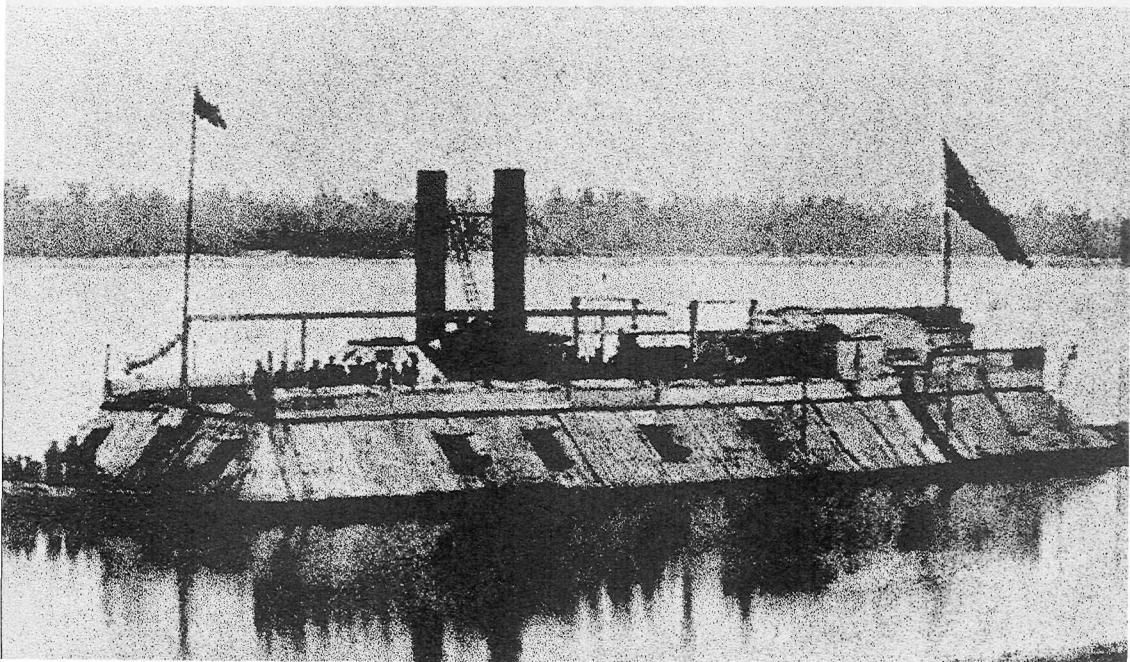


# Staff Ride Handbook for The Vicksburg Campaign, December 1862–July 1863



## FOREWORD

Since the early twentieth century, officers of the U.S. Army have honed their professional knowledge and skills by conducting staff rides to historical battlefields. Often, these educational exercises have focused on the tactical level of war, through a detailed examination of a single battle. The Vicksburg staff ride presented in this booklet, by contrast, focuses at the operational level of war. By studying the Vicksburg campaign and visiting the places where it took shape, the military professional can gain a greater appreciation for operational art—the conception, execution, and adjustment of a campaign plan. Individual battles and the tactics employed therein are not ignored but rather are set into the context of an evolving campaign. There is much of value here for military professionals in the twenty-first century.

June 2001

LAWYN C. EDWARDS  
Colonel, Aviation  
Director, Combat Studies Institute



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# **Staff Ride Handbook for The Vicksburg Campaign, December 1862–July 1863**

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**Dr. Christopher R. Gabel  
and the Staff Ride Team,  
Combat Studies Institute**

**Combat Studies Institute  
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027-1352**

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## INTRODUCTION

*Ad bellum Pace Parati*: prepared in peace for war. This sentiment was much on the mind of Captain Arthur L. Wagner as he contemplated the quality of military education at the Infantry and Cavalry School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, during the 1890s. Wagner believed that the school's curricula during the long years of peace had become too far removed from the reality of war, and he cast about for ways to make the study of conflict more real to officers who had no experience in combat. Eventually, he arrived at a concept called the "Staff Ride," which consisted of detailed classroom study of an actual campaign followed by a visit to the sites associated with that campaign. Although Wagner never lived to see the Staff Ride added to the Leavenworth curricula, an associate of his, Major Eben Swift, implemented the Staff Ride at the General Service and Staff School in 1906. In July of that year, Swift led a contingent of twelve students to Chattanooga, Tennessee, to begin a two-week study of the Atlanta campaign of 1864.

The Staff Ride concept pioneered at Leavenworth in the early years of the twentieth century remains a vital part of officer professional development today. At the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, the Army War College, ROTC detachments, and units throughout the world, U.S. Army officers are studying war vicariously in peacetime through the Staff Ride methodology. That methodology (in-depth preliminary study, rigorous field study, and integration of the two) need not be tied to a formal schoolhouse environment. Units stationed near historic battlefields can experience the intellectual and emotional stimulation provided by standing on the hallowed ground where soldiers once contended for their respective causes. Yet units may find themselves without many of the sources of information on a particular campaign that are readily available in an academic environment. For that reason, the Combat Studies Institute has begun a series of handbooks that will provide practical information on conducting Staff Rides to specific campaigns and battles. These handbooks are not intended to be used as a substitute for serious study by Staff Ride leaders or participants. Instead, they represent an effort to assist officers in locating sources, identifying teaching points, and designing meaningful field study phases. As such, they represent a starting point from which a more rigorous professional development experience may be crafted.

The Vicksburg campaign of 1862-63 is an effective vehicle for a Staff Ride. It raises a variety of teaching points, at both the operational and tactical levels, that are relevant to today's officers. Several different types of combat occurred in the course of the campaign. In addition, the campaign featured prominent participation by the Navy, thus raising a joint dimension. It also offers examples of combat support and combat service support activities, most notably military engineering and logistics.

*The Staff Ride Handbook for the Vicksburg Campaign, December 1862-July 1863*, provides a systematic approach to the analysis of this key Civil War campaign. Part I describes the organization of the Union and Confederate Armies, detailing their weapons, tactics, and logistical, engineer, communications, and medical support. It also includes a description of the U.S. Navy elements that featured so prominently in the campaign.

Part II consists of a campaign overview that establishes the context for the individual actions to be studied in the field.

Part III consists of a suggested itinerary of sites to visit in order to obtain a concrete view of the campaign in its several phases. For each site, or "stand," there is a set of travel directions, a discussion of the action that occurred there, and vignettes by participants in the campaign that further explain the action and which also allow the student to sense the human "face of battle."

Part IV provides practical information on conducting a Staff Ride in the Vicksburg area, including sources of assistance and logistical considerations. Appendix A outlines the order of battle for the significant actions in the campaign. Appendix B provides biographical sketches of key participants. Appendix C provides an overview of Medal of Honor conferral in the campaign. An annotated bibliography suggests sources for preliminary study.

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