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**THE FAILURE OF THE CONFEDERATE VICKSBURG CAMPAIGN**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Although the American Civil War occurred over 130 years ago, analyses of failed campaigns provide insight and reinforce the importance of critical warfighting skills for today's strategic leader. Several principles in today's joint doctrine serve as excellent tools to analyze failed campaigns. This paper analyzes and identifies some of the reasons the Confederate Vicksburg Campaign failed. The paper examines Jefferson Davis's strategy, the Confederate command, control, and communications system, and the quality of the Confederate leadership. The paper concludes by showing how these three areas hindered the Confederate unity of effort and its implications for future strategic leaders.

Although the American Civil War occurred over 130 years ago, analyses of failed campaigns provide insight and reinforce the importance of critical warfighting skills for today's strategic leader. Several principles in today's joint doctrine serve as excellent tools to analyze failed campaigns. The purpose of this paper is to analyze and identify why the Vicksburg Campaign failed. To structure the analysis I will examine Jefferson Davis's strategy, the Confederate command, control, and communications system, and the quality of the Confederate leadership. Lastly, I will conclude by showing how these three areas hindered unity of effort and its implications for future strategic leaders.

**General situations** During the Civil War there were three distinct theaters within the Confederacy. The first was the eastern theater consisting primarily of Virginia. The second was the western theater consisting of all of the states east of the Mississippi river minus Virginia; they were primarily Mississippi, Tennessee, Louisiana and Alabama. The third was the Trans-Mississippi, i.e., Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana and Missouri. President Jefferson Davis changed the organization and composition of these theaters; however, the basic structure remained remarkably stable.

Davis established a distinct priority among these theaters that remained consistent throughout the war. The priority theater was the eastern theater. With the Confederate capital in Richmond and Virginia's rich resources, Davis could not lose this state. Its loss would cause considerable political damage to the

South. While Davis could move the capital, Virginia's loss would send a clear signal to the southern population, the Union, and other nations. The southern population's will to fight would suffer as they realized their government could not defend them. Virginia's loss would encourage the Union by the hope of ending the war quickly. Lastly, potential foreign allies of the Confederacy would not support a nation that could not defend itself. Davis made an excellent decision to give the eastern theater the strategic priority. The far western and western theaters were secondary to the eastern theater. The Trans-Mississippi was so remote it became a strategic backwater despite plan or intent.

A significant factor affecting Davis's strategy was terrain. The compartmented terrain in the eastern theater significantly restricted maneuver. Once the South removed the threat of an attack from the sea, combat in the eastern theater occurred in well-defined corridors, like the Shenandoah Valley or the Fredericksburg approaches. The rivers in Virginia provided excellent defensive barriers. With the large number of soldiers in this theater, neither side could win an overwhelming victory in the east.

In the far western and western theaters, the situation was quite different with too much terrain and not enough resources available to defend them. Initially Davis's goal was to protect and retain control of all Confederate states. He realized the failure of that strategy following the fall of Fort Henry and

Fort Donelson. Archer Jones states:

In step with Beauregard and Johnston's moves President Davis and his War Department ordered an equally drastic concentration, the president admitting: "I acknowledge the error of my attempt to defend all of the frontier, seaboard and inland."<sup>1</sup>

Even with this, the situation in the west was exactly the opposite of the east. Davis still had too many soldiers in the east and not enough in the west.

The geography of the far western and western theaters was also quite different. Both areas were relatively flat and open. The North could attack from almost any direction. Many western rivers run mostly north and south with the Mississippi being the most significant. The Mississippi River, once under Union control, cut off the far western theater from the remainder of the Confederacy. These rivers served less as defensive barriers and more as lines of communication. The western theater lacked the geographic corridors that exist in the eastern theater.

**National Strategy** JCS Publication 3-0 defines strategy as the "art and science of developing and employing armed forces and other instruments of national power in a synchronized fashion to secure national or multinational objectives."<sup>2</sup> Jefferson Davis's national objective was to gain recognition of the Confederacy as a legitimate nation. His primary sources of national power were the Confederate army and the Southern will to fight. His concept to achieve his national objective was to prolong the Civil War until he broke the North's will to fight. He hoped the North would tire of its cost and recognize Confederate independence.

