



Foundation Document Overview

Vicksburg National Military Park

Mississippi



Contact Information

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Purpose



VICKSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK commemorates and interprets the campaigns, siege, and defense of Vicksburg, Mississippi, during the Civil War; interprets the history of Vicksburg from 1862 through Reconstruction; and preserves and protects the battlefield, Vicksburg National Cemetery, and related significant resources.

Park Description

Vicksburg National Military Park was established on February 21, 1899, to protect areas associated with the siege and defense of Vicksburg, Mississippi, which pitted Union forces commanded by Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant against the defending Confederate forces commanded by Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton. With the capture of New Orleans by Union Admiral David Farragut and Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler on May 1, 1862, the heavily fortified Confederate position at Vicksburg posed the most significant remaining obstacle to complete Union control of the Mississippi River. The Union effort to take Vicksburg and neutralize its gun batteries began in May 1862 with a series of unsuccessful naval attacks led by Farragut and ended with Grant's climactic siege of the city, which surrendered to Union forces on July 4, 1863.

Grant's Vicksburg campaign began in November 1862, with his forces moving overland from western Tennessee and those of his subordinate, Gen. William T. Sherman, moving south from Memphis, Tennessee, in a river-borne movement along the Mississippi River toward Vicksburg. This campaign ended in failure, as did several subsequent attempts to bypass the Vicksburg gun batteries through navigating existing bayous or excavating canals. In April 1863, Grant abandoned this water-borne strategy and moved Union forces down the west bank of the Mississippi south of Vicksburg, successfully crossed the river, and began moving overland. He first defeated the Confederate forces at Port Gibson and Raymond, and then took the state capital of Jackson, Mississippi, to secure his flank. Grant then turned west toward Vicksburg. After two attempts on May 19 and 22 made it clear that a direct assault on the city's fortifications would be too costly in terms of casualties, Union forces began siege operations. Pressure from supply shortages and lack of relief from other Confederate forces in the theater led Pemberton to surrender the city after 47 days.

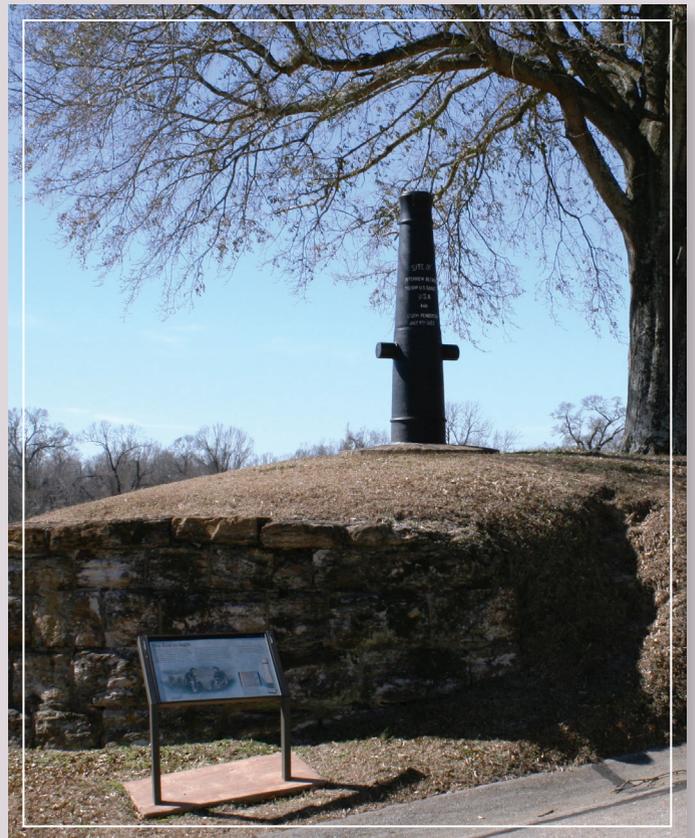




The Union victory at Vicksburg secured control of the Mississippi River for both Union logistics and commerce. The Confederacy was effectively split in two, and the area of active conflict was largely focused on the eastern theater for the duration of the war. Combined with Gen. Robert E. Lee's near simultaneous defeat at Gettysburg, the victory at Vicksburg represented a key turning point in the Civil War in favor of the Union. Grant's Vicksburg campaign is regarded by many historians as a masterpiece of maneuver warfare, "the most brilliant campaign ever fought on American soil . . . a well-conceived, violently executed offensive plan" (U.S. Army, Field Manual No. 100-5, May 1986). Grant's success led President Abraham Lincoln to name him General in Chief of the Armies of the United States and ultimately to a Union victory in the Civil War and preservation of the Union.

