

# Foreword

## (2021 Savas Beatie Edition)

**F**ew people have a profound and lasting impact on their profession. Fewer still achieve legendary status in their lifetime. Edwin Cole Bearss is one such person.

The Montana native was born on June 26, 1923, and at an early age developed a deep interest in the Civil War that would become his life's passion. He served in the United States Marine Corps during World War II and was severely wounded in action at "Suicide Creek" in New Britain. Ed spent 26 months in military hospitals before being discharged in 1946. Pursuing his interest in our nation's rich history, he entered Georgetown University and in 1949 was awarded a B.S. degree in Foreign Service Studies. He later received a Master's degree in history from Indiana University.

Initially employed in the United States Navy Hydrographic Office and later at the Army's Office of the Chief of Military History, he took advantage of proximity and frequently visited Civil War battlefields in Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. While visiting the battlefield at Shiloh in 1954 and talking with park historian "Pete" Shedd, Ed was inspired to seek a career with the National Park Service as a field historian. He entered on duty with the National Park Service at Vicksburg National Military Park in 1955—the year I was born, and thus began his legendary career during which he rose to become the agency's chief historian. By the time I began my association with the National Park Service twenty-one years later, Ed had already amassed a record of achievement of which but few could boast.

In the fall of 1977, while working as a seasonal park aid at Gettysburg National Military Park, I accepted a park technician position at Vicksburg National Military Park and left the state of my birth for my own destiny in Mississippi. Before leaving, one of my colleagues recommended that I read a book by an authority on Vicksburg named Edwin C. Bearss. He also

informed me that “Mr. Beers,” as he called him, had discovered and recovered a Civil War gunboat!

Upon my arrival at Vicksburg, I was assigned a desk in the park library. I immediately searched for the book my friend in Gettysburg had mentioned, only to discover that there were several books by Bearss on the library shelves among which were: *Decision In Mississippi* (1962), *Rebel Victory at Vicksburg* (1963), and *Steele’s Retreat From Camden* (1967). There were also his works on Wilson’s Creek, Forts Henry and Donelson, Pea Ridge, Grand Gulf, and Tupelo, to name but a few. Indeed, I soon found that in addition to the many books, the filing cabinets in the library were also packed with his writings. There was also a large drafting table opposite my desk on which Ed had produced the most detailed maps on the Vicksburg campaign extant that proved invaluable to me throughout my long tenure as park historian. Surrounded as I was by this physical evidence of the man, I could almost feel his presence and quickly became familiar with the legend long before I ever met him.

The most intriguing items to catch my attention, however, were two large red-bound volumes entitled Vicksburg Campaign that Ed had produced in the 1960s—but had not yet been published. I selected these volumes to be my introduction to the campaign. What a mistake! Typed on onion paper, these massive volumes chronicled the campaign in minute detail. Being a novice on the campaign, I was quickly overwhelmed; and, after reading only eight pages, put them aside for something more easily digestible.

Over the next few years I read works such as Dolph Hoehling’s *Vicksburg: 47 Days of Siege*, Earl Schenk Miers’ *Web of Victory: Grant at Vicksburg*, Richard Wheeler’s *The Siege of Vicksburg*, William Lovelace Foster’s *Vicksburg: Southern City Under Siege*, Dee Alexander Brown’s *Grierson’s Raid, The Final Fortress: The Vicksburg Campaign, 1862-1863* by Samuel Carter, III, *Pemberton: Defender of Vicksburg* by the general’s grandson, and Mary Loughborough’s moving account of the civilian experience of life under siege titled *My Cave Life in Vicksburg*. (Another book that came out during this time on the campaign by Ed Bearss, co-authored with Warren Grabau, was *The Battle of Jackson/The Siege of Jackson* (1981). These volumes gave me a foundation on which to build.