Davis refined his strategy as the Civil War progressed. A constant concern was the finite nature of his military assets. The South could not afford a major defeat or the loss of a field army.

In developing his national strategy, Davis correctly identified a realistic planning constraint. Davis believed he could not lose any of the Confederate states. Each state assisted the government in sustaining that state's regiments and maintaining the soldiers' morale. Archer Jones writes:

In addition to this important operational role, the states made a major contribution to logistics and soldier morale . . . They provided a continuing flow of clothing and blankets to their soldiers in Confederate service. Of particular importance, because it supplemented the soldier's meager and inflation-eroded pay, was state and country aid to soldier's families.<sup>3</sup>

The state government and the soldier's family assisted the Confederate government with sustaining the state's regiments. When the Confederacy lost a state to the North, it assumed the increased burden of sustaining the state's regiment without its help.

The Confederacy also depended on each state to provide the manpower to field and replenish their regiments. Besides manning regiments, the Confederate government looked to the states to provide replacement personnel as casualties mounted. Archer Jones illustrates the support role of state reserves in the Confederacy:

Composed of those exempt from service as too young or old or on account of their occupations, the reserves entered active duty only to repel a threat to the region. Especially valuable for coast defense and replacing or augmenting

Confederate regular forces, they allowed greater concentration against the principal Union threats.<sup>4</sup>

The role of the state in providing soldiers to the Confederacy was fundamental to Davis's strategy to defend the Confederacy.

Failure to maintain control of a state had disastrous effects. Loss of a state meant the Confederacy would no longer receive personnel from the state to man its army. In addition, the state's regiments experienced high desertion rates.

Soldiers' became extremely concerned over the welfare of their families and deserted to go home and care for them. In a dispatch to Jefferson Davis on 23 July 1863, following the fall of Vicksburg, Johnston wrote, ". . . Desertions continue, especially of Mississippians."<sup>5</sup>

Jefferson Davis understood these effects. The loss of each state placed his national objective at risk. He refused to choose which of the states was the most important. To illustrate this Archer Jones states the following concerning a question by General Joseph E. Johnston:

Estimating that a movement would take a month whether on the direct route by foot or round about by rail, he asked Davis: "Which is the most valuable, Tennessee or Mississippi?" But, the president, having confidence in the capacity of the new department arrangement to save both, gave Johnston no definite guidance.<sup>6</sup>

Jefferson Davis never answered him. He couldn't. He had to keep all of the states for the reasons cited above.

**Vicksburg Campaign** The Vicksburg Campaign began on 20 December 1862 when General William T. Sherman departed Memphis with his corps and arrived opposite Vicksburg on 26 December

1862. General Ulysses S. Grant had conducted a ground attack south toward Grenada, Mississippi but turned back on 18 December 1862 after a successful cavalry raid against his line of communication and base of operations. Sherman made several attempts to attack Vicksburg via the Yazoo River but eventually each failed. Grant abandoned his attack and moved his army down the Mississippi river.

On 29 January 1863, Grant assumed command of the attack against Vicksburg. By 29 April 1863, Grant's forces had moved south of Vicksburg, to the vicinity of Hard Times, across the river from Grand Gulf. Admiral David Porter had already run his fleet past the guns at Vicksburg. Upon learning of Grant's buildup at Grand Gulf, General John C. Pemberton sent reinforcements to Brigadier General John S. Bowen who was responsible for that area. Finding Grand Gulf too strong, Grant crossed two corps further south at Bruinsburg on 30 April. On 2 May, Grant attacked north with two corps. On 7 May, Sherman crossed at Grand Gulf and joined Grant. Pemberton consolidated his units near Vicksburg and General Joseph E. Johnston collected Confederate forces near Jackson.

Faced with two forces that might concentrate, Grant took advantage of interior lines, attacked and defeated the Confederate forces near Jackson and defended against Pemberton's force in Vicksburg. On 14 May, Sherman's and General James B. McPherson's corps arrived in Jackson. Johnston attacked Jackson and failed. He retreated to the northeast. On 14 May, Johnston

ordered Pemberton to attack Sherman's corps in the rear so the Confederate forces could concentrate. Unwilling to attack, Pemberton decided to pursue a vain effort to attack Grant's nonexistent line of communication.

