STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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# GRANT'S INTEGRATION OF LAND AND NAVAL POWER DURING THE VICKSBURG CAMPAIGN

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# Grant's Integration of Land and Naval Power during the Vicksburg Campaign

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The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or any of its agencies.

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this paper is to compelling delineate how the lessons learned from Grant's successful integration of Land and Naval Power shed light on the issue of Strategic Vision.

The Strategic Vision clearly demonstrated by Grant during the Vicksburg Campaign provides valuable lessons for the application of future joint operations.

The Vicksburg Campaign shows the acumen, vision, and the requisite leadership traits of General Ulysses S. Grant as he effectively collaborated with Admiral David D. Porter, the Commander of the Naval Forces, and his principal subordinate, General William T. Sherman to implement the paramount Strategic objective for the Western Theater-to seize Vicksburg and gain control of the Mississippi River.

This analysis reveals five important lessons essential for successful joint operations. First, Land and Naval Power success on the battlefield requires close cooperation and synchronization of effort by the Joint Commanders. Second,

deceptions and feints must be highly plausible and well coordinated. The employment of these measures during this operation effectively kept the Commander of the Confederate forces in the dark about Grant's intentions and operational plans during this campaign. Third, successful engagements on a linear battlefield depend on excellent terrain analysis. Fourth, good interservice communication facilitates coordination and application of force on the battlefield. Finally, leadership is a prerequisite necessary to achieve the promulgated political objectives in Major Theater Wars of Small-Scale Contingencies.

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# GRANT'S INTEGRATION OF LAND AND NAVAL POWER DURING THE VICKSBURG CAMPAIGN

Joint Operations is a quintessential element in current and future operations.

It is anachronistic today to envision a Major Theater War or Small-Scale Contingency occurring where a single service would provide all of the requisite forces required achieving the promulgated political objectives.

The Vicksburg Campaign was a successful Joint Land and Naval Operation. The campaign was comprised of some of the major elements of modern warfare, i.e., amphibious assaults, mobile forces, interdiction of critical communication assets, and maneuvers to concentrate forces against the enemy's center of gravity.

In addition, Grant meticulously devised deceptions and feints negated the Confederate strength in the overall defenses of Vicksburg by preventing his adversaries from effectively combining their forces.

This research provides evidence that despite the intricacies of interservice doctrine and the propensity to engage in service parochialism, successful Joint Operation requires key leaders to make a paradigm shift in normal operations, and work synergistically to remain focused on the strategic objective throughout the campaign.

The Vicksburg Campaign was successful because of the close relationship that existed among the three principle leaders of the campaign-General Grant, Admiral Porter, and General Sherman. For example, Sherman's successfully executed feint on Haines'Bluff along the Yazoo River, forced General Pemberton, the Confederate Commander at Vicksburg, to react to the plausible feint by redirecting key forces already allocated to support General Bowen at Grand Gulf to Haines' Bluffs. Sherman's feint allowed Grant to be opposed by a numerically inferior force on landing at Bruinsburg...and Grand Gulf.[1] The operational success of this maneuver was two-fold. First, it enabled Grant to engage and defeat a smaller Confederate element at Grand Gulf. Second, and more strategically important, it allowed Grant to be on the same side of the river with his adversary.[2] "All the campaign, labors, hardship and resources from the month of December previous to this time...were for the accomplishment of this objective".[3] In addition, perfect harmony consistently reigned between the naval and land components during this operation. According to Grant, "there never was a request made by Admiral Porter, or his subordinates that was not promptly complied with.[4]

The effectiveness of command doctrine enabled Grant and Porter to react quickly and modify their concept of operations to adapt to changes occurring on the battlefield. Grant and

Porter were constantly taking the initiatives by exploiting the adversaries areas of vulnerabilities. One of the key enablers' attributes to their success during the campaign was the affinity they developed for each other, and the inherent respect that emerged for the capabilities of their respective services. In addition, Porter and Grant shared the same strategic vision for the requisite conditions required for success in this campaign and effectively disseminated that vision to subordinate commanders.

The genesis of Union Naval strategy to meet the enumerated political objective was the blockade of Southern ports to interdict essential war material in transit to the Confederacy. The second objective outlined by General-in-Chief Winfield Scott, was for Union forces to gain control of the Mississippi River, both to cut the Confederacy off from western resupply and open world trade markets for midwestern crops.[5] Therefore, a different strategy had to be devised to gain control of this monolithic feature, which was deemed the gateway to complete command and control of the West.