In my early years at Vicksburg, I also had the great good fortune to work with Albert P. Scheller. Al was a retired New York City fireboat captain who worked as a seasonal employee at the park each summer from 1971-1988. It

was Al who first introduced me to the outlying battlefields of Grand Gulf, Port Gibson, Raymond, Jackson, Champion Hill, and Big Black River Bridge—the actions that led up to the assaults against the city’s formidable defenses and siege of Vicksburg. Al, much like Ed, had a photographic memory and in the course of our discussions almost always prefaced what he said with “According to Bearss . . .” or “Ed says . . .,” and quoted him at length. I learned so much from him and will be forever grateful for the knowledge and friendship he shared with me.

Armed with what I now considered a strong foundation and growing confidence, I mustered the courage to try and tackle the red volumes. This time I made it past page 8, but they still proved a difficult read. Unlike the books I had been reading that were written in a popular easy-to-read narrative style, digesting these volumes was like eating cardboard. Laden with detail and the minutia of the campaign, they required complete focus, persistence, and determination that strained your brain to finish. But months later I completed reading both volumes and had the headache to prove it.

Still, I discovered them to be a treasure trove of information—far more so than the general works mentioned above that often glossed over or simply mentioned in passing significant aspects of the campaign and its key actors. These volumes revealed to me in stunning fashion the complexity of the campaign that made historians and academic scholars alike shy away for its study—as evidenced by the then paucity of works on Vicksburg. They also revealed to me how little I knew about the campaign, and challenged me to delve even further into the story of Vicksburg.

Although there was no index, the volumes were footnoted, which guided my further study. They led me to the War of the Rebellion: *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, and still later to *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*—*OR* and *ORN* for short, respectively. These massive compilations of reports and correspondence are mind-boggling to the novice but are the single-most important primary source on the Civil War. Navigating them can be problematic for a Civil War buff and even difficult for an experienced researcher. But in these red volumes, I discovered that Ed had amazingly extracted the facts and condensed and converted the *OR* and *ORN* into narrative form, thus eliminating the need for constant flipping back and forth from the index to reports and from volume to volume to locate specific information. I started referring to him as the Joe Friday of historians who, just as the TV detective on “Dragnet,” was interested in “Just the facts.”

The footnotes also led me to the bank of filing cabinets lining a wall in the library—specifically, the “Regimental” files and “Letters and Diaries” files. These too are large collections of letters, diaries, and memoirs of Union and Confederate soldiers who participated in the campaign, and citizens of Vicksburg who experienced the most trying ordeal of their lives in a terrifying quest for survival. Mostly untapped by researchers, they contain a wealth of information on the campaign and siege that Ed used to add color and more of the human dimension to his narrative of facts gleaned from the *OR* and *ORN*. The “Regimental” files were especially fascinating, and over the years I read the thousands of documents, each of which provided another piece to the complex jigsaw puzzle that is the Vicksburg campaign.

Among my many duties was responding to park correspondence. Before computers and the internet enabled individuals to conduct their own research, people used to write letters or called on the phone seeking information on their ancestors and the units in which they served during the campaign. Each day a stack of such letters was placed on my desk and I diligently responded to each providing as much information as I could. The park also had three phone lines which frequently rang simultaneously in my office. At times, the volume of requests proved staggering. Still, responding to each and every one was truly one of the most interesting, fun, and rewarding aspects of my career. As each request demanded that I research something new, my knowledge of the campaign and history of Vicksburg National Military Park rapidly grew with each response I drafted.

I quickly found the two red volumes indispensable in responding to these requests. Rather than initially scour through the *OR* and *ORN*, I was able to go directly to a specific chapter in the red volumes for the answers. They also directed me to specific letters or diary accounts in the “Regimental” and “Letters and Diaries” files for additional information. Thus, over time, seeking answers in the red volumes was like reading them repeatedly, which greatly expanded my knowledge and understanding of the campaign. In the process, I also gained a deep appreciation for the scope and breadth of the meticulous research that went into writing these volumes and developed an abiding respect for the man I had yet to meet. For years I had virtually exclusive access to the red volumes. It was like having my own personal pool of information and they became my “go-to” reference work. As they were too large to place on my desk, I moved them to the shelf closest my desk for quick access. Almost instinctively, I reached for them each time the telephone rang.