Stymied by Union forces, Pemberton intended to fall back into Vicksburg. On 17 May, Johnston ordered him to evacuate Vicksburg and save his army. Again, Pemberton decided to disobey Johnston. On 18 May, Grant pushed Pemberton into Vicksburg and immediately invested the city. After several failed attacks, the siege succeeded and Pemberton surrendered to Grant on the 4th of July. Following the fall of Vicksburg, Sherman turned east and attacked Johnston. For the purposes of this paper, this ended the Vicksburg Campaign.<sup>7</sup>

**Western Theater Strategy** Realizing his army was a finite asset, Davis chose a strategy of concentration. He would concentrate his army at a decisive point to win a climatic battle with minimal loss. He felt Vicksburg was the key to maintaining control and chose it as the decisive point. Unfortunately, he restricted Johnston's and Pemberton's flexibility. His decision resulted in the loss of Pemberton's army and the western theater.

Although Jefferson Davis's strategy to retain Vicksburg depended on Johnston's and Pemberton's forces concentrating, Davis did not order such a junction when he ordered Johnston to Mississippi. In Seddon's dispatch to Johnston dated 9 May 1863, he directed:

Proceed at once to Mississippi and take chief command of the forces, giving to those in the field, as far as practicable,

the encouragement and benefit of your personal direction. Arrange to take for temporary service with you, or to be followed without delay, 3,000 good troops, who will be substituted in General Bragg's army by a large number of prisoners recently returned from the Arkansas Post capture, and reorganized, now on their way to General Pemberton. Stop them at the point most convenient to join General Bragg. You will find reinforcements from General Beauregard to General Pemberton, and more may be expected.<sup>8</sup>

However, in an endorsement of one of Johnston's dispatches dated 16 May 1863, Davis states to Seddon:

Do not perceive why a junction was not attempted, which would have made our force nearly equal in number to the estimated strength of the enemy, and might have resulted in his total defeat under circumstances which rendered retreat or reinforcement to him scarcely practicable.<sup>9</sup>

If the junction did not happen, Davis did not have the forces to give Johnston to maintain control of Vicksburg. Johnston continuously requested soldiers from Davis to field an army large enough to raise the siege. After multiple requests for soldiers, Johnston sent a dispatch to Davis on 28 May 1863:

It is reported that the last infantry coming leave Montgomery tonight. When they arrive shall have about 23,000. Pemberton can be saved only by beating Grant. Unless you can promise more troops, we must try with that number. The odds against us will be very great. Can you not add 7,000?<sup>10</sup>

Davis told Johnston he was unable to provide additional soldiers.

In a dispatch answering Johnston on 28 May 1863, Davis wrote:

The re-enforcements sent to you exceed by, say, 7000 the estimate of your dispatch of 27th instant. We have withheld nothing which it was practicable to give. We cannot hope for numerical equality, and time will probably increase the disparity.<sup>11</sup>

Davis's strategy to defend the Confederate states in the western theater was flawed from the beginning. It depended on a critical event that did not happen, i.e., the junction of Johnston's and

Pemberton's forces. He simply did not have the forces available to relieve an investment of Vicksburg and refused to prioritize the effort.

Rather than focusing on Vicksburg, Davis could have directed Johnston to maintain control of the western theater and restore the boundary along the Mississippi River when possible. Johnston would have freedom to maneuver throughout Mississippi and defeat Grant. Once he defeated Grant's army, Johnston could have restored Mississippi to Confederate control.

Why did Jefferson Davis select such a restrictive strategy for the western theater? One reason is Davis's attempt to be the President, the commander-in-chief, and the general-in-chief of the Confederate forces. He did not have an experienced general staff to help develop an appropriate strategy. This situation identifies a major flaw in the Confederate command and control and communications system.

**Inadequate C3 System** One reason the Vicksburg Campaign failed was the Confederacy's inadequate command and control and communications system. Flaws in the command and control system started at the very top.