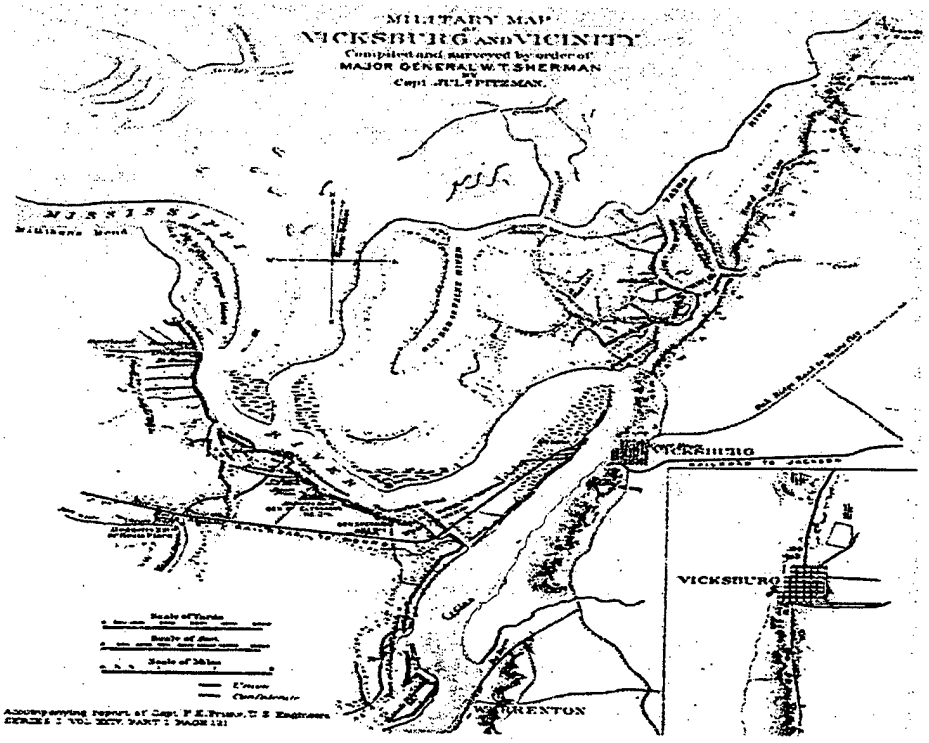
President Lincoln looked at a map and commented to a visitor:

> " See what a lot of land these fellows hold, of which Vicksburg is the key. Let us get Vicksburg and all that country is ours. The war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket."[6]

The salient location and terrain surrounding Vicksburg made the task of the Union extremely difficult. The town stood on a 200-foot bluff on the eastern bank of the Mississippi

(See figure 1)

Figure 1 - Military Map of Vicksburg and Vicinity




**Source: Bearss, Edwin C., <u>The Vicksburg Campaign</u>, Vol.1, Dayton, Ohio: Morningside House Company, 1985) p.476.**

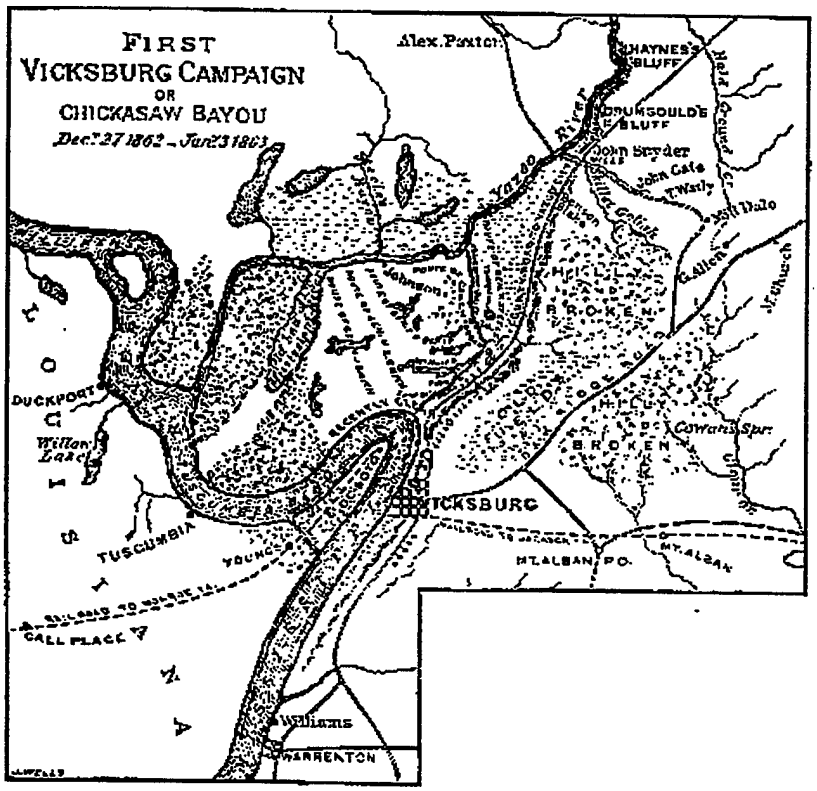
Between this area and Memphis, Tennessee, the lines of bluffs ran far inland, and the area adjacent to the river was low and swampy. Across the river, the ground was often inundated and nearly impassable for an Army. From the north, the Yazoo River blocked the landward approach. By 1862, the