These volumes, along with Ed's other writings, clearly demonstrated the true art of the historian and proved instructional in my own development as a public historian. From them I learned how to research and ferret out and validate information. They taught me reliance on primary source material and how to effectively balance the use of secondary sources. They stressed objectivity and clarity; and emphasized that one must have intimacy with the subject in order to write about it. They set an example for me to emulate and the standard to achieve in my own writing efforts which they helped inspire.

In November 1980, our paths finally crossed when Ed came to Vicksburg to dedicate the U.S.S. Cairo Museum. It was Ed, along with friends Warren Grabau and Don Jacks, who in 1956 found the resting place of the ironclad gunboat Cairo that had been torpedoed and sunk in the Yazoo River, north of Vicksburg, on December 12, 1862. Ed spearheaded the salvage operations and, when chief historian of the National Park Service, lobbied hard for its restoration and display at Vicksburg National Military Park. Ed's *Hardluck Ironclad: The Sinking and Salvage of the Cairo* (1966) documents the gunboat's ill-fated career and is a delightful read.

We met almost in passing that day as I was then just a park technician, or low man on the totem pole, whose role during the event was crowd control. Still, I had an excellent vantage point from which to watch and listen to Ed's main oration. In recounting the history of the gunboat and his finding of the vessel, Ed spoke passionately, with energy and enthusiasm. You could actually feel the electricity as Ed recounted the moment of discovery when Warren shouted, "My God, stop the boat! The compass has gone wild! We've found the Cairo!" His talk, presented with the power of intimacy with the subject, was captivating. Just as with his writings, the manner and force of his presentation was instructional and proved instrumental in my development as an interpreter/historian.

Our paths crossed briefly again the following year when members of the Civil War Round Table of Chicago visited Vicksburg on their annual battlefield tour with Ed serving as their guide. Purely as a courtesy, I was invited to do an after-dinner presentation. Dressed in a Confederate uniform, I gave a first-person monologue of life under siege that was based on a compilation of soldiers' letters, memoirs, and diaries in the park's collection. Ed afterwards complimented me on my presentation. This program became my hallmark and over the years I delivered it thousands of times. Ed heard it so often that he could no doubt present it himself.

Sadly, we did not meet again for several years, during which time my exclusive access to Ed's seminal work ended with publication of *The Vicksburg Campaign* by Morningside Press. Bob and Mary Younger at Morningside took the two red volumes, added an index, and released Volume I (Vicksburg is the Key) in 1985, and Volumes II (Grant Strikes a Fatal Blow) and III (Unvexed to the Sea) in 1986. Thanks largely to Ed's reputation as an historian and raconteur extraordinaire, it was an instant success and quickly sold out. Fortunately, I had wisely ordered a set of these books for the park as well as a set for my own personal use. Although Morningside reprinted *The Vicksburg Campaign* several times in short print runs, the set went out of print following the death of Bob Younger in 2006. Those fortunate to own a set well know the treasure these books possess.

Thankfully, in 2000 the University of Tennessee Press released Warren Grabau's *Ninety-eight Days: A Geographer's View of the Vicksburg Campaign*. Although it lacks the minute detail for which Ed's work is noted, to this date it remains the most analytical examination of the campaign ever produced. It helped fill the void once Ed's trilogy went out of print, but it too, is now out of print. In recent years several additional books on Vicksburg have been released, but none compare to Ed's and Warren's works. From the dates of their publication, these volumes were proudly displayed on my desk within reach of my fingertips for the remainder of my career. The well-worn pages and the number of post-it tabs reflect their use.

Thus, when my dear friend Theodore P. "Ted" Savas at Savas Beatie contacted me to seek my assistance in reprinting Ed's trilogy, I was absolutely delighted—thrilled beyond measure! And I was so deeply honored when Ted asked me to provide this Foreword. This is the ONE indispensable work on Vicksburg, and it is so valuable that it should NEVER be allowed to go out of print. These volumes will stand the test of time and 1,000 years from now will still be the authoritative work on Vicksburg.