Vicksburg National Military Park currently consists of 1,806 acres, which protect most of the historic siege and defense lines from the final stage of the campaign. The entire battlefield area is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, as is the ironclad gunboat USS *Cairo*, the Shirley House, the only surviving antebellum structure within the park, and a number of major memorials and statues. There are 22 state memorials within park boundaries, 5 state memorials on former park property, and one state memorial on Grant's Canal. There are 12 free-standing bronze statues in the park, as well as 4 bronze statues associated with the Navy Monument, and 6 bronze statues associated with 5 of the state monuments. The park includes the Vicksburg National Cemetery, which is the final resting place of 17,000 Union soldiers and sailors killed in operations associated with the Vicksburg campaigns, as well as veterans of later wars. The park also manages a remnant of Grant's Canal, part of a failed military strategy to build a navigable waterway to bypass the defenses at Vicksburg, and Pemberton's Headquarters, the command center for Confederate forces during the siege of Vicksburg.

Vicksburg National Military Park maintains a 16-mile tour road that allows visitors to experience the Union siege and Confederate defensive lines via 15 designated tour stops. Nearly 1,400 monuments and markers, including 284 regimental monuments, 239 regimental markers, 95 relief portraits, and 62 busts honoring key commanders from both sides lie along this route, while 645 iron tablets and guide posts mark trench lines, battery, and infantry positions, and describe battle events. The park also maintains other interpretive exhibits to help visitors understand the significance and historical context of the campaign.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Battlefield Landscape** – During the spring of 1863, Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant launched a complex plan to capture Vicksburg and wrestle total control of the Mississippi River from the Confederacy. This campaign culminated in the siege of Vicksburg, lasting from May 18 to July 4, 1863. Because of the tactics and terrain used during the defense and siege of Vicksburg, the battlefield landscape protected by Vicksburg National Military Park is uniquely different from other Civil War parks. A number of individual features make up the complex mosaic of the battlefield landscape. Large portions of the battlefield are overgrown with vegetation but key areas have been restored to their 1863 appearance, providing historic sight lines that give visitors a better understanding of how the battle was perceived by the soldiers involved in this struggle.
- **Vicksburg National Cemetery** – Recognizing the need to address the proper burial of Civil War dead, Congress passed legislation to establish Vicksburg National Cemetery in 1866. The following year interments began at the cemetery, making it one of the oldest national cemeteries in America. More than 17,000 troops are buried in Vicksburg National Cemetery, the largest Union cemetery in the nation. Of these burials, the identity of almost 13,000 soldiers and sailors is unknown. The cemetery also protects the final resting place of a significant number of United States Colored Troops who served during the Civil War. This national cemetery also contains the remains of veterans of the Mexican–American War, Spanish–American War, World Wars I and II, and the Korean War. Vicksburg National Cemetery was closed to burials in 1961.



- **Commemorative Landscape** – Soon after Vicksburg National Military Park was established in 1899, the nation’s leading architects and sculptors were commissioned to honor the soldiers and sailors who had fought in the campaign. Today, more than 1,400 monuments, tablets, and markers dot the landscape offering mute testimony to the courage and sacrifice of blue and gray alike. The commemorative landscape is a fundamental part of the park’s purpose, which reflects the efforts of veterans groups and states from both sides to write their legacy on the landscape of Vicksburg National Military Park, while healing and reuniting the nation.



- **USS Cairo and Associated Artifacts** – Constructed in the fall of 1861, the USS *Cairo* was one of seven ironclad gunboats designed by James B. Eads to serve Union forces during the western campaigns of the Civil War. During the Vicksburg campaign the USS *Cairo* hit an electrically detonated mine on December 12, 1862, and sank in the muddy waters of the Yazoo River. The USS *Cairo*, its cannon, and many of the personal items of sailors on board became frozen in time until its rediscovery on November 12, 1956. Raised from her watery grave, the USS *Cairo* was partially restored and eventually brought to Vicksburg National Military Park in 1977. The USS *Cairo* and its contents are a priceless time capsule reflecting life onboard a Union vessel during the Civil War. The story of this ironclad and the Brown Water Navy, as well as many of the ship’s artifacts, are on display at the USS *Cairo* Museum.