Confederates had guns mounted above the town and along the river making Vicksburg impregnable to an attack from the water.[7]

## PROLOGUE TO VICKSBURG

In December 1862, Grant made his first attempt to take Vicksburg overland from the east. In cooperation with his land assault, Sherman and Porter attempted an amphibious assault on the northern flank of the city culminating in the disastrous battle of Chickasaw Bluffs (See figure 2).

Figure 2 - Battle of Chickasaw Bluffs




**Source: Battle Leaders of the Civil War, Vol.3 (New York: The Castle Book Company, 1991) p.465.**

This operation failed to dislodge the Confederate forces from their strongly fortified position for several reasons. First, the Union land forces, commanded by Sherman lacked the requisite intelligence data to ascertain the size and salient position of the Confederate Forces. Second, Sherman failed to conduct adequate reconnaissance of the area to determine the configuration of the Confederate defensive position. Third, he was victimized by the "fog and friction" of war. Grant's message on 23 December 1862 informing him of the capture of his supply line and ordering him to abort the mission was not received until 3 January 1863.[8]

Therefore, poor intelligence and untimely communication were critical factors contributing to Sherman's debacle at Chickasaw Bluffs. Accurate intelligence and rapid communication are vital enabler necessary to conducting successful operations on the battlefield. The side that maximizes the full range of intelligence assets and minimized disruptions in communication will have a decisive advantage on the battlefield. Good intelligence and communication assets provide the commander with the requisite tools to plan and array his forces in the most propitious manner. In addition, it enables the commander to know when, where, and under what conditions to accept battle. One of the best methods to prepare for war and the concomitant

fog and friction is to know the capabilities of the adversary and concentrate your forces against his areas of vulnerabilities.

Sherman's failure at Chickasaw Bluffs convinced Grant that success in this operation depended on the neutralization and control of key waterways surrounding Vicksburg. His decision necessitated close synchronization between all land and naval forces designed to bypass Vicksburg.

## COMMAND AND CONTROL

Command and Control synchronize and coordinate combat power on the battlefield and provides the direction to fight.[9] In essence, the command and control system establishes the parameters by which the commander communicates his intent to subordinates and directs the execution of the campaign plan. General Grant and Admiral Porter epitomized close coordination throughout the Vicksburg Campaign. Grant's relationship with all but one of his subordinate commanders was excellent.[10]

The fog and friction of war and the volatile combat environment compelled Grant to exert greater influence on the battlefield execution than is normally demonstrated by Theater Commanders. In an ideal environment, devoid of countervailing factors, where all subordinates fully anticipated and implemented the Commander's intent, the need for control would be significantly reduced. For instance, the "fog and friction"

of war was exacerbated during Sherman's assault against Chickasaw Bluffs when key intelligence and communication data were not readily available to preclude the debacle that occurred in the assault.

What factors contributed to the successful Joint Land and Naval Operations during the Vicksburg Campaign? There was no joint order promulgated by President Lincoln or the Congress creating a Joint Task Force (JTF). The coordination and cooperation emerged because of the affinity and personalities of the three principal Union leaders during this Campaign-General Grant, Admiral Porter, and General Sherman.

Grant's outstanding characteristic was his flexibility of mind. He was always ready to change his plans when confronted with unexpected battle conditions. For example, when his supply base at Holly Springs, Mississippi was destroyed, he made a very bold decision to maneuver his troops…cutting loose from his supply base.[11] His decision violated an axiom of war stating, "when any great body of troops moved against an enemy they should do so from a base of supplies."[12] In addition, Grant clearly understood and appreciated the importance of logistics on the battlefield operations. He moved with alacrity to attack all key elements of the Confederate infrastructure, roads, railroads, bridges, etc., which could be used to assist the Confederacy in prosecuting the war. His operational plan was

designed to interdict all logistic enablers to preclude supplies from reaching the Confederate forces.

