

### Champion Hill: Decisive Battle for Vicksburg

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## Review

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**Smith, Timothy B.** *Champion Hill: Decisive Battle For Vicksburg.* Savas Beatie, \$34.95 ISBN 1932714006

Battle's first broad study

Confederate loss sealed fate of the campaign and the war in the west

Individual battles in large Civil War campaigns often receive less attention in research and publication space than they deserve. This is perhaps more true in the Western Theatre than in the East. The campaign that sealed the fate of the Confederacy in the West was undoubtedly the effort to take Vicksburg and open the Mississippi River for the Union. Most research and writing on the campaign has focused on Union efforts to approach the fortress city and accounts of the siege once Confederate forces were trapped within the impressive defenses. Almost as a wayside in these narratives is the Battle of Champion Hill. J.F.C. Fuller placed the engagement in its proper perspective when he stated, The drums of Champion's Hill sounded the doom of Richmond.

This battle doomed the Confederate forces in western Mississippi to withdraw into the Vicksburg defenses. Severing the Confederacy into portions east and west of the Mississippi River, the battle eliminated the Confederates' chance to breakout and join the other Rebel army in the region. The battle also set the stage for U.S. Grant to become the most powerful Union military man during the war, and arguably, to begin the long road to his presidency.

Only a handful of historians have tackled this monumental campaign with the attention it deserves, among them Edwin C. Bearss, Terrence Winschel, Warren Grabau, and Mike Ballard. All of these superb researchers have added their insight and opinions to the body of knowledge and written at length about the campaign. No one has, until now, concentrated on the Battle of Champion Hill.

Into this breach has entered Timothy B. Smith, Ph.D., a graduate of Mississippi State University and a staff historian at Shiloh National Military Park. Dr. Smith has expanded his Ph.D. dissertation into this volume and the result is an excellent description of the battle.

The book does have some oddities for the reader. The first four chapters, consisting of 108 pages, gives background that almost anyone with knowledge of the campaign will find familiar. Although it sets the scene nicely, it gets in the way of describing the battle. As one would expect, there is a heavy reliance on the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* and secondary sources, but relatively few (by percentage of citations) diary and journal citations.

Once the author gets down to the core of his subject, he does a superb job in recounting the story and placing the battle in its proper context within the campaign. His writing style is clear and concise. There are several strong points that add to the value of this volume. The maps are plentiful, easy to read, very detailed, and are a great aid to the reader. There is an abundance of photographs of personalities from the campaign. The author included two sections that are very beneficial to researchers. First, an order of battle is included as an appendix. The organization is very clear and includes the name of commanders down to regimental level. Secondly, the postscript entitled *Thereafter* lists the major personalities and details what happened to their careers after the battle.

This book will be a welcome addition to the library of those interested in the War in the West, and in particular, the Vicksburg Campaign. Dr. Smith is to be commended for his fine scholarly effort.

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