While Jefferson Davis recognized the need for a general-in-chief, he made a fatal mistake by leaving the position empty throughout most of the war. Early in the war, Jefferson Davis assigned General Robert E. Lee as his general-in-chief. Lee served in this position until the Union forces wounded Joseph E. Johnston. Davis assigned Lee as the commander of the Army of

Northern Virginia. Describing the relative advantage the North had over the South, Archer Jones states:

But the Union drew ahead of the Confederacy when Davis, wisely met the emergency of Johnston's wounding by appointing Lee to succeed him but unwisely leaving the position of chief of staff unfilled.<sup>12</sup>

Davis left the position empty until the closing days of the war when he assigned Braxton Bragg as the general-in-chief. This was too little, too late. Bragg had already lost credibility before taking the position. As a result Davis never depended on him. In addition, Bragg came too late to be very effective. The Confederacy had all but lost the western theater when Bragg assumed the position.

Historians generally credit President Davis as a competent commander-in-chief. A West Point graduate, a veteran of the Mexican War, and a former Secretary of War for the United States, Davis came to the position well qualified. He was comfortable as the commander-in-chief. Archer Jones states:

This military knowledge would be Davis's strength but also his weakness, for it tempted him to focus more on military management and give to finance, supply, diplomacy, and the politics of war less attention than they deserved.<sup>13</sup>

When Davis released Lee to take command of the Army of Northern Virginia and left the general-in-chief position empty, I believe he felt he could do the general-in-chief's job.

Davis could have been more effective with a general-in-chief to help develop strategy. It is realistic to expect Davis to appoint a general staff to support his general-in-chief. President Lincoln established a War Board that served General

Halleck. Archer Jones illustrates this point in the following statement, "Using the relations begun by the War Board, Halleck created, as an informal organization a functioning general staff."<sup>14</sup> Although the initial intent of the organization was to focus on the logistics and transportation needs of the Union Army, it also advised the general-in-chief on strategies. Jefferson Davis had excellent intelligence of the Union's activities. It is likely he was aware of how President Lincoln had organized his staff for the war. Without this capability, Davis forfeited the staff expertise and focus that might have helped him develop strategy.

Obviously, Davis formed strategy and decided which strategy to carry out. However, those who advised him had other primary duties. For example, his Secretary of War, Seddon, was a frustrated strategist and often advised Johnston without authority. In a dispatch to Johnston, Seddon recommended a strategy and expressed his frustration about not having command authority:

I venture, with diffidence, only one suggestion, and that not strictly applicable to your own field of operations. It is, that should opportunity of communication with General Holmes or General Prime occur, it might be well to urge they should make diversions for you, or, in case of the fall of Vicksburg, secure a great future advantage to the Confederacy by the attack on and seizure of Helena, while all available forces of the enemy are being pushed to Grant's aid. Had I command of communication, this suggestion would be directly addressed and pressed by the Department.<sup>15</sup>

Seddon surely advised Jefferson Davis on various strategies or courses of action. But serious issues, such as, supplying and

transporting the Confederate army, demanded his attention. Those problems grew critical during the last two years of the war. Seddon could not dedicate himself or his staff to strategic thinking. Failing to fill the general-in-chief position and provide a general staff limited Davis's effectiveness.

Another inadequacy in the command and control structure was Davis's failure to establish a single and clear chain of command for the western theater. When Davis ordered Johnston to take command of the western theater, he tried to reduce his span of control. In a dispatch to Bragg on 17 June 1863, Davis stated:

The arrangement made of several departments in a geographical district, to the command of General Johnston was assigned, was intended to secure the fullest cooperation of the troops in those departments, and at same time to avoid delay by putting the commander of each department in direct correspondence with the War Office . . .<sup>16</sup>

Although Davis communicated directly with Bragg in Tennessee and General Pemberton at Vicksburg, it is clear he intended for Johnston to command both forces.