Grant was a calm, stable commandeer of whom Porter wrote:

> " He works like a horse, while he should make others do it for him".[13]

Porter's appointment to command the entire Mississippi Squadron marked the zenith of his wartime career.[14] His achievement prior to collaborating with Grant during the Vicksburg Campaign, was his bombardment of Confederate forts in assisting Rear Admiral David Farragut to capture New Orleans.[15]

Sherman was Grant's alter ego. He had the innate ability to conceptualize Grant's plan without the need for elaborate dialogue. Each fully understood the nature of total war; and both possessed a good logistics background. This was one of the characteristics that permeated their relationship and accounts for the synergy that emerged among the three key leaders during this operation. Although Grant was the Supreme Commander during the Vicksburg Campaign, neither officer had complete authority to control the other. For instance, General Halleck suggested to Grant that he "ask Porter to cooperate".[16] Porter reflected that: " It is only through that high courtesy bred in a purely military school that so perfect an understanding was achieved".[17]

## MILITARY OPERATIONS

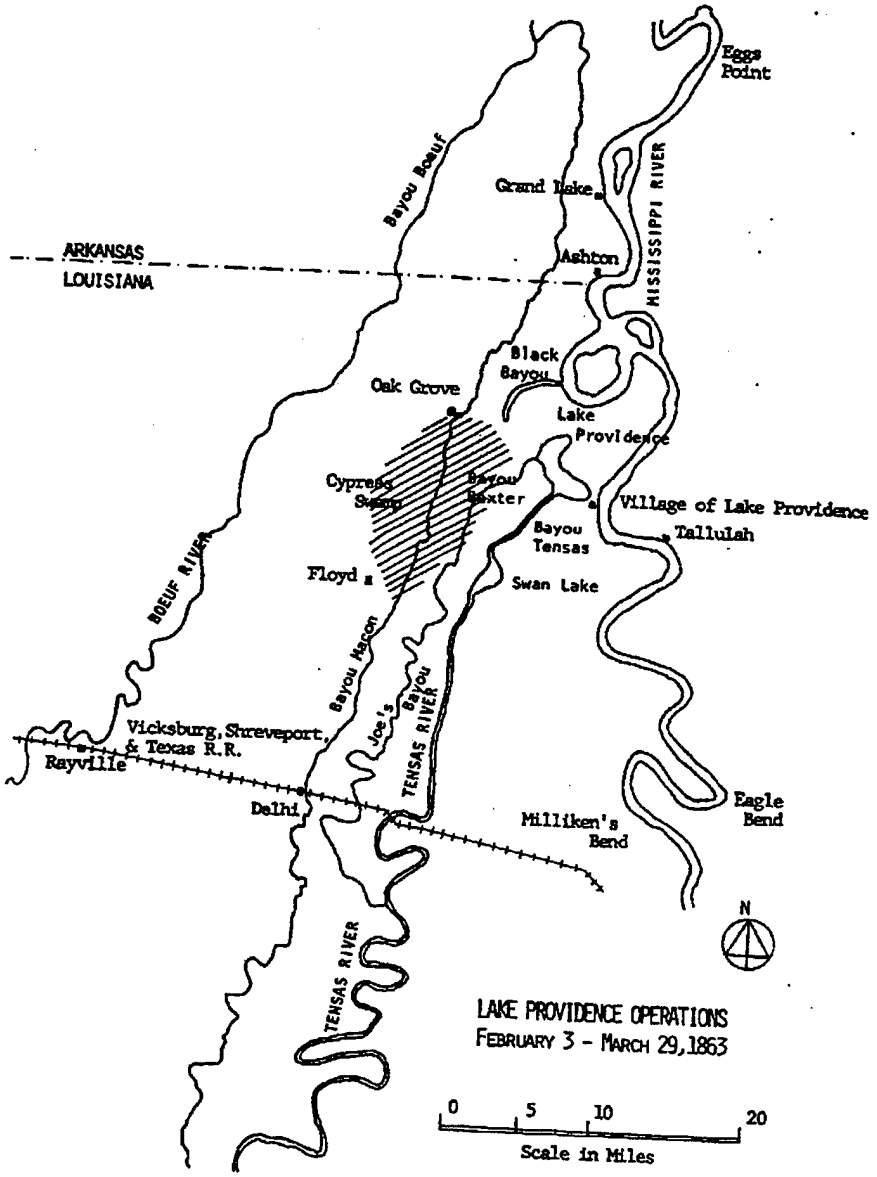
Grant never lost sight of the military conditions required to achieve the strategic aim. The strategic objective was to control the Mississippi River.[18] The objective could only be achieved by seizing Vicksburg. Grant stated succinctly that the cooperation of the naval forces was essential to the realization of this objective.[19] Naval artillery support was necessary to prepare and cover the ground troops on the east bank of the Mississippi River. Naval support was also important in feints and deception operations, and in the bombardment of the city itself.

