

*A BGES Field University Program*  
*Unvexed to the Sea, the Mississippi is Reopened*  
*The BGES' Signature Vicksburg Campaign Study,*  
*Part 8*

*Presented by Brigadier General James Parker Hills, Ret.*  
*November 18-21, 2020, from Baton Rouge, Louisiana*

BGES “owns the West,” and that’s a fact—no brag, just fact. No other organization has dared to “hump the miles” necessary to understand the endurance required to execute Forrest’s and Van Dorn’s late 1862 cavalry raids in West Tennessee and North Mississippi, nor has any other organization shown the “protuberances” of Grant and Porter to perambulate the swamps of the Bayou Expeditions in Mississippi and Louisiana during the winter of 1863.

While these events transpired, things were happening on the Lower Mississippi River that few read about, and almost none see for themselves. So now, after three-and-a-half years of stomping, scratching, sweating, and shivering, here comes the conclusion of BGES’s Odyssey of the Vicksburg Campaign. With the end in sight, now is the time tie up some loose ends. To use a phrase of some renown, the time has come to tell “the rest of the story.”

And what a remarkable story it is! This story is singular because of its relative obscurity. That is, the saga has almost dissipated into the fog of history. But BGES won’t allow that to happen, and just as Ed Bearss dragged the facts out of the mud 39 years ago in his unprecedented “Vicksburg Campaign” trilogy, we will hose those datum off, one by one, and thoroughly analyze them.

Along the way, we will see shimmering and wandering bayous, ancient live oaks bearded with Spanish moss, war-scarred antebellum mansions, and cypress swamps with snow-white egrets and dark, gnarly alligators. You really don’t want to miss this one, even if you have missed all of the precursors.

**Wednesday, November 18, 2020**

5:00 PM. Check into the headquarters hotel in Baton Rouge, and get there in plenty of time. At 5 PM, we will register, and at 6:30 we will open the program with a working supper that includes another of Parker Hills’ brand-new-for-BGES PowerPoint lectures, “Fight for the Lower Mississippi.”

Virtually anyone who has studied the Civil War is familiar with the “Anaconda Plan,” but most continue to view the plan in the derisive shadow that was originally cast by an uninformed press in 1861. But, from what event, not from what person, did this concept originate? This question is only the first of many that need to be addressed, and the answers will be provided on this first night. This briefing alone will be worth your trip, so don’t miss it. Forewarned is forearmed.

### **Thursday, November 19, 2020**

Baton Rouge was the second Confederate capital to fall during the Civil War (Nashville was the first), and to see a Confederate attempt to retake the capital city, we will travel to Greenwell Springs, the Confederate encampment on the Amite River, and follow Breckinridge’s Confederates, as well as Grierson’s Union Raiders, into Baton Rouge—events that took place in August 1862 and May 1863, respectively.

Of course, Grierson’s Raid was an integral part of Grant’s plan to divert Confederate attention away from his true intent at Vicksburg, and it worked remarkably well. The raiders, who were considered expendable, reached the terminus of their trek at Magnolia Mound Plantation in Baton Rouge. We’ll do the same after we fight the Battle of Baton Rouge and after we follow Nathaniel Prentice Banks’s march to Port Hudson on March 13-14, 1863. This march was supposed to support David Glasgow Farragut’s attempt to run his blue-water fleet past the gauntlet of guns at Port Hudson. We shall see how that worked out and why.

We will then cross the Mississippi River and, since we will be landlubbers, we will follow Farragut up the river along the roads on the west side of the river. This will allow us to visit the gravesite of the CSS *Arkansas* in Port Allen and the site where the stirring song, “Maryland, My Maryland,” was drafted. We will then cross the Mississippi above Port Hudson on the new John James Audubon bridge, an architectural marvel. Then on to Bayou Sara, where Banks literally steamed and paddled to the east side of the river on May 22, 1863, the same day that Grant launched his ill-fated second assault on the Vicksburg defenses.