The flaw occurred when Davis continued to communicate directly with subordinates rather than through Johnston. In a dispatch to Bragg on 22 May 1863, Davis began subverting Johnston's authority:

The vital issue of holding the Mississippi at Vicksburg is dependent on the success of General Johnston in an attack on the investing force. The intelligence there is discouraging. Can you aid him? If so, and you are without orders from General Johnston, act on your judgement.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, Pemberton believed he had the authority to communicate directly with Davis, bypassing Johnston whenever he felt appropriate. Pemberton expressed surprise when he learned of

Johnston's objection his communications with Davis. In a report to Seddon on 14 December 1863, Pemberton wrote:

In relation to General Johnston's complaint that I had made my report direct to the War Department instead of to him, I am surprised inasmuch as General Johnston had been previously informed by the War Department that I had the right to do so.<sup>18</sup>

This dual chain of command had disastrous effects on the Vicksburg Campaign.

Davis's failure to clearly delineate the command and control structure confused and frustrated Johnston. It took many dispatches and a large amount of time to clarify. It does not appear Johnston was fighting the order to take command of the western theater by arguing the fine points of who commanded which forces. From his dispatches, it appears Davis's command structure genuinely confused Johnston. In a dispatch to Davis on 5 July 1863, Johnston complained about the movement of soldiers by Davis:

I consider my assignment to the immediate command in Mississippi as giving me a new position and limiting my authority to this department. The order of the War Department transferring three separate bodies of troops from General Bragg's army to this, two of them without my knowledge and all of them without consulting me, would have convinced me had I doubted. These orders of the War Department expressed its judgement of the number of troops to be transferred from Tennessee. I could no more control this judgement by increasing the number than by forbidding the transfer . . .<sup>19</sup>

He was not sure whether he or Davis commanded Bragg's forces. While the impact was not catastrophic, the confusion diverted Johnston's attention from his mission and placed doubt in his mind as to the extent his authority.

The second and more devastating effect, of the dual chain of command, is visible in Pemberton's actions. While he believed Johnston was his immediate commander, Pemberton retained independent command with direct lines of command from Davis. Upon arriving at Jackson, Mississippi, Johnston realized William T. Sherman was ready to attack. Johnston ordered Pemberton to attack Sherman from the rear. Pemberton called a War Council, disobeyed the order and attacked in a different direction. In a letter dated November 10, 1863, Pemberton attempted to justify his decision:

"The consequence which, in my judgement, would have resulted from pursuing the instructions literally" would have been the certain fall of Vicksburg, almost without a blow being struck in its defense, so overwhelming a force could the enemy then have thrown, without opposition, on its small garrison.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps the most devastating effect of Pemberton's disobedience was the loss of his army. As Grant pushed Pemberton back toward Vicksburg, Johnston ordered his subordinate to evacuate the town and save his army. In a dispatch to Pemberton dated May 17, 1863, Johnston wrote:

...If Haynes' Bluff is untenable, Vicksburg is of no value and cannot be held. If, therefore, you are invested in Vicksburg, you must ultimately surrender. Under such circumstances, instead of losing both troops and place, we must, if possible, save the troops. If it is not too late, evacuate Vicksburg and its dependencies, and march to the northeast.<sup>21</sup>

Again, Pemberton called a War Council and chose to disobey Johnston's order. To justify his decision, Pemberton cited guidance from Davis to protect and hold Vicksburg. In a letter to Seddon dated 2 August 1863, Pemberton attempted to defend his

decision:

The evacuation of Vicksburg! It meant the loss of the valuable stores and munitions of war collected for its defense; the fall of Port Hudson; the surrender of the Mississippi River, and the severance of the Confederacy. These were mighty interests, which, had I deemed the evacuation practicable in the sense in which I interpreted General Johnston's instructions, might well have made me hesitate to execute them. I believed it to be in my power to hold Vicksburg. I knew and appreciated the earnest desire of the Government and of the people that it should be held.<sup>22</sup>

His decision to disobey Johnston eventually resulted in the loss of the western theater and the war. Had Pemberton obeyed Johnston, his army would have been free to maneuver against Grant. Under Johnston's command, the Confederates could have halted Grant's offensive and at least delayed the fall of the western theater for several months. There may have been enough time to break the North's will to fight.