Grant and Porter collaborated in ascertaining the sequence of operations that provided the best opportunity available to achieve the strategic aim. They meticulously weighed each Course of Action (COA) to determine the most prudent means to circumvent the strong defenses of Vicksburg.

General Grant in coordination with Admiral Porter designed three plans to turn the flank of the Mississippi strong point.[20] The first project was an attempt to bypass Vicksburg by digging a canal across a loop in the Mississippi River.[21] The second project was designed to create a channel into Lake Providence and open a route through Bayou Baxter, the Washita and Red

Rivers on the west side of the Mississippi River below Vicksburg (See Figure 3).

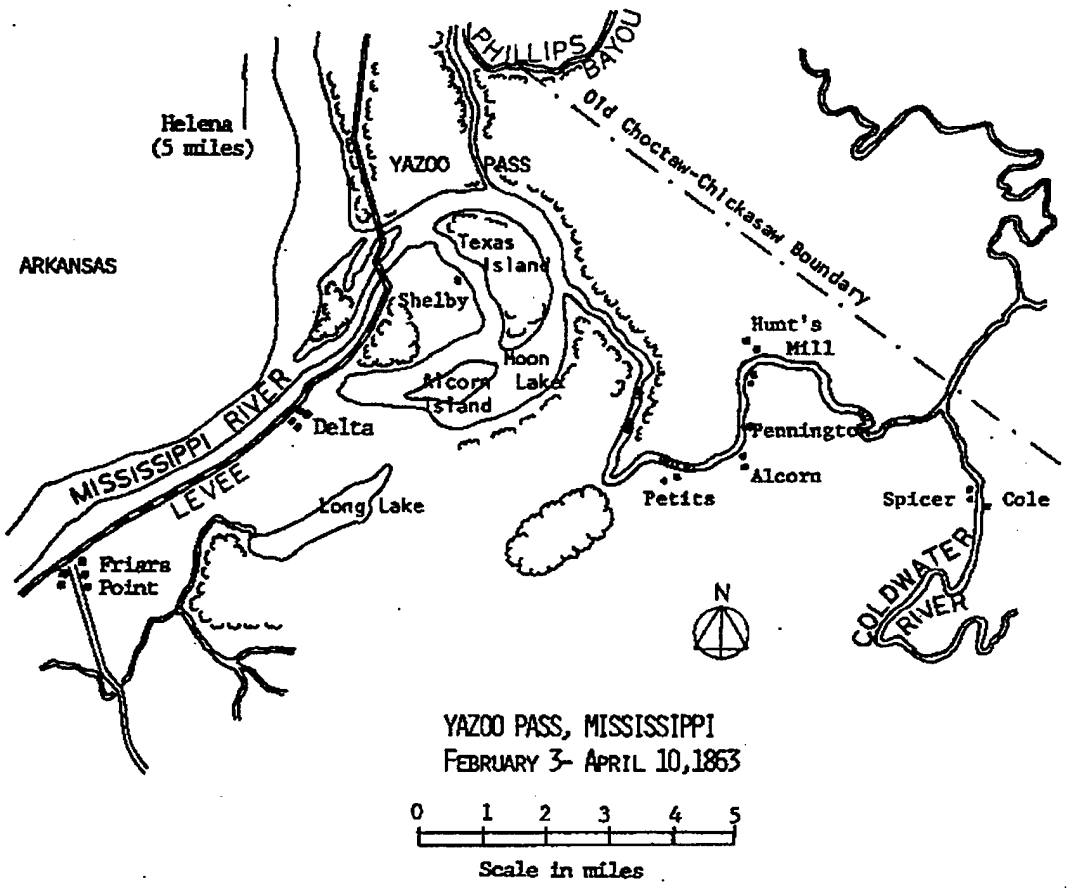
Figure 3 - Lake Providence




**Source: Bearss, Edwin C., The Vicksburg Campaign, Vol. 1 Dayton, Ohio: Morningside House Company, 1985) p.480.**

The first two projects failed because of low water levels in the Bayous and the inability to successfully clear routes for navigation, respectively.[22] The third attempt to find an alternative water route north of the city culminated in the failure of the Yazoo Pass Expedition, when flotilla ships failed to navigate the narrowing streams.[23] (See Figure 4).