Other Important Resources and Values

- **Pemberton's Headquarters** – Built in 1835–36, the property served as the second command headquarters for Lt. Gen. John C. Pemberton as his first was within firing range of Union batteries. Pemberton used the house from May 23 until the Confederate surrender on July 4, 1863. The Greek revival style architecture of the house has not been altered significantly since the historic events that took place there and the house retains a high level of integrity. General Pemberton's Headquarters was designated a national historic landmark in 1977, and in 2002 Congress passed legislation authorizing acquisition of the property for inclusion in Vicksburg National Military Park.
- **Grant's Canal** – Located across the Mississippi River in Louisiana, the site of Grant's Canal was part of a larger military strategy to build a navigable waterway to bypass the city of Vicksburg and its defenses. In 1990, Congress added a surviving section of Grant's Canal to Vicksburg National Military Park. This site not only connects visitors to this unique chapter in the Vicksburg campaigns but also interprets the distinguished actions of United States Colored Troops during the battle of Milliken's Bend, which took place north of Vicksburg.
- **Solemnity of Site** – Because of the death and destruction waged on these grounds protected by Vicksburg National Military Park, the park lands have been described as hallowed ground. This provides a sense of solemnity that is a fundamental value of the park. Maintaining this sense of solemnity is an important goal to maintain in any future management decisions for the park. Vicksburg National Military Park provides an opportunity to reflect on the sacrifices of the fallen and the implications of the Civil War on the nation in a somber and reverential place.
- **Connections with the Community of Vicksburg** – The community of Vicksburg and Vicksburg National Military Park are fundamentally connected not only by the historic events that took place there, but through a need for collaboration in the stewardship of the park and its legacy. Consisting of 1,806 acres, the largest publicly accessible park in the community, Vicksburg National Military Park also manages key sites scattered throughout Vicksburg including Pemberton's Headquarters, Louisiana Circle, South Fort, and Navy Circle. By working in partnership with citizens, nongovernmental organizations, municipal and state governments, and other federal agencies, the park strives to protect viewsheds, maintain appropriate buffering, and engage diverse audiences in the stewardship of park resources.

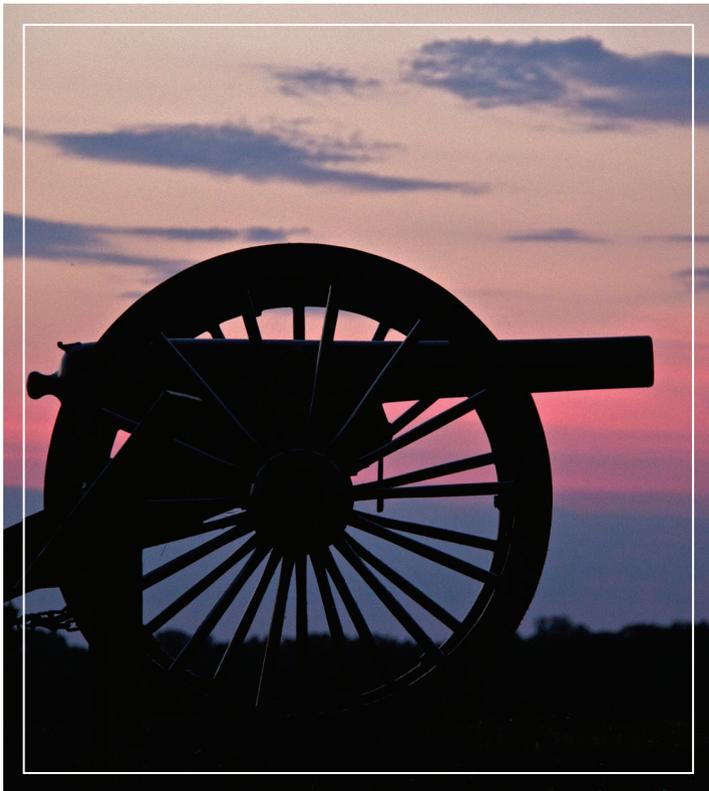
Vicksburg National Military Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Appropriate Recreational Opportunities** – Vicksburg National Military Park is within the city of Vicksburg and the 1,806 acres of rolling terrain is the premier green space for the local community. The daily use of the park for fitness activities such as walking, running, and biking creates a unique opportunity to engage community members and foster park relevancy with local stakeholders. Appropriate recreation at the park provides an opportunity for users of current and future generations to continue to experience and appreciate the park in different ways, but recreation must be done in a way in which commemoration and solemnity of the battlefield are respected.
- **Prairie Nymph** – The prairie nymph (*Herbertia lahue*) is a small purple iris flower that grows in abundance along the mowed landscape of the tour road that winds through Vicksburg National Military Park. Designated a species of special concern in the state of Mississippi, this wildflower is common in the open grasslands in the park, exemplifying the benefits of a diverse landscape that includes edge habitats and open grasslands as well as hardwood forest, thereby enhancing the biodiversity of the park.
- **Mint Spring Falls/Bayou** – Mint Spring Bayou and Waterfall is in the northwest portion of the park near the Yazoo Diversion Canal and has both historic and natural significance. During the defense and siege at Vicksburg, both Union and Confederate soldiers relied on the bayou for fresh water and this natural feature served as a boundary between battle lines. The Mint Spring Bayou waterfall has been designated as a "Mississippi State Natural Feature."
- **Archeological Resources** – Archeological resources at Vicksburg National Military Park may be found throughout the battlefield landscape and could provide insights into the struggles that took place during the Vicksburg Campaign as well as information on civilian life during the Civil War. Earthen fortifications, earthworks, trenches, and the remnants of other military defenses are visible resources on the surface. Subsurface archeological resources may also be found throughout the park. A comprehensive archeological survey of the entire park has not been conducted, so the level of integrity of these archeological resources has not been fully determined.

