

### Engineering Victory: The Union Siege of Vicksburg

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## Review

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**Solonick, Justin S.** *Engineering Victory: The Union Siege of Vicksburg.* Southern Illinois University Press, \$37.50 ISBN 9780809333912

### Digging, Not Starving out Vicksburg's Defenders

Many books have been written about the 1863 Vicksburg Campaign, but few of them have spent more than a few pages explaining the Union engineering effort that made the Federal victory possible. This oversight has been ably corrected by Justin S. Solonick in his book *Engineering Victory: The Union Siege of Vicksburg*.

On the first page of his book, author Justin S. Solonick sums up the Union engineering effort during the siege of Vicksburg: "The story of Vicksburg beleaguered remains an unwritten tale of engineering problems met with improvised solutions" (1). He spends the remainder of the book explaining in great detail how the shortage of trained engineers with the Army of the Tennessee forced the army to "mix its by-the-book siege techniques with western soldier improvisation (3). Solonick also contends that "contrary to popular 'Lost Cause' mythology, Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton and the beleaguered Confederate garrison at Vicksburg were not starved out they were dug out" (4).

It should be noted that this volume only covers the Union engineering efforts at Vicksburg. It does not delve into Confederate engineering during the siege, nor does it cover the Union defensive effort along the Big Black River to protect the Union army's rear. In the course of his work, Solonick explodes a number of myths involving the siege of Vicksburg, including the idea that the Confederate garrison surrendered because they were about to starve. The author contends that "deficiencies in food stocks did not determine the garrison's fate; rather, it was the efforts of the Union engineers and the westerners of the Army of the Tennessee that forced Pemberton to surrender...federal preparations for the July 6 attack, conducted within plain view of the Confederates, intimidated

the garrison into surrendering" (213-215).

The concluding chapter of the book evaluates the impact that the siege of Vicksburg had on the future of military warfare. Solonick comes to the conclusion that "the Vicksburg siege barely impacted the later sieges of the Civil War and represented the last Vauban-style siege in Western military history" (217). Although it was "not acting as a harbinger of future warfare," the author makes the point that the siege of Vicksburg was "a transitional event that helped define the Civil War as a transitional war. Although it signaled the death of the Vauban-style siege of the Enlightenment, the type of tactical movement that brought the Army of the Tennessee to within a few feet of the Gibraltar of the Confederacy during the summer of 1863 reinforced the basic principles of siege craft that extended back to antiquity" (219).

*Engineering Victory* is enhanced by the author's use of a large number of illustrations. The complexities of describing Civil War engineering to a lay audience make these a necessity, and Solonick has done a very good job in choosing prints, diagrams, and maps to help explain the technical jargon.

With *Engineering Victory: The Union Siege of Vicksburg*, Justin S. Solonick has done a very credible job of documenting the engineering effort that made the Federal victory at Vicksburg possible. For anyone wanting to learn more about how the Army of the Tennessee dug their way to victory at Vicksburg, this book is highly recommended.

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