Figure 4 - The Yazoo Pass

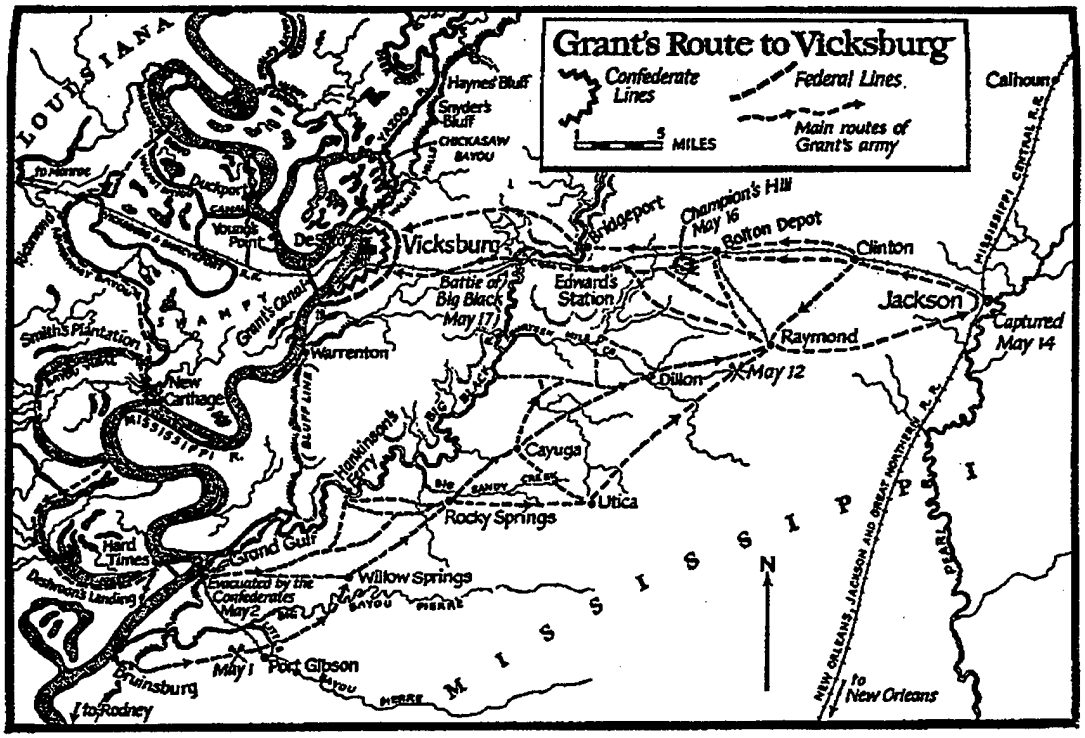



**Source: Bearss, Edwin C., The Vicksburg Campaign, Vol.1 Dayton, Ohio: Morningside House Company, 1985) p.484.**

Despite these setbacks, Grant and Porter were still convinced that the indirect approach was the most feasible Course of Action (COA) to employ to gain control of Vicksburg.

Grant devised a new plan of operations that employed the use of speed, maneuver, and concentration of forces in a circuitous manner against Confederate defenses. He declared that he would move inland expeditiously without occupying the countryside.[24] His soldiers would live off the land, far from their logistical base. In addition, Grant would march his Army south of Vicksburg on the west side, to be ferried across the river by Admiral Porter at a point south of Vicksburg (See Figure 5).

Figure 5 - Grant's Route to Vicksburg




**Source: Catton, Bruce, Grant Moves South, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company,1960) p.427.**

The operation succeeded because the Navy, under the skillful eyes of Porter facilitated the landing of the land forces by running he Vicksburg batteries on 16 April 1863, simultaneously silencing the Confederate batteries south of the city.

Grant's supreme confidence was shown in Porter when asked the question on how he proposed to get the ships and transports through "That is the Admiral's affair".[25]

Joint Deception Operations were conducted to deceive General Pemberton, the Confederate Commander at Vicksburg, as to Grant's intentions to run the batteries south of Vicksburg. On 29 April 1863, while Grant watched the naval attack on Grand Gulf, Sherman feinted an attack at Chickasaw Bluffs with mortar rafts and ten regiments on transports.[26] During the same time, Brigadier General Benjamin Grierson raided Confederate ports in a 600-mile ride that had knocked the heart out of the state.[27] These feints were successful because General Pemberton reacted by deploying key assets to the diversions and consistently overreacted to Grant's intentions feeling his position was vulnerable. For instance, Pemberton had complained to General Joseph E. Johnston, a Confederate Corps Commander nearby, that he was holding a broad front, with large forces on both flanks out of supporting distance. Now he had Union naval forces attacking Chickasaw Bluffs. Pemberton's precipitous decision to deploy his forces exacerbated the Confederate problem. Grant had an 8:1 advantage when his troops crossed into Bruinsburg.[28]

The joint land and naval operations forced the Confederates to evacuate Chickasaw Bluffs, the chain of key terrain features north of Vicksburg. The Union's occupation of this salient position was crucial to Union victory. General Johnston realized with the Union's occupation of this terrain presaged to the Confederate cause. Unable to bring himself to reinforce

Pemberton, Johnston telegraphed Pemberton to cut his losses and get out of Vicksburg. "If Haines Bluff be untenable, Vicksburg is of no value and cannot be held."[29] " If therefore, you are invested in Vicksburg, you must surrender. If it is not too late, evacuate Vicksburg… and march to the northeast."[30] By pressing both Johnston's and Pemberton's forces at all points, Grant adroitly succeeded in preventing the Confederates from combining against him, therefore, giving him the opportunity to defeat them in detail.