As we follow Banks to Port Hudson, we will stop to engross ourselves in the human side of the war when we recount the unusual death and Masonic funeral of Union Lieutenant Commander John E. Hart, skipper of the USS *Albatross*, in Confederate-held St. Francisville. Then back on the road with Banks toward Linwood Plantation, where Sarah Morgan wrote much of her famous diary. En route, we will see where Banks rendezvoused with Grierson’s cavalrymen at Thompson’s Creek on the dark and stormy night of Friday, 22 May 1863. Rather than being allowed to return to Grant, much to Grierson’s dismay his now-famous horsemen would now be impressed by Banks into service at Port Hudson.

### **Friday, November 20, 2020**

Today’s events will start early in order to tie up many loose ends that are often overlooked in studies of the Vicksburg Campaign. For example, much has been written

about Grant's decision at Grand Gulf on May 3, a decision described in *Receding Tide*: "At Grand Gulf Grant is going to make one of the great calculated risks of his career—a move with great significance for our nation as well . . . Ulysses Grant decides he is going to flout his orders. He has an opportunity to take Vicksburg on his own, and Banks has provided him with a loophole in the contract." Now, where was Banks, when was he there, and precisely what was he doing when he wrote to Grant that he could not be at Port Hudson until May 10, and then with only 15,000 men? We will go there and find out for ourselves.

We will travel the route of Banks's Bayou Teche Campaign, and we will see his strategic plans which General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck would later dub as "eccentric movements." The "mind's eye" picture almost never matches the actual ground, and once the ground has been seen, the two visuals become a clear and permanent snapshot in one's memory. We will develop these snapshots as we travel the wonderfully scenic Bayou Teche, and to get to the Teche we will go through the unfortunate town of Donaldsonville, which Farragut had burned on August 9, 1862. There we will visit Fort Butler. Then we will meander southward along the scenic Bayou Lafourche with Cuvier Grover's Union brigade, and near Thibodaux we will follow the same railroad that delivered these Yanks to Brashear City, today known as Morgan City.

After visiting Fort Star in Morgan City, we will travel northward up the Bayou Teche to the fights between Banks and Confederate Gen. Richard Taylor, who was a Yale graduate, son of U.S. President Zachary Taylor, and until Taylor's sister's death the brother-in-law of Jefferson Davis. We will see the fight at Fort Bisland, April 12-13, and will visit the sites of the fight at Irish Bend, April 14. At Irish Bend we will see the wonderful time capsule of Franklin, Louisiana, a town enriched by sugar-cane dollars.

Following Taylor's withdrawal and Banks's "pursuit" from Franklin, we will travel through New Iberia, where we will see Banks's headquarters, the famed mansion known as "Shadows-on-the-Teche." Only 8 miles from New Iberia was a strategic asset on Avery Island—a Confederate salt mine needed for meat preservation—and Banks had this facility destroyed on April 17. The island rebounded, however, for today Avery Island is the home of world-famous Tabasco sauce.

Then we continue northward to follow the armies through Vermilionville, today known as Lafayette. We will see where Taylor destroyed the bridge over Vermilion Bayou (hint: not where the historical marker is located), a move which delayed Banks for two days. In Lafayette we will also see the magnificent St. John Cathedral and the cemetery where Generals Alfred Mouton (killed at Mansfield, Louisiana, on April 8, 1864) and Franklin Gardner (commander of Port Hudson, Louisiana) are interred. Then, time allowing, we will proceed northward to Opelousas, the Confederate capital from May 1, 1862 to January 23, 1863. Here, at the recently destroyed Morton house, the capitol building, we will discuss Banks's achievement of his strategic goal on April 20, 1863, as well as his dilemma with Grant. It is decision time for Banks in Opelousas, but is he up to the task? As an aside in Opelousas, we will see the Jim Bowie Oak, a 300-year-old tree which stood near the home of the famous frontiersman. After a full and memorable day, we will take the direct route back to Baton Rouge.

