

## Vicksburg, and a Confederate Offensive in the East

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The week of June 16-22 1863, saw no major battles, but was notable for the continuation of the siege of Vicksburg and the movement of both Union and Confederate armies in the opening stages of the Gettysburg campaign. In addition, West Virginia officially became the thirty-fifth state following a proclamation by President Lincoln, and the Confederate ironclad *Atlanta* was captured by Union forces.

In Mississippi, the siege of Vicksburg dragged on, with Federal forces under General Ulysses S. Grant extending their lines and launching a bombardment of the Confederate positions with more than 200 cannon. By mid-June, the southern high command had determined that any attempt to relieve the besieged city was “hopeless.” Despite the death and destruction, the siege also demonstrated the softer side of the war as jokes and the trading of supplies sometimes occurred between the two sides. Often, nightfall brought a temporary end to the deadly firing from sharpshooters and allowed for truces and trading between rebels and Federals. One veteran noted: “Johnny Reb and Jonathon Fed [had] many a set-to to see who could say the funniest things or who could outwit the other in a trade.”

Such brief pleasantries could not, however, ease the growing sense of despair felt by many of the defenders. As the siege wore on one battle-weary Confederate officer put his desperation in words: “One day is like another in a besieged city—all you can hear is the rattle of the Enemy’s guns, with the sharp crackle of rifles of their sharp-shooters going from early dawn to dark and then at night the roaring of the terrible mortars is kept up sometimes all this time.”

A major change in the Federal command at Vicksburg took place this week as Grant removed General John McClernand from command of the Thirteenth Army Corps. The two officers had been rivals for some time, with the politically-powerful McClernand leading a separate force during the early stages of the campaign before being placed under Grant's command. The reason for McClernand's dismissal was that the general had allowed an order to be published in newspapers congratulating his command and denigrating others without Grant's permission. Grant viewed McClernand as inferior, self-seeking, and incompetent, a view shared by many in the Union army.

In the eastern theater, Lee's Army of Northern Virginia continued its movement northward, with Richard Ewell's Second Corps in the vanguard. Following their victory at Winchester, Ewell's command began crossing the Potomac River on June 16, to be followed in subsequent days by troops under James Longstreet and A.P. Hill. As the army advanced, cavalry skirmishes and small battles would occur at locations such as Middleburg and Aldie Virginia; Point of Rocks, Maryland; and Greencastle, Pennsylvania. Union General Joseph Hooker responded to Lee's advance by moving the bulk of his command to northern Virginia, maintaining a position between Lee and Washington, D.C.

Federal naval forces won a victory on the Georgia coast with the capture of the Confederate ironclad CSS *Atlanta*. Originally a Scottish ship, it had run the blockade into Savannah in 1861, and Confederate officials subsequently determined to convert her into an ironclad, mounting eight guns in an armored casemate. The vessel proved slow, leaky, mechanically unreliable, and hard to maneuver, but Commander William Webb nevertheless determined on June 17 to attack two Union warships, the monitors *Weehawken* and *Nahant*. The *Atlanta* quickly ran aground and was pummeled by the Federals, with Webb surrendering

his vessel within fifteen minutes. It was an embarrassing defeat for the outmanned Confederate navy.