## LOGISTICS

Logistics is a critical component to the military success on the battlefield.[31] Grant was fully cognizant of the significant impact logistics has on the operational art of war. In addition, he was aware and clearly understood that chance and risk permeate and are concomitant to battlefield operations. For example, Grant recognized the unfeasibility of landing above Vicksburg and attacking from the north. Consequently, when he decided to launch an attack from the south, he recognized the potential quandary to his forces, because he risked the possibility of having his lines of communication and supplies interdicted by Confederate forces. Nevertheless, he made this bold move by skillfully incorporating his logistical plan into his concept of operations. Grant was acutely aware of the tremendous risk involved in this operation. " To have no

communications-to cut loose altogether from my base and move my whole army without a rear link was a tremendous gamble!"[32] His plan was to move his army south on the West Side of the Mississippi River and attack toward the east.

Grant understood the intricate details involved in logistical operations, having served as a Quartermaster in the Mexican War.[33] Therefore, he knew how long he could go without sufficient supplies. Grant's plan was predicated on the fact that he would abandon his supply trains after crossing the Mississippi River, march to Jackson and seize food from the countryside, destroy the Confederate forces in the rear of Vicksburg… and capture the city.[34] Pemberton fruitlessly attempted to sever Grant's supply line at the Big Black River, but failed. Grant restored his supply lines after investing Vicksburg and settling down to a siege.

Grant's successful logistics plan, speed, maneuver, and concentration of forces, were examples of the total integration of Land and Naval Power during the Vicksburg Campaign. In particular, Grant's audacious decision to operate in enemy territory without the requisite logistics trains to support his forces after his main supply base was destroyed at Holly Springs, Mississippi help turn the tide of the campaign. Second, Grant refused to bind himself to conventional tactical and operational art of war. For example, he experimented with.

approaches to reach the high ground near Vicksburg.[35] The nearly impregnable Confederate salient positions surrounding Vicksburg made a direct assault by Union forces impractical. Therefore, Grant chose an indirect approach to neutralize the Confederate advantage.

## LESSONS LEARNED

### LAND AND NAVAL POWER COORDINATION

The success of the Vicksburg Campaign can be attributed to the profound trust and respect that emerged between Grant and Porter. Their cooperation was paramount to achieving the Union's strategic objective in the Western Theater-the capitulation of Vicksburg and the control of the Mississippi River. What makes this accomplishment really remarkable is the fact that the War or Navy Departments provided virtually little definitive joint guidance. The War Department provided only cursory guidance that related to the importance of establishing a cooperative venture between the services in accomplishing the mission!

The highly volatile and complex global environment that confronts the military today means that future joint operations will require clearly delineated guidance be provided to commanders of the joint services to reduce friction and other concomitant problems.

The Vicksburg Campaign was an anomaly that ended favorably for the Joint Land and Naval Power led by Grant and Porter. However, to facilitate and maximize joint effectiveness, and provide conditions that optimize the chances for success, clearly established joint doctrine and training must occur prior to commencement of operations on the battlefield. In addition, future joint efforts must be under the absolute control of a single component commander.

The National Command Authority (NCA), unlike the War and Navy Departments that operated during the Vicksburg Campaign, must retain control over policy by unambiguously providing the necessary guidance to the Theater Commander. General Henry Halleck, Chief of Staff, United States Army, told Grant that he had " permission to fight the enemy where you please."[36] Porter stated that: " Each Commander acted on his own responsibility, neither having received instructions from their several Departments."[37]

CAMPAIGN DECEPTION

Grant with the assistance of Admiral Porter adroitly employed the art of deception to facilitate the execution of the mission by masking the real intentions of Union operations. These deceptive techniques, devised through close coordination between the Land and Naval Forces, caused General Pemberton, the

Confederate Commander at Vicksburg, to split his forces, thereby weakening his forces and becoming more vulnerable to Grant's attacks. These deceptions and feints were successful because they were conducted with a great deal of plausibility. For example, Sherman's feint against Chickasaw Bluffs as previously enumerated, Porter's bombardments, and Grierson's extensive raids were classic demonstrations of successfully executed deception measures. Even the failed attempts to navigate the bayous in the Yazoo River created great concern in Vicksburg, causing guns and troops to be removed from key areas to defend against contrived threats.[38]

