A BGES Civil War Field University Program:
The Vicksburg Campaign Part 2: The Spring 1863
Bayou Expeditions and the Battle of Helena

Carl von Clausewitz stated in his 1832 classic, On War; “From the transport-driver and the drummer up to the general, boldness is the noblest of virtues, the true steel which gives the weapon its edge and brilliancy.” Bold is a superb description of the actions of the soldiers and sailors who toiled both for and against the Bayou Expeditions of early 1863—four efforts that Grant called a “series of experiments.”

These gutsy expeditions, two of which came within a hair’s breadth of succeeding, have been largely overlooked. Undoubtedly, this myopic view is because General Grant himself belittled the expeditions in his 1885 Memoirs. As so often happens, Grant fell victim to 20/20 hindsight when he wrote that the “experiments” were simply “to consume time, and to divert the attention of the enemy, of the troops and of the public generally.” Caveat emptor! Because 22 years earlier Grant wrote to General McClernand that he “went with the admiral [Porter] on his second excursion [into Steele’s Bayou], and, so far as explored, know it to be perfectly practicable.” Grant also wrote to the General-in-Chief, Henry Wager Halleck that, “Ordinary Ohio river boats can now pass from Lake Providence into Bayou Macon, and thence, by easy navigation, to the mouth of Red River.” Indeed, these 1863 statements are quite a contrast to his 1885 recollection in his Memoirs that, “I, myself, never felt great confidence that any of the experiments resorted to would prove successful.” Of course, Grant’s Memoirs are packed with wonderful information, written concisely and cogently, but one must always expect a bit of fact distortion in an autobiography.

This expedition will take you to the exact spots where these operations were attempted—most sites are so remote they cannot be visited in a bus, and some require a bit of walking. With that in mind, one may well ask why would BGES do this tour in February, when the weather can be so capricious? The reason is simple—the winter is when these expeditions were attempted and because it is when the water level is highest in the bayous. To understand the Bayou Expeditions it is imperative to visit the bayous when they are full, because some of them are little more than ditches during the hotter months of the year. BGES will take you where no other tour group would dare to go, and you will see and appreciate the geography that determined the course of history during one of our nation’s most critical periods. Indeed this study cannot be done by bus—it must be limited to two vans. Only 19 people can register. Don’t miss this one!

Wednesday, February 22, 2017
6:00 p.m. Registration at the Hampton Inn, Vicksburg and enjoy their hospitality suite.
6:45 p.m. Introductions by Len Riedel and then Parker Hills will do an introductory PowerPoint presentation. Hills is a master of the medium and the talk will be both informative and entertaining.

**Thursday, February 23, 2017**

Depart at 8:00 a.m. You can't have a play without setting the stage, so we will do this by traveling to the Mississippi River at a commanding overlook point to view the problem Grant faced and to discuss his strategic and operational level considerations of late 1862 and early 1863. Then we will travel to the only remaining Eads ironclad, the USS *Cairo*, in order to understand the enormity of the task trying to move these behemoths through the bayous of the Mississippi Delta. After gobbling some groceries for lunch, we will head into Louisiana to see one of Grant’s four experiments—Grant’s Canal. We will then venture further into Louisiana to see a frequently misunderstood engineering venture, the Duckport Canal, which has sometimes been mistakenly associated with the Bayou Expeditions. From there we travel up to Lake Providence to see a third canal; then we will go to Bayou Baxter to discuss the termination of the Lake Providence experiment, along with the motivation for the termination. Lunch is included and the hotel has a heavy snacks happy hour that we will endeavor to get you back in time for.

**Friday, February 24, 2017**

Depart at 8:00 a.m*. Today is a superb photo op day as we will take you to places no one else knows exists and that we have found over the years. The first BGES exclusive is the Ashton Cut—wartime levee and cypress bedded riverbed included. This cut in the Mississippi River levee was tangential to the Lake Providence Expedition, and if you accept that the Bayou Expeditions have been overlooked, you will know that this effort has been all but forgotten. Next on the schedule is Arkansas Post, which preceded Grant’s efforts and is not technically part of the mission at hand, but which is so far off the beaten path that we feel obligated to take you there. We then travel to Helena, where will pay homage to Pat Cleburne and Thomas Carmichael Hindman who are interred there. The July 4th, 1863 Battle of Helena will merit some discussion and is tied to the Ashton Cut. We will then stage ourselves for the Yazoo Pass Expedition by traveling back across the river into Mississippi to spend the night in Clarksdale. Lunch, dinner and the hotel are all included this day.

*Note: we are leaving the hotel today and you can either check out for the one night and store your bags or you can just bite the bullet and keep your room so that you can go straight to it when we return. The road hotel is included in your registration fee; however, the headquarters hotel in Vicksburg is your expense and responsibility. Just remember to make two reservations if you are “checking out.”
Saturday, February 25, 2017

Ready to go at 8:00 a.m. Today will be dedicated to one of those “almost successful” expeditions—the Yazoo Pass. You will benefit from another BGES exclusive when we take you to the actual point where the Mississippi River levee was blown on 3 February 1863. You will feel as if you have returned to that cold day in 1863. We will then follow the Union flotilla to magnificent Moon Lake, then along the Yazoo Pass to the Coldwater River. Here, at the junction of the two waterways (another BGES “find”) you can imagine the ironclads and the transports as they made a daunting 90 degree turn into the Coldwater. After lunch we will follow the Federal fleet southward as it debouches from the Coldwater into the Tallahatchie River. We will continue to follow the flotilla to Minter City, where the Federals learned from locals of a Confederate fort that had recently been constructed 32 river miles to their front. The next stop is Greenwood and the ironclads’ appointment with destiny at Fort Pemberton. We will show you an old friend, long forgotten—The Star of the West (of Fort Sumter fame). After walking the area thoroughly to discuss the travails of Joseph Brown’s Chillicothe and James Eads’ Baron de Kalb (originally the St. Louis) ironclads we will return to our home base at Vicksburg. Lunch is included but dinner is on your own.

