

Gen. Ulysses S. Grant on the Siege of Vicksburg, 1863

Introduction

One of the Union's top military objectives was to gain control of the Mississippi River, and thereby split the Confederacy in two. General Ulysses S. Grant took up this challenge late in 1862 but was frustrated for several months by the rebel defenses of Vicksburg, Mississippi. In mid-April 1863, Grant undertook a series of naval and infantry maneuvers that moved more than 30,000 troops into Vicksburg's rear. This directive reflects Grant's genius for military strategy as well as the fortitude that led Lincoln to believe in 1864 that he had at last found a general who would not let him down.

EXCERPT

. . . Vicksburg is so strong by nature and so well fortified that sufficient force cannot be brought to bear against it to carry it by storm against the present Garrison. It must be taken by a regular siege or by starving out the Garrison. I have all the force necessary for this if my rear was not threatened.

It is now certain that Jo Johnston has already collected a force from twenty to twenty-five thousand strong at Jackson & Canton and is using every effort to increase it to forty thousand. With this he will undoubtedly attack Harris Bluff and compell me to abandon the investment of the City if not reinforced before he can get here. I want your District striped to the very lowest possible standard. You can be in no possible danger for the time it will be necessary to keep their troops away. All points in West Tennessee North of the Memphis & Charleston road, if necessary, can be abandoned entirely. West Kentucky may be reduced to a small Garrison at Paducah and Columbus.

If you have not already brought forward the troops to Memphis to send me bring Smith's, formerly Denver's, Division. Add to this all other force you can possibly spare. Send two regiments of Cavalry also. If you have not received the Cavalry last ordered from Helena divert them to this place instead of sending two other regiments. No boat will be permitted to leave Memphis going North until transportation is fully provided for all the troops coming this way. The Quartermaster in charge of transportation and Col. W.S. Hillyer are specially instructed to see that this direction is fully enforced.

The entire rebel force heretofore against me are completely at my mercy. I do not want to see them escape by being reinforced from elsewhere. I hope before this reaches you troops will be already on the way from your command.

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Gen. Dodge can spare enough from his force to Garrison Lagrange & Grand Junction.

Very respectfully

U. S. Grant

Maj: Gen.

Questions for Discussion

Read the document introduction and the excerpt and apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer these questions.

1. Locate the city of Vicksburg on a map of the United States. Explain the importance of this city to both Confederate and Union forces?
2. Grant's actions at Vicksburg would convince Lincoln that he had finally found a competent and effective leader. Why had Lincoln been disappointed with his other Union generals?
3. Vicksburg fell to Grant's forces on July 4, 1863 and Lincoln wrote Grant: "I write this now as a grateful acknowledgment for the almost inestimable service you have done the country." Why did Lincoln consider this such an important victory and especially on that date?

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Image



 Head Quarters, Dept. of the Ten.
 Near Vicksburg, May 31st 1863.
 Maj: Gen. S. A. Hurlbut
 Comd'g 16th Army Corps.
 Gen.

I send this
 by Col. Hickey of my Staff to
 insure it reaching you speedily and
 that he may urge upon you the
 necessity of the very prompt action.
 Vicksburg is so strong by nature
 and so well fortified that sufficient
 force cannot be brought to bear against
 it to carry it by storm against the
 present Garrison. It must be taken
 by a regular siege or by starving
 out the Garrison. I have all the
 force necessary for this if my rear

Ulysses S. Grant to Stephen A. Hurlbut, May 31, 1863 (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC07055)

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was not threatened.

It is now certain that Gen Johnston has already collected a force from twenty to twenty-five thousand strong at Jackson & Canton and is using every effort to increase it to forty thousand. With this he will undoubtedly attack Haines Bluff and compel me to abandon the investment of the city if not reinforced before he can get here. I want your district stripped to the very lowest possible standard. You can be in no possible danger for the time it will be necessary to keep three troops away. All points in West Tennessee north of the Memphis & Charleston road, if necessary, can be abandoned entirely. West Kentucky may be reduced to a small garrison at Paducah and

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Columbus.

If you have not already brought forward the troops to Memphis to send me bring Smith's, formerly Denver's, Division. Add to this all other force you can possibly spare. Send two regiments of Cavalry also. If you have not received the Cavalry last ordered from Helena divert them to this place instead of sending two ^{other} regiments.

No boat will be permitted to leave Memphis going North until transportation is fully provided for all the troops coming this way. The Quartermaster in charge of transportation, and Col. W. S. Hillyer are specially instructed to see that this directive is fully enforced.

The entire rebel force hitherto against me are completely at my mercy. I do

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not want to see them escape by being reinforced from elsewhere.

I hope before this reaches you troops will be already on the way from your command.

Gen. Sledge can spare enough from his force to Garrison Lorange & Grand Junction.

Very respectfully
U. S. Grant
Maj. Gen.

Rec'd in West A. C.
Gen. S. 1/2 Aug.

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Transcript

Ulysses S. Grant to Stephen A. Hurlbut, May 31, 1863 (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC07055)

Head Quarters, Dept. of the Tenn.
Near Vicksburg, May 31st 1863,

Maj: Gen. S. A. Hurlbut,
Cmd^g. 16th Army Corps,

Gen.

I send this by Col. Hillyer of my Staff to insure it reaching you speedily and that he may urge upon you the necessity of the very prompts action.

Vicksburg is so strong by nature and so well fortified that sufficient force cannot be brought to bear against it to carry it by storm against the present Garrison. It must be taken by a regular siege or by starving out the Garrison. I have all the force necessary for this if my rear [2] was not threatened.

It is now certain that Jo Johnston has already collected a force from twenty to twenty-five thousand strong at Jackson & Canton and is using every effort to increase it to forty thousand. With this he will undoubtedly attack Harris Bluff and compell me to abandon the investment of the City if not reinforced before he can get here. I want your District striped to the very lowest possible standard. You can be in no possible danger for the time it will be necessary to keep their troops away. All points in West Tennessee North of the Memphis & Charleston road, if necessary, can be abandoned entirely. West Kentucky may be reduced to a small Garrison at Paducah and [3] Columbus.

If you have not already brought forward the troops to Memphis to send me bring Smith's, formerly Denver's, Division. Add to this all other force you can possibly spare. Send two regiments of Cavalry also. If you have not received the Cavalry last ordered from Helena divert them to this place instead of sending two [*inserted*: other] regiments.

No boat will be permitted to leave Memphis going North until transportation is fully provided for all the troops coming this way. The Quartermaster in charge of transportation and Col. W.S. Hillyer are specially instructed to see that this direction is fully enforced. The entire rebel force heretofore against me are completely at my mercy. I do [4] not want to see them

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escape by being reinforced from elsewhere.

I hope before this reaches you troops will be already in the way from your command.

Gen. Dodge can spare enough from his force to garrison La Grange & Grand Junction.

Very respectfully

U. S. Grant

Maj: Gen.

[*docket*]

Rec^d. H^d Qrs 16thA.C.

June 3^d. 1 ½ P.US.