The Vicksburg Campaign: March 29 May 18, 1863

Jeff T. Giambrone

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr>

Recommended Citation

Giambrone, Jeff T. (2014) "The Vicksburg Campaign: March 29 May 18, 1863," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 1 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.16.1.25

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol16/iss1/24>

Review

Giambrone, Jeff T.

Winter 2014

Woodworth, Steven E. and Grear, Charles. *The Vicksburg Campaign: March 29 – May 18, 1863.* Southern Illinois University Press, \$32.50 ISBN 9780809332694

An Essay Collection Providing a New Look at a New Campaign

In *The Vicksburg Campaign: March 29 – May 18, 1863*, editors Steven E. Woodworth and Charles D. Grear have assembled a book made up of articles from a number of noted historians about one of the most complex and interesting operations of the Civil War: General Ulysses S. Grant's 1863 campaign against Fortress Vicksburg.

The articles in this book deal with the events prior to the siege of Vicksburg, the importance of which is spelled out clearly in the introduction:

It lasted only seven and a half weeks, but the maneuver segment of the Vicksburg Campaign reversed the verdict of the previous six months' operations on the Mississippi, all but sealed the doom of the Gibraltar of the Confederacy and its defending army, secured the reputation of Ulysses S. Grant as one of history's greatest generals, and paved the way to eventual Confederate defeat (1).

The 11 articles making up this book cover a wide range of topics related to the Vicksburg Campaign, and are written by authors that many Civil War enthusiasts will already be familiar with:

Running the Gauntlet: The Effectiveness of Combined Forces In The Vicksburg Campaign by Gary D. Joiner. *'Through The Heart Of Rebel Country': The History And Memory Of Grierson's Raid* by Charles D. Grear. . *'In The Enemy's Country': Port Gibson And The Turning Point Of The Vicksburg Campaign* by Jason M. Frawley. . *Roads To Raymond* by J. Parker Hills. . *The First Capture And Occupation Of Jackson, Mississippi* by Steven E.

Woodworth. . *'I Am Too Late': Joseph E. Johnston And The Vicksburg Campaign* by John R. Lundberg. . *Grant, McClellan, And Vicksburg: A Clash Of Personalities And Backgrounds* by Michael B. Ballard. . *'Developed By Circumstances': Grant, Intelligence, And The Vicksburg Campaign* by William B. Feis. . *'A Victory Could Hardly Have Been More Complete': The Battle Of Big Black River Bridge* by Timothy B. Smith. . *The 'Stealing Tour': Soldiers And Civilians In Grant's March to Vicksburg* by Steven N. Dossman. . *Politics, Policy, And General Grant: Clausewitz On The Operational Art As Practiced In The Vicksburg Campaign* by Paul L. Schmelzer. .

In a single book review it is not possible to give each of these articles the coverage it deserves, but there are two works that deserve special mention. In *Grant, McClellan, And Vicksburg*, Michael B. Ballard does a very good job of explaining the complex relationship between Ulysses S. Grant and John A. McClellan. He writes that the two generals:

Came from very different backgrounds and had personalities that made a good relationship between the two implausible and ultimately impossible. Yet their common purpose, to defeat the Confederacy, kept them together for many, often uncomfortable, months (129).

Ballard documents the rift that grew between the two men, but points out that Grant's growing dislike for his subordinate did not keep him from making effective use of a capable fighting general:

He can rightly be called loud-mouthed, annoying, overbearing, arrogant, and possessed of a consistent ability to create friction with other commanders. Yet in campaigns and battles, he often performed admirably. Grant understood that, and he tolerated McClellan and used him accordingly. Whatever Grant's feelings, he put victory first, something he had in common with the political general he detested (151).

In *'Developed By Circumstances,'* William B. Feis shines some much needed light on an often overlooked aspect of the Vicksburg Campaign: Grant's use of intelligence to guide his movements during the maneuver phase of the operation. The author points out that Grant's combat experience prior to the Vicksburg Campaign had taught him the importance of good intelligence gathering:

When Grant zeroes in on Vicksburg in late 1862, his past success against similar positions augured well for his future campaign, especially since they were valuable learning experiences in using intelligence against enemy forces tethered to fortified positions. But it had also been, at times, a hard-earned education (154-155).

Feis relates in his article how a spy network run by General Grenville Dodge aided Grant's movements against Vicksburg by supplying intelligence on the intentions of his opponent, General John C. Pemberton. At first much of the information being sent to Grant was "often contradictory and confusing" (158). Eventually, however, a Union spy named W. I. Morris managed to slip into Vicksburg in March 1863 and bring back valuable reports on the disposition of Pemberton's army and the layout of the city's defenses. The information supplied by Morris also "revealed that Pemberton's army was dispersed and that advancing from below the city might hit him where he was least expecting it" (160).

Grant went on to make very effective use of this information, and Feis makes the point that:

Grant's ability to think clearly in a fluid and chaotic environment, plus a remarkable flexibility that allowed him to adjust seamlessly to developing circumstances and to interpret intelligence quickly and correctly, were critical factors behind the victory (169).

All of the articles in this work are well written, but that notwithstanding, the book may have trouble finding an audience. Some of the articles, such as Frawley's on the Battle of Port Gibson, Woodworth's on the Battle of Jackson, and Smith's on the Big Black River, are general overviews, and seem geared towards an audience that is reading about the Vicksburg Campaign for the first time. They would probably not be of much interest to someone that is well versed in the operations that took place around Vicksburg in 1863. Other articles, however, such as Hills' on the Union army's march to Raymond, or Schmelzer's on Clausewitz's writings and how they apply to the Vicksburg Campaign, or even Ballard's on the relationship between Grant and McClelland, will probably not be appreciated by a general audience looking for an introductory volume on Vicksburg. These latter works, however, will be highly valued by someone seeking a deeper knowledge about the campaign.

At \$32, *The Vicksburg Campaign* might be a bit too expensive for just the articles that a particular reader would be interested in, but if you find it at your local library, it is well worth checking out. The book is well written, and by reading it you are sure to increase your knowledge of one of the most dramatic campaigns of the Civil War.

Jeff T. Giambrone is an historian with the Mississippi Department of Archives & History. His latest book is: Remembering Mississippi's Confederates, published by Arcadia in 2012. Mr. Giambrone can be reached at Championhilz@att.net.