Sunday, February 26, 2017

Again lets be on board by 8:00 a.m. This morning we travel to Snyder’s Bluff, northeast of Vicksburg, to understand the Confederate fortifications on the Yazoo River. Then we drive into the Mississippi Delta to Steele’s Bayou, where we will see how Porter began his Steele’s Bayou adventure on 13 March 1863. We will follow Porter’s flotilla up Steele’s Bayou to Muddy Bayou at Eagle Bend, then we proceed northward to Black Bayou. Here, at Black Bayou, Porter’s boldness came into full play, for it is here that he literally shoved five Eads ironclads through a narrow ditch for three miles, edging and digging all the way. We will remind you to keep the image of the USS Cairo in your mind’s eye as we talk about this stunning effort. Then we stop along Black Bayou at the point where Sherman’s legendary “candlestick march” took place on the night of 21 March. After this brief stop, we travel to Hill Plantation, Sherman’s forward base for his infantry that is supporting the ironclads. We will lunch at the Onward Country Store, where in the fall of 1902 Teddy Roosevelt refused to shoot a bear tied to a tree, thus, the story behind the famous “Teddy Bear.” We will return to the hotel filled with memories of a tour only conducted three other times—you cannot and will not get this tour from anyone but BGES. Lunch is included and so too is our traditional Catfish dinner at Rowdy’s.

About the Faculty:

Parker Hills is the nation’s leading historian on the Vicksburg Campaign and has a well earned reputation for the highest standards of preparation on tours and the exceptional educational value of his content. Being with Hills is like taking a senior
military service school course in which you will surely leave with far more knowledge than when you arrived. Parker is a graduate of the US Army War College and he is in high demand from businesses and military organizations that want his leadership training. Hills is the founder of BattleFocus and is a retired officer who served on both active duty as a battery commander in Korea, and as an aide to General of the Army Omar Bradley. He was the Director of Public Affairs for the Mississippi National Guard and he founded the Regional CounterDrug Training Academy in Meridian, Mississippi. Parker is the co-author of Receding Tide, Vicksburg and Gettysburg, The Campaigns that Changed the Civil War. Parker has also published the Vicksburg Campaign Driving Guide and The Art of Commemoration—a book that reveals the symbolism and beauty of the commemorative memorialization at the Vicksburg Park. He is also the driving force for preservation in the state of Mississippi and largely through his efforts the Raymond Battlefield Park exists. He is in high demand and his programs cost a little more; but, you will quickly see that they are well worth it.

**Hotel Information:**

Your registration fee includes includes one night’s single or double occupancy lodging. The headquarters hotel in Vicksburg is the Hampton Inn, 3330 Clay Street, Vicksburg, MS 39183. The phone number is 1-800-HAMPTON. When you call in ask for the group code **BAG.** Our rate is $89 plus tax single or double and reservations must be made by February 1st, 2017

In Oxford for Feb 21, 22 and 23, the headquarters hotel is Hampton InnOxford/Conference Center, 103 Ed Perry Blvd, Oxford, MS 38655. Phone: 662-234-5565.

**Transportation:**

The servicing airport is Jackson (JAN). It is about 45 miles to Vicksburg. **There is no public transportation.** Since Southwest Airlines has pulled out of Jackson, you may find it more economical and enjoyable to fly into New Orleans and rent a car for the 150 mile drive. Monroe, Louisiana is also an option but no better than Jackson and a little further. We will also make arrangements for those who drive in to leave their cars at the Hampton Inn while we are on the road.

**Recommended Reading:**

You will be provided with a reading book and maps upon arrival. The following books are suggested to enhance your readiness for the program.

_____ J. Parker Hills and Edwin C. Bearss: **Receding Tide, $28** click here to order the trade edition  Click here to order the deluxe leather edition for $43
Edwin C. Bearss, *The Vicksburg Campaign* (3 volumes) Out of print copies may be available from Broadfoot Books call 910-686-4816. This set is the basis for the 9 tour series.

### Registration Form

**The Vicksburg Campaign Part 2: The Spring 1863 Bayou Expeditions and the Battle of Helena**

*A BGES Field University Program*

*Presented by Brigadier General James Parker Hills, Ret.*

*February 22-26, 2017 from Vicksburg, MS*

Name: __________________________________________________________

Address: _______________________________________________________

City/State/Zip: ___________________________________________________

Phone: ___________________________ Email: _________________________

Registration includes four lunches, two dinners, one night single or double lodging on February 24th, a reading book with maps, the academic program, support of a professional historian, tour director, all admissions and transportation. We will also provide snacks, bottled water and a limited selection of sodas.

_______ Registration $995 (s) $925 (d)

_______ Current BGES member $925 (s) $850 (d)

_______ Teacher/full time student with identification $800

_______ I am not a member but would like to join so that I can get the member’s rate or I am a member who is past due to renew. Please accept my donation of

$_________ (must be $75 or more which is tax deductible)

_______ Send me the books indicated, I have enclosed $_____________
I am sending a deposit of $300 per person plus full payment for any books and or memberships. Total enclosed is $
I will pay the balance due before the event.

Check enclosed

Charge my (circle one) MC  VISA  AMEXP  Discover  $__________

#__________________________________________________________________________

Exp: _______________  CVV: _______________

Signature: ___________________________________________________________________

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