**Saturday, November 21, 2020**

Today we follow two untested brigades of Christopher C. Augur's division of Banks's XIX Corps and Grierson's attached cavalry as they attempt to close the back door at Port Hudson on the road to Clinton at Plains Store on May 21, 1863. At the time, Banks was still west of the Mississippi River at Morganza, Louisiana, approaching Port Hudson from the north with his Bayou Teche divisions, now composed of veteran soldiers. But Banks was still a day away. Thomas W. Sherman (known now as "the other Sherman") was approaching Port Hudson from the south with two brigades on steamboats out of New Orleans. But Sherman was still a day away. We will see what happens.

Then on to old Port Hudson, where we will see what is left of a once thriving river town. We will visit various town and fortification sites, as well as the National Cemetery, before moving into the military park. In the park we will walk the trails—walks which will require vigor—to see the fortifications and describe the attacks on Fort Desperate, Fort Babcock, Mississippi Redoubt, Bennett's Redoubt, Alabama-Arkansas Redoubt, and Commissary Hill. If one is not up to all of the walks, there is a nice museum and exhibits. After a full day we will return to Baton Rouge, a tad tired but now well-armed with the knowledge of "the rest of the story." The Vicksburg Odyssey ends here.

**About the Faculty:**

**Parker Hills** is the nation's leading historian on the Vicksburg Campaign and a scholar of some note on the Gettysburg Campaign. He 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 surely will leave with far more knowledge than when you arrived. Parker is a graduate of the U.S. 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 general 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 Counter Drug Training Academy in Meridian, Mississippi. Parker is the coauthor of *Receding Tide: Vicksburg and Gettysburg, The Campaigns that Changed the Civil War*. Parker also has 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 also is the driving force for Civil War preservation in the state of Mississippi, and largely through his efforts the Raymond Battlefield Park exists. Given this outstanding résumé, his programs cost a little more, but you quickly will see that they are well worth it.

**Hotel Information:**

Our headquarters hotel will be announced on this site and will be emailed to each registrant. We expect to select a hotel with airport transfers. Keep in mind we believe we

have scheduled while the National Champion, LSU Tigers are on the road at Auburn, but this weekend and the weekend before when they host University of South Carolina are not set in stone, so we will get the hotel set soon, and you would be advised to get your reservations before the 2020 schedule gets firm or you could pay a fortune.

### **Transportation:**

The servicing airport is Baton Rouge (BTR). You may get a much better airfare flying into New Orleans (MSY) and driving the 90 miles to the program. This is a program where driving is a great option.

### **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. Amazon.com has a program to support non-profits IF YOU SIGN UP to support Blue and Gray Education Society (EIN 54-1720582) at [AmazonSmile](#). When you sign up there rather than the normal Amazon site, one-half of one percent of your purchase price will be provided to BGES as a donation from Amazon. This will apply not only on this purchase but others you may make at other times. BGES is selling the tBears book.

\_\_\_\_\_ Edwin C. Bearss and James P. Hills: *Receding Tide: Vicksburg and Gettysburg, The Campaigns that Changed the Civil War* \$30 **Click here to order.**

Charles East: [Sarah Morgan: Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman](#)

David C. Edmonds: *The Guns of Port Hudson* ([Vol 1](#), and [Vol. 2](#))

Warren Grabau: [Ninety-Eight Days: Geographers View Vicksburg Campaign](#)

Timothy B. Smith: [The Real Horse Soldiers: Benjamin Grierson's Epic 1863 Civil War Raid Through Mississippi](#)

John D Winters & T. Harry Williams: [The Civil War in Louisiana](#)

# *Registration Form*

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Name:

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Address:

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City/State/Zip:

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Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Registration includes three lunches, a welcoming reception and group dinner, a map packet, the academic program, support of a professional historian, a tour director, park admission, and transportation. We will also provide snacks and bottled water.

\_\_\_\_\_ Registration \$825

\_\_\_\_\_ Current BGES member \$750

\_\_\_\_\_ 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).

\_\_\_\_\_ 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 \$\_\_\_\_\_

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Exp: \_\_\_\_\_ CVV: \_\_\_\_\_

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Mail to BGES Seminars, P.O. Box 1176, Chatham, VA 24531; or fax credit card registrations to 434-432-0596. You may also register online at [www.blueandgrayeducation.org](http://www.blueandgrayeducation.org).