Significance

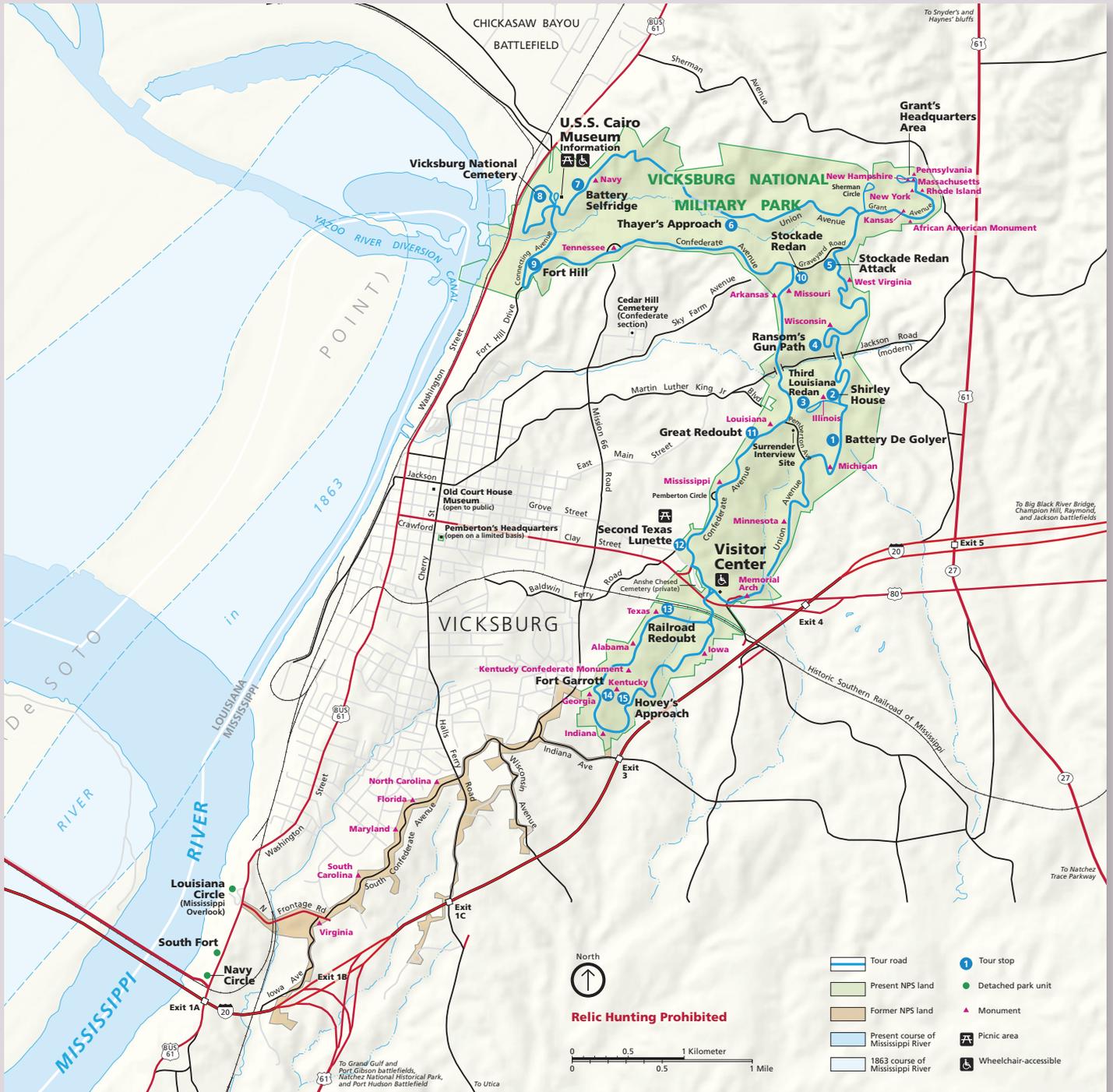
Significance statements express why Vicksburg National Military Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The battlefield protected by Vicksburg National Military Park is hallowed ground on which more than 100,000 soldiers from both the Confederate and Union armies fought and suffered, many of whom were wounded or died in the struggle for the city of Vicksburg and for control of the Mississippi River.
- A combination of the Mississippi River, rail, and roads, along with imposing terrain and natural defenses, made Vicksburg both a stronghold and strategic military target, thus providing control and protection of transportation and commerce routes that were vital avenues of connection within the Confederacy.