In order for deception to succeed in future campaigns, the Operation Plan (OPLAN) must be designed in a way that compels the enemy to react to a highly probable plan. In essence, future deception measures must be predicated on the military's ability to conceal its actions and intentions until it is too late for the enemy to effectively respond. Therefore, a corollary to deception is the ability to maintain close operational security as we shape and control the full dimensions of warfare. In addition, future deception, like those used in the Vicksburg Campaign, must be targeted against a commander with the requisite authority and resources to respond in the desired manner. Furthermore, since campaigns in the future will likely be nonlinear, effective deception measures will depend on

our joint forces feeding false information to more than one enemy echelon of command.

A good deception plan must be meticulously designed to take into account the full operational battlefield. The more plausible the picture is painted, the more likely the enemy will ignore contrary indicators.

Future deception measures must be an integral part of the Campaign Plan. A carefully developed deception plan provides the commander with the viable means to divert and exploit the enemy's actions and intentions. This enables the Theater Commander to have a decisive advantage on the battlefield. It is absolutely imperative that we gain complete control over all conduits of deception measures. It is highly likely that we will confront and adversary that will employ countermeasures to attempt to neutralize our technological superiority.

TERRAIN ANALYSIS

Understanding the limitations and opportunities of terrain is a fundamental military skill.[39] The key elements of terrain analysis are summarized in the traditional mnemonic OCOKA: Observation and Fields of Fire; Cover and Concealment; Obstacles and Movement; Key Terrain; and Avenues of Approach.[40]

Sherman's first expedition against Chickasaw Bluffs, December 1862, failed in part because of poor terrain analysis.

The Confederate forces' salient position provided excellent cover and concealment, and linking fields of fire tied directly to nearly impenetrable obstacles.

After Sherman's debacle at Chickasaw Bluff, Grant and his subordinate commanders became more cognizant of the significance of good terrain analysis to effective planning. As a result, his operations during the last phase of the Campaign was predicated on taking the initiative by neutralizing the physical obstacle by employing speed, surprise, maneuver, and deception to circumvent the Confederate Army. All future effort by Grant in cooperation with Porter was designed to attack the Confederate Center of Gravity (COG). This included an attack on the resources and materials entering the South. This was a classic example of Total War.

## INTERSERVICE COMMUNICATION

The Vicksburg Campaign was often plagued by poor interservice communication. The success that emerged occurred perchance or by developing field expedient methods through trial and error. Effective command and control is dependent on good, reliable communication networks. Despite the paucity of good channels of communication, the campaign was successful. The success can be directly attributed to the slow buildup and relative one-dimensional battlespace. However, future campaigns

will occur with such speed and intensity with adversaries employing an array of technologically sophisticated communication systems throughout the battlespace. Therefore, any minor errors or glitches in our communication systems will have potentially catastrophic consequences.

In order for interservice communication to be used to the fullest extent, it must be interoperable and utilized extensively during **Joint Training Exercises** to help facilitate successful execution during military conflicts.

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

Leadership is the key component that combines the **Strategic**, **Operational**, and **Tactical** levels of war into a synergistic whole. The strategic leadership demonstrated by Grant during the Vicksburg Campaign led to success on the battlefield.

The complexity of the Vicksburg Campaign necessitated close cooperation and coordination of effort between Grant and Porter. The mutual respect and admiration they developed for each other was paramount in translating ideas and theories into a viable and executable campaign plan. However, for future operations to be successful, it will require more than the admiration commanders have for each other. For example, Major Theater Wars (MTWs) and Military Operations Other than War (MOOTW) in the future will be more complex and involve the additional

intricacies of service parochialism, which makes it an imperative that promulgated Joint Doctrine and policy be established to set the parameters for battlefield operations.

## CONCLUSION

The potentially volatile and complex future environment, characterized by mercurial nonstate and rogue nations, portend a great deal of uncertainty for global stability. Therefore, it is imperative that the Department of Defense (DOD) takes the lead in developing joint planning and training doctrine focused on plausible future symmetrical and asymmetrical threats.

Future military engagements will inherently be fought with joint or coalition forces. As a result, the forces must be interoperable, highly trained, and able to respond rapidly to a myriad of threats ranging from Major Theater Wars to Military Operations Other Than War.

The next campaign could take place on a **linear** battlefield, like the Vicksburg Campaign, where the emphasis on good terrain analysis is essential, or on a **nonlinear** battlefield, where the paramount forces are directed against enemy activities, rather than concentrating on specific terrain features. Nevertheless, the primary objective of the Theater Commander will be to defeat the enemy and achieve the delineated political objective established by the National Command Authority.

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