Having said that, permit me to stress that these volumes are not for the novice and should not be your introduction to the Vicksburg Campaign. Rather, the works mentioned earlier should serve that purpose along with more recent publications including: *The Vicksburg Campaign*, by David Martin; *Vicksburg Is the Key: The Struggle for the Mississippi River*, by William Shea; Donald Miller's *Vicksburg: Grant's Campaign That Broke the Confederacy*; Michael Ballard's *Vicksburg: The Campaign that Opened the Mississippi*; Justin Solonick's *Engineering Victory: The Union Siege of Vicksburg*, and Timothy B. Smith's *The Vicksburg Assaults, May 19-22*,

*1863 and The Siege of Vicksburg: Climax of the Campaign to Open the Mississippi River, May 23-July 4, 1863*. These volumes cover the gambit for those with little to moderate knowledge of the campaign and will provide the foundation on which to build prior to taking on Ed's trilogy. And too, there is *Receding Tide: Vicksburg and Gettysburg: The Campaigns that Changed the Civil War*, by Ed and coauthored with Brig. Gen. (ret.) J. Parker Hills for those who want a more challenging read.

If the reader will indulge me a while longer, in 1988 I was formally named park historian, a position I held until my own retirement in 2012. The year 1988 marked the 125th Anniversary of the Vicksburg campaign. To mark the anniversary, Al Scheller and myself, along with Stacy Allen of the park staff who went on to become the long-serving historian at Shiloh National Military Park, conducted tours of the outlying battlefields. This was the first—and to date—the only time in the history of the park that such tours were offered, in preparation for which we took to the field with Ed's volumes in hand to do preliminary investigation. Volume II in particular, which addresses the inland campaign, and its battle maps proved invaluable. We ground-truthed the action Ed described, which greatly aided our understanding of the battles. Later, during the actual tours, we quoted passages from Ed's work for the benefit of participants. Till this date I still consult Ed's volumes before each tour.

Once named park historian, I was invited to accompany Ed on tours each time he visited Vicksburg. At first I simply held the maps and pointed to specific sites Ed was talking about. I was amazed at his ability to recount the campaign in detail—it was as if he was reading aloud from his volumes. I also marveled at the manner of his delivery—its passion, energy, and force, and absorbed all that I could. As anyone who has ever taken one of Ed's tours can attest, there is no better way to see a battlefield. Just as with his writings, his tours set an example for me to follow and the standard to achieve on my own tours—the number of which increased dramatically each year.

As time went on, I gained a speaking role on Ed's tours. And, if there were multiple busloads of folks, I was given my own bus and provided narration from point to point where Ed addressed the group as a whole. Due to Ed's busy schedule, if he was not available to conduct a tour, groups began to request that I serve as their guide. Conducting tours of the campaign route or just the park is always such fun for it is especially delightful to meet folks who share a similar passion for history. Tours with Ed always provided

moments of laughter. On one tour, there were three busloads of visitors. Ed was on the lead bus, Parker Hills and I were on the other two. Ed's bus deviated from the normal route.

I remarked to my group, "I have no idea where he is going, but we are all about to learn something new about the Vicksburg campaign." Several miles later, Ed's bus pulled over and he got out. "We're here, wherever that is," I told my group and led them off the bus.

Ed walked up to me with a confused look on his face and asked, "Winschel, where the hell am I?"

Following Al Scheller's retirement in 1988, Ed became my mentor and inspiration. He and his wife, Margie, a wonderful historian in her own right and author of *Sherman's Forgotten Campaign: The Meridian Expedition*, took me under their wings and turned an impressionable and inexperienced young man into a professional historian. I cannot thank them enough for the many acts of kindness extended me over the years. I owe much of my professional stature to them.

