

## Engineering Victory: The Union Siege of Vicksburg

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ISSN 0003-4827

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### Recommended Citation

Barloon, Mark. "Engineering Victory: The Union Siege of Vicksburg." *The Annals of Iowa* 76 (2017), 228-229.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.12384>

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commander. The author's penchant for asides on minor characters or ephemeral details amplifies the organizational problems presented by these twin narratives. For example, after noting that Dodge's chief of scouts in 1863 was from the Seventh Kansas Cavalry, Morgans sets off on a page-long excursion on the Seventh's history that manages to encompass "Bleeding Kansas," William "Buffalo Bill" Cody, future Kansas governor Edmund Needham Morrill, and Susan B. Anthony (110-11). Dodge often gets lost in these details. The result is an interesting but at times exasperating study of Iowa's most famous Civil War general.

*Engineering Victory: The Union Siege of Vicksburg*, by Justin S. Solonick. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015. ix, 289 pp. Illustrations, maps, diagrams, table, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$37.50 hardcover.

Reviewer Mark Barloon is senior lecturer of history at Central College. His Ph.D. dissertation (University of North Texas, 2001) was "Combat Reconsidered: A Statistical Analysis of Small-Unit Actions during the American Civil War."

The Vicksburg Campaign was *the* critical moment of the American Civil War. Federal success depended on the intelligence and improvisational skill of the midwesterners who filled the ranks of Major General Ulysses S. Grant's Army of the Tennessee. Because they had only three professional engineers to guide them, Grant's soldiers were forced to apply their own creativity and common sense to the problem of besieging the enemy. Consequently, Confederate Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton was forced to surrender his army. He did not surrender because his men had depleted their supplies but rather because their defensive works had been compromised by Grant's crafty, self-educated, soldiers-turned-engineers. Although the soldiers performed exceptionally, their siege tactics were not exceptional; they resembled the siegecraft of seventeenth-century French Marshal Vauban more than the modern trench warfare of World War I.

These are the arguments made by historian Justin Solonick, who received his Ph.D. in 2013 under the tutelage of Steven Woodworth at Texas Christian University. In this book, Solonick enters into three separate scholarly debates regarding Vicksburg and the Civil War. First, he reinforces his mentor's belief that the West was the critical theater of the war and that westerners made better soldiers than easterners. Second, he advances Michael Ballard's suggestion that the Confederates did not surrender because of a lack of supplies. Instead, it was the Federals' relentless advancement of their trenches that forced

Pemberton to recognize the futility of his position and surrender. Finally, Solonick enters into the scholarly debate started by John Mahon regarding the modernity of Civil War combat. Solonick concludes that the siege of Vicksburg did not presage World War I trench warfare; rather, it looked more like the Vauban sieges of the 1670s.

There is a lot to like about this book. Solonick demonstrates skill as both a researcher and a writer. He has scoured archives from New York to North Carolina in his search for snippets regarding the technical aspects of the Federal siege. He is equally disciplined in his writing. His text is muscular and concise, aided by a logical progression of chapters, with cogent summaries at the end of each. Furthermore, his apt use of pictures, maps, and diagrams helps readers understand both the theoretical and real world aspects of the siege.

Of course, no book is perfect. One disturbing mistake can be found on the first page. There, and throughout the book, Solonick cites Charles Hobbs's important memoir of the Vicksburg Campaign, yet he fails to include it in his bibliography. Although this omission may be nothing more than an editorial lapse, it causes readers to doubt the integrity of the work. (Let me hasten to add that the overall quality of Solonick's monograph is excellent, suggesting that this gaffe is simply an unfortunate mistake.) More troubling, however, are Solonick's repeated claims that Grant's western soldiers were uniquely qualified to conduct this siege. Throughout the book he describes the Federal soldiers using phrases like "can-do attitude" (2), "western exceptionalism" (3), "western improvisation" (77), "soldier improvisation" (176), and "soldier ingenuity" (215). He implies that Grant's midwesterners were more capable of becoming amateur military engineers than other Federal soldiers, yet he fails to compare their improvisational abilities with those of other Federals in other armies. Again, this quibble does not cripple his work, but Solonick would be more persuasive if he understated rather than overstated his "midwestern exceptionalism" argument.

On the whole, *Engineering Victory* is a fine examination of the siege tactics used by the Federals at Vicksburg. It presents the complex story of Grant's efforts to topple the "Gibraltar of the West" in a clear and coherent manner. Regardless of whether you agree with all of Solonick's arguments, it is difficult to disagree with him when he concludes that the soldiers of the Army of the Tennessee outperformed their Confederate counterparts at Vicksburg.

*Lincoln and Emancipation*, by Edna Greene Medford. Concise Lincoln Library Series. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015. 141 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 hardcover.

*Lincoln and the Thirteenth Amendment*, by Christian Samito. Concise Lincoln Library Series. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015. ix, 171 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$24.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Brian Dirck is professor of history at Anderson University. He is the author of *Lincoln and the Constitution* (2012) and *Lincoln the Lawyer* (2007).

From Southern Illinois University's superb Concise Lincoln Library series come two volumes that examine parallel and seminal events in Abraham Lincoln's presidency: the complex and often difficult path he pursued toward embracing emancipation as a central Union war aim and his embrace of the Thirteenth Amendment as the best means to finally eradicate once and for all the institution of American slavery.

Few subjects in Lincoln scholarship are as controversial as emancipation. To her credit, Edna Greene Medford brings to the task a balanced and well-informed perspective. Her Lincoln is neither saint nor sinner but a well-meaning man whose views on race and emancipation were essentially moderate and evolved over time. "Lincoln followed a less urgent and more detached path than the revolutionaries" like Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner, she writes, and "while he saw advantage in gradual and peaceful abolition, the war escalated his timetable and altered his approach" (3).

Medford is careful to set Lincoln within the context of his times, particularly the volatile sectional politics of the 1850s, during which "Lincoln honed his argument in opposition to the expansion of slavery and availed himself of the opportunities presented to share his views" (23). Consistently denouncing the evils of slavery but just as consistently expressing misgivings about the possibility of a mixed-race American society and denying that anyone could properly interfere with the property rights of slaveholding white Southerners, Lincoln's arguments "comforted moderates" but alienated abolitionists (24).

During the war President Lincoln began by insisting on keeping slavery at arm's length, denying that the war was fundamentally about emancipation and supporting various gradualist antislavery schemes involving compensating white slaveholders and colonizing freed slaves out of the United States. But the war increasingly radicalized Lincoln. In the end he embraced not only emancipation as a war policy, but also the absolute end to slavery via constitutional amendment—a remarkable evolution.