

LIVING THROUGH THE SIEGE OF VICKSBURG

<https://www.apps.mdah.ms.gov/Public/prop.aspx?id=29426&view=facts&y=1040>

The Vicksburg Campaign was not a singular event, but a multi-season deluge of fighting over what President Abraham Lincoln called “the key” to the Mississippi River. Union and Confederate leaders believed Vicksburg to be the most important location for control of the Mississippi River and ultimately the South. The Confederates dug into Vicksburg’s bluffs, ravines, and hills so thoroughly that it took union troops eighteen months to gain control of the city.

Union troops, led by General Ulysses S. Grant went through four stages to take Vicksburg. First Grant tried to gain access with gunboats. They proved ineffective because of the extensive defenses the Confederates had built into the bluffs. The second stage was a two-pronged attempt to flank the Confederates and push them into the central part of Mississippi, away from the river. Thirdly, Grant used other groups of soldiers throughout the area to create diversions that kept the Confederate leader, General John C. Pemberton guessing as to what would be their next move. The last stage of the Vicksburg Campaign was an overland march to take the Confederacy by surprise. This march from Jackson led to Grant’s troops laying siege to the town for forty-seven days, until the confederates surrendered on July 4, 1863.

The people of Vicksburg began enduring military activity as early as the spring of 1862. There was only need for protection against gunboats at that time, but as the war progressed, there was a need for more fortified protection. In the spring of 1863, the Union army brought out much larger and more destructive firepower. To shelter themselves, the citizens resorted to going beneath the earth, and cave construction and living became a way of life.

Subjects that can be addressed within this digital archive:

- The Siege of Vicksburg
- The Civil War
- Leaders of the battle over Vicksburg
- Mississippi in the Civil War
- Cave life in Vicksburg

Curricular Connections:

Mississippi State Standards for Social Studies

Eighth Grade: 8.9 Identify key people and evaluate the significant events of the American Civil War.

2. Examine key battles and plans which shaped decisions for the North and the South (e.g., Fort Hood, First Bull Run, Shiloh, Antietam, Vicksburg, Gettysburg, Sherman March, Anaconda Plan, etc.). 3. Identify significant political and military leaders from the North and the South and examine their contributions. 5. Analyze the factors that led to the Northern victory of the Civil War (e.g., total war,

industrial, population, resources, technological advantages, etc.).

Mississippi Studies: MS.6 Analyze the role of Mississippi during the Civil War and evaluate the effects of Reconstruction in the state. 2. Analyze the significance of the military campaigns that took place in Mississippi during the Civil War and the impact wartime conditions had on the civilian population.

Directions:

Have students read the introduction provided in this lagniappe, then use the following link to access the information on the Vicksburg Siege Cave. <https://www.apps.mdah.ms.gov/Public/prop.aspx?id=29426&view=facts&y=1040>, click on the View National Register Form (Use this to answer all questions.) Type your answers in the space provided.

Questions:

1. Where is the location described in this form?

Answer: The cave was located at the western side of a box-like ravine on the northern side of the city, directly behind the Confederate defenses.

2. What was the size and shape of this cave?

Answer: The cave had two rooms and was a Y shape.

3. Who is listed as the cave’s owner in this document?

Answer: Dr. Paul E. Ballard D.D.S.

4. Describe what the first caves were like.

Answer: The first caves were depressions carved into the sides of hills for protection against the naval bombardment from federal ships.

5. Why did digging out these caves become a necessity?

Answer: In the spring of 1863, the Union forces brought mortar boats that fired a 200-pound ball filled with a bursting charge

6. Why do you think building caves became a profitable business?

Answer: Student’s answers may vary, but should include thoughts on placing safety above money and being afraid for their lives.

7. Who do historians believe lived in this cave mentioned in the article?

Answer: Robert Hough’s family and Henry Lester