As chief historian, Ed encouraged his field historians to further their academic credentials, participate in academic seminars, speak to Civil War Round Tables, and to publish; and he provided the support to do so. Getting published was certainly one of my dreams. Thankfully friends such as Bob Krick and Will Greene, both of whom I had served with at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, and Ed motivated me to write. Ed gave so freely of his time to edit everything I wrote—and still does. At first there was more red ink than type on the draft manuscripts he returned to me. And yet, he always wrote in his cover letter, "I wish to thank you for giving me the opportunity to review and comment on the subject manuscript. It is a pleasure to read a well written and carefully research report such as yours on . . . [publication of which] will bring credit to both yourself and the National Park Service."

The copious amounts of red ink gradually lessened with each new manuscript. Ed's comments, coupled with my wife's critique, furthered my development as a writer. The rate and level of improvement was reflected in the number of articles of mine that were published. In 1999, Ted Savas, with whom I had shared many speaking venues, published my first hardbound volume titled *Triumph & Defeat: The Vicksburg Campaign*. Ed honored me by writing the Foreword, and he did so once again in 2006 when Ted so graciously published *Triumph & Defeat* (volume II). Ed further honored me to co-author numerous articles on Vicksburg in *Blue & Gray Magazine*.



My debt to Ed is more than I could ever repay. I can but hope that whatever I may achieve in the field of history as a writer, speaker, and battlefield preservationist is a testament to him who molded my professional development. Thus, it is indeed among the great honors of my career to write with a full heart this Foreword in tribute to a friend I so dearly love, and his work that will inspire generations to come as it continues to inspire me.

Terrence J. Winschel  
Historian (ret.)  
Vicksburg National Military Park

## Addendum

Two weeks after this Foreword was penned, Edwin Cole Bearss passed away at the age of 97. The man may have left us, but the legend and his legacy live on in the generation of field historians he trained and the countless thousands of people he and they have touched in their writings, programs, videos, and tours.

To say that Ed was a giant in his field is understatement. He was a giant in a field of giants that includes the likes of Alan Nevins, Douglass Southall Freeman, Bruce Catton, T. Harry Williams, Charles Rowland, James “Bud” Robertson, William “Jack” Davis, Grady McWhiney, and oh! so many others. In this field of luminaries, Ed shone brightest! As with most of those in this elite group, Ed was a historian, writer, and speaker of national acclaim. But he was so much more, and he rose above the field by also being a tour guide extraordinaire and avid preservationist.

In short, he was a complete historian.

Ed passionately believed in the mission of the National Park Service to preserve and promote our nation’s most-cherished historic sites for the “benefit and enjoyment of the people.” Dearest of these sites to him were the the battlefields to which he devoted his life to interpret and preserve. As a combat veteran of the “greatest generation,” Ed served selflessly in the tradition of American patriots of all generations whose service manifests that the soul of the nation is not in its laws. Rather it is in the principles in which we as a collective people believe, and for which we are willing to fight and die to protect. The soul of the nation was not formed in the halls of Congress;

but on the hallowed ground on which blood was shed in defense of principles held dear and is reflected in the national cemeteries where those who, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, “gave the last full measure of devotion” are enshrined forever.

General Joshua Chamberlain of Gettysburg fame referred to these sites—consecrated by the blood of American patriots—as “the vision-place of souls.” He predicted, as I do most fervently pray will continue, that “reverent men and women from afar, and generations that know us not and that we know not of, heart-drawn to see where and by whom great things were suffered and done for them, shall come to this deathless field, to ponder and dream; and lo! the shadow of a mighty presence shall wrap them in its bosom, and the power of the vision pass into their souls.”

Thankfully people of like mind as Ed, and those he inspired, knowing that preservation of these sites helps to maintain the soul of the nation and keep alive the principles that define us as a people, have successfully preserved thousands of acres of consecrated ground for the benefit of future generations.

In a lifetime of achievements as a public historian, Ed was most proud of his preservation efforts and in this arena he has made his most lasting contribution to the nation he served so selflessly, so faithfully, and so completely.

TJW