

Engineering Victory: The Union Siege of Vicksburg

By Justin S. Solonick

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On May 25, 1863, after driving the Confederate army into defensive lines surrounding Vicksburg, Mississippi, Union major general Ulysses S. Grant and his Army of the Tennessee laid siege to the fortress city. With no reinforcements and dwindling supplies, the Army of Vicksburg finally surrendered on July 4, yielding command of the Mississippi River to Union forces and effectively severing the Confederacy. In this illuminating volume, Justin S. Solonick offers the first detailed study of how Grant's midwesterners serving in the Army of the Tennessee engineered the siege of Vicksburg, placing the event within the broader context of U.S. and European military history and nineteenth-century applied science in trench warfare and field fortifications. In doing so, he shatters the Lost Cause myth that Vicksburg's Confederate garrison surrendered due to lack of provisions. Instead of being starved out, Solonick explains, the Confederates were dug out.

After opening with a sophisticated examination of nineteenth-century military engineering and the history of siege craft, Solonick discusses the stages of the Vicksburg siege and the implements and tactics Grant's soldiers used to achieve victory. As Solonick shows, though Grant lacked sufficient professional engineers to organize a traditional siege—an offensive tactic characterized by cutting the enemy's communication lines and digging forward-moving approach trenches—the few engineers available, when possible, gave Union troops a crash course in military engineering. Ingenious midwestern soldiers, in turn, creatively applied engineering maxims to the situation at Vicksburg, demonstrating a remarkable ability to adapt in the face of adversity. When instruction and oversight were not possible, the common soldiers improvised. Solonick concludes with a description of the surrender of Vicksburg, an analysis of the siege's effect on the outcome of the Civil War, and a discussion of its significance in western military history.

Solonick’s study of the Vicksburg siege focuses on how the American Civil War was a transitional one with its own distinct nature, not the last Napoleonic war or the herald of modern warfare. At Vicksburg, he reveals, a melding of traditional siege craft with the soldiers’ own inventiveness resulted in Union victory during the largest, most successful siege in American history.

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Editorial Review

Review

"*Engineering Victory* is a truly original study that offers unprecedented insight into the mechanics of the Vicksburg siege from the Union perspective. It also serves as a powerful reminder that ultimate victory was not just a question of starvation but also one of skillful execution of the siege tactics of the period. Justin Solonick's impressive work is richly deserving of a place of high honor in the Vicksburg Campaign literature canon."—***Civil War Books and Authors***

“By showing why Vicksburg fell when it did, Justin S. Solonick’s book sheds new light on one of the most important campaigns of the Civil War. By exploring how Grant’s army achieved that success, it illuminates the nature of Civil War armies and on the society that raised them.”—**Steven E. Woodworth**, author of *Nothing but Victory: The Army of the Tennessee, 1861–1865*

“If Vicksburg was the front door to the Confederacy, it was engineering that proved to be the key to opening the door. Thus argues Solonick, as he proceeds to methodically and convincingly make his case.
Lacking professional engineers, U. S. Grant’s Army of the Tennessee often relied upon western ingenuity for mining and trenching. Their efforts, not fully appreciated by West Point theorists even after the war, won the day. Must reading not only for western theater enthusiasts but also for those who wish to grasp how the war evolved.”—**Larry J. Daniel**, author of *Days of Glory: The Army of the Cumberland, 1861–1865*

“Justin Solonick has produced an important and necessary study of siege operations at Vicksburg, setting the story within the context of European siege craft and pointing to new directions in the history of Civil War military operations. This book is a breath of fresh air.”—**Earl J. Hess**, author of *Kennesaw Mountain: Sherman, Johnston, and the Atlanta Campaign*

"The author covers the spectrum of siege as practiced at Vicksburg, from establishment of the line of circumvallation to the saps, approaches, and parallels that led to the final phase of the siege. He also discusses the mining intended to destroy the earth and log bastions that guarded the city and blocked unfettered navigation of the Mississippi River. Solonick gives readers an excellent and comprehensive understanding of the complexities of the siege operations that sealed the doom of Vicksburg and with it the Confederacy. . .this book is a truly significant contribution to our understanding of the Vicksburg campaign. *Engineering Victory* is an outstanding work that fills one of the few, yet major, voids in the literature on the Vicksburg campaign and taps into scores of soldier memoirs, diaries, and letters that add much human interest to this study. *Engineering Victory* is an essentially important work that will enhance the most complete colelction of Vicksburg titles. —**Terrence J Winschel,** author of *Triumph & Defeat: The Vicksburg Campaign*, volumes 1 and 2

"Solonick's book provides a thorough and engaging study of the Union army's siege operations against the pivotal river city of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Readers will walk away from the volume with a great deal of respect for the hardworking engineers of the Army or the Tennessee who faced various obstacles and challenges. Rather than just surrounding Vicksburg and waiting for its defenders to capitulate, Grant's men transformed themselves from a marching army into a besieging one."—Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai, Angelo State University

About the Author

Justin S. Solonick is an adjunct instructor in the Department of History and Geography at Texas Christian University. His most recent publication, “Saving the Army of Tennessee: The Confederate Rear Guard at Ringgold Gap” appeared in *The Chattanooga Campaign*, edited by Steven E. Woodworth and Charles D. Grear, and published by SIU Press in 2012. He has also published numerous book reviews pertaining to Civil War topics.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Willie Hodges:

As people who live in typically the modest era should be up-date about what going on or details even knowledge to make these keep up with the era that is always change and advance. Some of you maybe will update themselves by reading through books. It is a good choice for you personally but the problems coming to an individual is you don't know what kind you should start with. This Engineering Victory: The Union Siege of Vicksburg is our recommendation so you keep up with the world. Why, since this book serves what you want and need in this era.

Linda Poteat:

The book untitled Engineering Victory: The Union Siege of Vicksburg is the reserve that recommended to you to see. You can see the quality of the publication content that will be shown to a person. The language that author use to explained their ideas are easily to understand. The article writer was did a lot of research when write the book, to ensure the information that they share to your account is absolutely accurate. You also will get the e-book of Engineering Victory: The Union Siege of Vicksburg from the publisher to make you far more enjoy free time.

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