Communications The lack of adequate and reliable communications made the exercise of command and control both difficult and frustrating. Faulty communications may not have caused the Vicksburg Campaign to fail but it contributed to it. Throughout the campaign, Davis, Johnston and Pemberton relied on four means to communicate. The fastest and least accurate was the telegraph. Many surviving dispatches are telegrams between these leaders. The slowest means was the personal letter. Long conversations via letter took a great deal of time since either the post office or a courier had to deliver them. When long explanations were necessary, security was a concern, or the telegraph was not available, Johnston and Pemberton sent a

spokesman. The problem with this procedure was the accuracy of the message or its explanation depended on the spokesman's understanding and restraint in providing his interpretation.

The most accurate means of communications were meetings between leaders to discuss the issues. While President Lincoln went to the field to meet with his generals, Davis did not meet with either Johnston or Pemberton during the Vicksburg Campaign. Having a general-in-chief, to watch things in the capital, would have allowed Davis to overcome the inadequacy of his communications support. With the help of a general-in-chief, Davis would have the freedom to visit Johnston or Pemberton. Or if Davis was too busy as the President, he could send the general-in-chief to communicate his intent to commanders. By meeting with his generals, Davis could ensure they understood his strategy and intent. Such meetings would allow for greater discussion and analysis of the plan. Davis could have achieved consensus and unity of effort among his generals in the western theater.

Without this means of communications, Davis was at the mercy of the other three to communicate his intent and orders. Communications were both tedious and frustrating. Consequently, they reduced Davis's effectiveness as a commander-in-chief.

**Leadership** Joint Pub 1 identifies eight critical values for our armed forces to be effective in today's world. These values are integrity, competence, physical courage, moral courage, teamwork, trust and confidence, delegation and cooperation. All

those values provide an excellent framework to analyze Johnston's, and Pemberton's leadership; however, I will focus primarily on competence. Johnston's and Pemberton's lack of competence contributed to the failure of the Vicksburg Campaign.

Joseph Johnston lacked competence as a theater army commander. As the commander of the western theater, Johnston never made the transition, from being a commander of a single army, to being a commander of multiple armies. In a dispatch to Davis dated 16 June 1863, Johnston wrote:

...I meant to tell the Secretary of War that I considered the order directing me to command here as limiting my authority to this department, especially when that order was accompanied by War Department orders transferring troops from Tennessee to Mississippi; and, whether commanding there or not, that you reply to my application for more troops that no more could be spared would have made it improper for me to order more from Tennessee. Permit me to repeat that an officer having a task like mine, far above his ability, cannot in addition command other remote departments . . .<sup>23</sup>

He felt he could not simultaneously command Bragg's and Pemberton's armies. Yet, Davis expected him to do exactly that. Johnston had the same means of communications as Davis. Davis commanded Bragg using the telegraph. Johnston never accepted the idea he could command two separate fights while not physically located with each. He depended on being intimately familiar with the ground and personally involved in the fight. He was uncomfortable with the requirement to fight both campaigns while located in a third, separate position. This is typical of a corps or army commander who focuses on one geographical area, not a theater strategic commander. To Johnston's credit, there was no precedent in the Confederate Army to guide his actions. This

position was totally new and Johnston didn't receive much guidance on how to fulfill his responsibilities.

When Johnston became the western theater commander, he resisted the guidance to focus on the threat to Vicksburg. Earlier, Johnston had positioned himself with Bragg in Tennessee and believed the main threat to be in Tennessee and not Mississippi. He did not agree with either the President or the Secretary of War. Davis felt strongly Grant threatened Vicksburg and the main effort would be there. Finally, out of desperation, Davis ordered Johnston to Mississippi to take charge of the situation. Johnston, although claiming he was ill and could not perform his duties well, complied with the order. In a dispatch to Seddon on 9 May 1863, Johnston stated, "Your dispatch of this morning received. I shall go immediately, although unfit for field service."<sup>24</sup> After arriving, he immediately realized the gravity of the situation and began to assemble an army.

Johnston again showed his failure to meet the responsibilities of his new job through his fixation on raising an army. From the moment he moved to Mississippi, he maintained pressure on Davis and Seddon to provide him soldiers and transportation. Very early Davis told Johnston about the lack of transportation in Mississippi and his inability to help Johnston. In a dispatch to Johnston on May 30, 1863, Davis wrote, ". . . You no doubt will be embarrassed by deficiency of field transportation. The recent robberies have diminished the amount in the country."<sup>25</sup> Instead of continuing to push for more

soldiers, Johnston should have realized he couldn't raise the kind of army he wanted. If he could find the soldiers, Johnston couldn't move them any appreciable distance quickly. After grasping this reality, Johnston should have looked for another course of action.