- The USS *Cairo* and associated artifacts provide visitors direct access to the most intact Civil War ironclad gunboat and a window into the life of Union sailors serving in the Brown Water Navy.
- One of the most complex and protracted military operations in U.S. history, the Vicksburg campaign marked a decisive turning point of the Civil War, giving the Union control of the Mississippi River, splitting the Confederacy in half, and elevating Ulysses S. Grant as a military and future political leader.
- The courageous actions of United States Colored Troops at the battle of Milliken's Bend fought during the Vicksburg Campaign secured the first battlefield victory for these forces, demonstrating the resolve of African Americans to fight for their freedom, leading to a shift in the perception of African Americans in the U.S. military.
- The Union occupation and subsequent Reconstruction era of Vicksburg served as a national model demonstrating the successes and failures of post-Civil War recovery efforts in the South, including the genesis of the Freedmen's Bureau, which set the tone for self-sufficiency in the African American community.
- Established in 1866, Vicksburg National Cemetery is the final resting place for more than 17,000 Union soldiers, sailors, and United States Colored Troops, the most of any national cemetery in the country.
- Vicksburg National Military Park showcases one of the most extensive collections of commemorative monuments, sculptures, and outdoor art in the world, created by some of the leading artists of their times.
- Vicksburg National Military Park serves as a high-quality natural area, providing one of the few remaining public land tracts of loess bluff hardwood forest and diverse transitional habitat in the lower Mississippi Delta region and river corridor, thereby supporting numerous species of migratory birds, the rare prairie nymph, and a host of species that have lost habitat through urban development and agrarian monoculture.

Park Map



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

The Military Experience: Strategy, Tactics, Technology and Humanity

- The Vicksburg campaign encompassed a complex and coordinated regional effort to control the Mississippi River. Success at Vicksburg achieved the Union’s major objective of splitting the Confederacy in two and surrounding it. In addition, the Union’s simultaneous victories at Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, signaled the turning point of the American Civil War.
- The Vicksburg campaign is the culminating point in a series of campaigns that linked political, strategic, operational, and the tactical art of war. It is used as a model for present-day military operations and studies.
- The Vicksburg campaign occurred during a period of significant evolutionary advances in technology, resulting in major changes in the conduct of war.

Siege and Fall of Vicksburg

- Civilians in Vicksburg endured a 47-day siege, an ordeal bringing out the fortitude and resilience of individuals to survive no matter the cost.



The Occupation of Vicksburg

- The military occupation of Vicksburg on July 4, 1863, and the emancipation of enslaved residents, unleashed a political battle over state sovereignty, civil rights, and the power of government to remake and police society; these struggles became iconic for the nation. The Union Army occupied Vicksburg 1863–1875.

Reconstruction Period

- From 1865–1875, the Union Army, other federal agencies, and the Vicksburg, Mississippi, civilian government struggled to find solutions to reestablish social and economic order after the war, providing insight into the challenges, changes, and consequences faced by residents and public officials during this period of U.S. history.

Commemoration

- Vicksburg National Cemetery and its monuments exhibit the commitment of a grateful nation and its effort to honor sacrifices of soldiers and sailors whose devotion to duty and shared war-time experiences transcend perceived boundaries of the North and South, reflecting a reunified nation.
- Vicksburg National Military Park presents a unique commemorative landscape design showcasing outdoor sculptures and architecture created by leading artists of the American Renaissance era (1876–17), the value and artistic expression of which is unmatched by any other collection of works created during this period.

Stewardship: ‘Transforming the Environment’

- Today the park and Vicksburg National Cemetery are layered landscapes with historically significant features and commemorative elements from the 19th to the 21st century. Guided by NPS policies, ongoing research, and new preservation methods and techniques, this landscape brings together the complexities of interpreting ongoing preservation efforts and the experiences of soldiers and residents during the campaign, siege, and occupation of Vicksburg, Mississippi.