.

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### Executive Committee

Ray Beeker, Deborah Cronin, John Crosby, Allan Sather, Rick Watson, Carol Wise  
On the web at <http://mypage.iu.edu/~rawatson/roundtable/> Web master, Rick Watson.

A new web address is being planned!

Mailing address: MCCWR, c/o Monroe County History Center, 202 E. 6<sup>th</sup> St. Bloomington, IN 47408

## “Maps-in-Motion” at CWPT

The Civil War Preservation Trust, along with the wonderful work they do in helping to preserve Civil War battlefields threatened with development or other forms of loss, has introduced a new series of battlefield maps showing Confederate and Union movements in motion as the battles progress. These fascinating maps make understanding the battles much easier. Their latest effort is on the Battle of Fredericksburg. See all of them at [www.civilwar.org](http://www.civilwar.org), and consider supporting the important efforts of the CWPT.

## CW Soldiers Found and Reinterred with Honors

The remains of a Civil War soldier from New York that was discovered by a hiker on the battlefield at Antietam near Sharpsburg, Maryland, almost a year ago was returned to his home state of New York recently for proper burial with full military honors. The service took place on September 17, the 147<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bloodiest day of the war, at the National Cemetery in Schuylerville, New York. For details of this remarkable event, go to <http://www.military.com/news/article/army-news/remains-of-civil-war-gi-returned-home.html>. Also, an unknown soldier was found on the Battlefield at Franklin, Tennessee, and recently was reinterred there in a three-day ceremony designed to honor all of the fallen soldiers of that battle on both sides. Details are at <http://www.franklin-stfb.org/upcoming.htm>.

## Civil War Conference in Nashville, Tennessee

There will be a Civil War conference in Nashville's historic Ft. Negley Park, one of the only remaining fortifications for the city that was built in the Civil War. This educational event will be held on Saturday, November 21, and it runs from 8:30 a.m. through 4:30 p.m. Included in the conference is a tour and lunch and the fee is only \$40 (before November 1st) and \$45 thereafter. Seating is limited and it is first come, first in. For more information and details, contact our October speaker, Gregg Biggs, at [biggs@charter.net](mailto:biggs@charter.net)