One course of action was to go to Vicksburg and take command of Pemberton's army. There is precedence for this from the Union side. Grant learned that Lincoln had given James McClernand command of the Vicksburg expedition. He realized Lincoln had appointed McClernand for political reasons and not military expertise. Grant decided to personally take command of the expedition. Grant eventually relieved McClernand and led the operation to a successful conclusion. There are some differences between Grant's and Johnston's situations. Grant questioned the military competence of McClernand. Johnston initially assessed Pemberton as an excellent general. In a dispatch to Davis on 23 May 1863, Johnston stated:

An officer who left Vicksburg on Tuesday reports that an assault near the Yazoo road had been repelled this time. It is said here today that another was made near the Jackson road and also repulsed. This gives me confidence in Pemberton's tenacity. If the army can be organized and well commanded, we shall win.<sup>26</sup>

However, Johnston had a more obvious reason to take command of Pemberton's army, i.e., transportation.

Once in command of the garrison at Vicksburg, Pemberton identified a critical shortage of transportation and cavalry. He immediately purchased all the horses and wagons he could. He also pushed Davis for help with transportation. When Johnston

took command in Mississippi, the local supply of horses and wagons was almost nonexistent. In a dispatch to Seddon on 24 June 1863, Johnston stated:

When I came, all military materials of the department were in Vicksburg and Port Hudson. Artillery had to be brought from the east, horses for it and all field transportation procured in an exhausted country - much from Georgia brought over wretched railroads - and provisions collected. I have not had the means of moving.<sup>27</sup>

The only force of any size that had reasonable mobility was Pemberton's garrison. Johnston should have collocated himself with Pemberton to direct his actions and ensure compliance. Johnston's failure to do this plagued him later when Pemberton disobeyed his orders. Had Johnston taken command of Pemberton's garrison, he would not have allowed its investment in Vicksburg. He could have maneuvered the garrison against Grant's army and had an excellent chance of limiting Grant's success in Mississippi. As it turned out, Johnston lost Pemberton's garrison and was left with a small and relatively immobile force.

Pemberton, similarly, lacked competence as a maneuver commander. His military experience before taking command of Vicksburg was primarily in coastal defense. Archer Jones states:

Promoted to the newly authorized rank of lieutenant general, John C. Pemberton lacked any experience beyond command of coast defenses in South Carolina, from which Lee and Davis removed him because he could not get along with the local authorities.<sup>28</sup>

His focus and expertise developed in static defenses. He was not skilled in the maneuver and sustainment of large forces. His lack of confidence was evident during his maneuvers outside Vicksburg against Grant. Instead of being bold, Pemberton

exercised great caution and it caused him to disobey Johnston's order to attack Sherman from the rear. In a letter to Seddon 2 August 1863 he attempted to justify his actions concerning

Johnston's order:

My own views were strongly expressed as unfavorable to any advance which would separate me farther from Vicksburg, which was my base. I did not, however, see fit to put my own judgement and opinions so far in opposition as to prevent a movement altogether, but believing the only possibility of success to be in the plan of cutting the enemy's communications, it was adopted . . .<sup>29</sup>

Pemberton attacked in a totally different direction in an attempt to cut Grant's nonexistent lines of communications. Johnston's orders would result in Pemberton leaving his base of operations at Vicksburg. Pemberton absolutely opposed leaving the one area where he felt secure. His decision to retreat to Vicksburg resulted in losing the one thing he wanted to protect, his army.

The combined effect of a restrictive strategy, an inadequate command and control and communications system, and the incompetent leaders in Johnston and Pemberton, was the Confederate Army's failure to achieve unity of effort. JCS Pub 1 states, "Success in war demands that all effort be directed toward the achievement of common aims."<sup>30</sup> The Confederate leadership never achieved consensus on the strategic objective in the western theater, much less the appropriate means to obtain that aim. Davis and Sedden dictated Vicksburg as the key to defending the western theater. In a dispatch to Johnston on June 16, 1863, Seddon emphasized the importance of Vicksburg:

Your telegram grieves and alarms me. Vicksburg must not be lost without a desperate struggle. The interest and honor

of the Confederacy forbid it. I rely on you still to avert the loss. If better resources do not offer, you must hazard attack.<sup>31</sup>

However, Johnston initially believed western Tennessee was the key to defending the western theater. After arriving in Mississippi, Johnston decided that Jackson was the key to defending it. Johnston never saw Vicksburg as the decisive point. Pemberton, having received the guidance from Davis to defend Vicksburg, stayed loyal to Davis though it caused him to disobey Johnston. This disagreement about the decisive point made unity of effort almost impossible. The disjointed efforts of the three key leaders are obvious. The lack of unity of effort caused the loss of Pemberton's garrison, the western theater, and the Civil War.

In conclusion, the Vicksburg Campaign failed for many reasons. The main reason was the lack of unity of effort within the Confederacy. JCS Pub 1 states, "The clear articulation of aims and objectives and the resulting strategic focus are fundamental prerequisites for unity of effort."<sup>32</sup> In the Vicksburg Campaign, Davis did not clearly articulate the aims and objectives of the campaign to Johnston and Pemberton. The lack of a feasible strategy to defend the western theater increased Johnston's confusion about what must be done. Davis's dual command and control structure contributed to Johnston's confusion and the lack of unity of effort. JCS Pub 1 says, "The primary emphasis in command relations should be to keep the chain of command short and simple so that it is clear who is in charge of

what."<sup>33</sup> While the chain of command was short, it was not simple. Johnston did not understand the reason behind Davis's dual lines of command. Inadequate communications frustrated Davis's ability to achieve clarity and unity of effort. Lastly, the lack of competence in Johnston's and Pemberton's leadership prevented the Confederacy from achieving unity of effort. Davis's efforts to put one commander in charge in the western theater failed to achieve his goal of retaining Mississippi under Confederate control. The loss of this theater eventually resulted in the loss of the war.

While this campaign occurred over 130 years ago, the strategic leader can benefit from its historic lessons. From the Vicksburg Campaign the strategic leader learns to apply the principles in current Joint Doctrine correctly. He must ensure the strategy is feasible and not too restrictive. Otherwise, he will undermine attempts to achieve unity of effort. Today's strategic leader must ensure the command and control structure is simple and short to support unity of command. While today's communications systems are better than those of the Civil War period, the strategic leader must ensure they are effective and efficient. Although today's leaders consider communications a given, they are not necessarily so. Lastly, strategic leaders at all levels must be competent in their war fighting skills. As the world changes this will become more challenging. The government expects today's strategic leaders to be competent in new and unusual missions. Unity of effort remains paramount for

the military to be successful.

ENDNOTES

1. Archer Jones, Civil War Command & Strategy (New York: The Free Press, A Division of MacMillan, 1992), 51.
2. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for Joint Operations, Joint Pub 3-0 (Washington: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1 February 1995), II-2.
3. Jones, 77.
4. Ibid., 76.
5. U.S. War Department, The War of Rebellion: A Compilation of the Records of the Union and Confederate Armies Hereafter cited as OR (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889), Series 1, Volume XXIV, Part 1:209.
6. Jones, 117.
7. The above campaign description is derived from the summary located in BG Vincent J. Esposito, The West Point Atlas of American Wars, Vol I (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), Map 102-107.
8. OR, 215.
9. Ibid., 216.
10. Ibid., 194.
11. Ibid., 193.
12. Jones, 83.
13. Ibid., 15.
14. Ibid., 225.
15. OR, 219.
16. Ibid., 196-197.
17. Ibid., 191.
18. Ibid., 330.
19. Ibid., 198.
20. Ibid., 324.

21. Ibid., 241.
22. Ibid., 272.
23. Ibid., 196.
24. Ibid., 215.
25. Ibid., 194.
26. Ibid., 192.
27. Ibid., 229.
28. Jones, 114-115.
29. OR, 261.
30. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States, Joint Pub 1 (Washington: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 10 January 1995), III-1.
31. OR, 227.
32. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States, III-1
33. Ibid., viii.

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