

Tukufu Zuberi: Our next story investigates a mysterious map that takes us to the front lines of one of the most explosive battles of the Civil War. May 1863: The secession of 11 southern states has plunged the country into an unthinkable bloodbath. Two years into the war, Confederate states have the Union army on the run. To take the upper hand, Lincoln and his generals realize they must first seize control of the Mississippi River and cut the rebel supply lines. To sever this Confederate artery, the Union forces will have to crush the rebels at Vicksburg, a key garrison which the South has held since the beginning of the war. In May, Union commander Ulysses S. Grant orders his troops to storm the city, but the rebels are dug in and kill 3,200 of his men in just two days. With the war hanging in the balance, Grant needs a bold, new battle plan. Almost 160 years later, a mysterious map has surfaced that may help explain the Union strategy for seizing Vicksburg. It's in the hands of a Tucson, Arizona, man who says the map belonged to his great-grandfather, a Civil War veteran.

Fred Gumbart: I remember seeing the map, and it always made me imagine the gore of war, the smell of the gunpowder. The map makes me think of all that.

Tukufu: I'm Tukufu Zuberi. I've spent a lot of time studying the Civil War. In many ways, it gave birth to our country. So a map from such a key battle could be a significant find. I've arranged to meet Fred Gumbart and see the map myself.

Fred: I have an old map that belonged to my great-grandfather and supposedly he carried it in the Civil War at Vicksburg.

Tukufu: Let's look at it here. I'd made several calls to historians before meeting Fred, but no one I spoke to had ever seen or heard of a map from the battlefield of Vicksburg. Fred could have something pretty special. Now, if this map came from the Civil War and was at Vicksburg, that would make it historically priceless. What is it you want to know?

Fred: I'd like to know whether he really carried this at the battle of Vicksburg. And I'd like to know more about the map. What does the map show? What's going on in the map?

Tukufu: Is there anything that you can tell me that will help me answer these two questions?

Fred: My great-grandfather's name was George Conrad Gumbart. He was a captain in the Union Army.

Tukufu: That's some good information. Actually, that's not a whole lot to go on, but it is a start. What I want to do is take the map with me. I think it will be very important in my investigation. And then come back to you with an answer.

Fred: Great. All right.

Tukufu: Before I head out on the road, I want to take a closer look at the map. There's a lot here, starting with a date in the bottom corner: June 20, 1863. There are place names: Halls Ferry, Warrenton Road. This looks like a list of weapons of some sort, and these seem to be gun positions. This red line says "line of rebel works." That has to be the Confederate position. So the map is from a Union perspective. This says "Lauman's Division." That must refer to the Union soldiers. If this map can tell us something about General Grant's strategy at Vicksburg, it may be an important find. But my first job is to get the document authenticated. I've brought the map to Washington, D.C., to the Library of Congress. I'm meeting Diane Van der Reyden, an expert in document authentication. Here's the map.

Diane Van der Reyden: Ooh, yes.

Tukufu: It looks like it's in very good condition.

Diane: It's a very beautiful map. I can tell you it's not on paper or on parchment. It looks like it's on drafting linen, and that's consistent with the period. Drafting linen was developed shortly before the Civil War.

Tukufu: Are the inks consistent with the period?

Diane: You've got a combination of several types of inks on this. You've got iron gall ink, you've got what looks like a carbon black ink, and then there's a blue ink. It is consistent with the period, yes.

Tukufu: So far, so good. No red flags. Time to put Fred's map under ultraviolet light.

Diane: And what we're going to look for first and foremost is whether there are any optical brighteners.

Tukufu: What are optical brighteners?

Diane: Optical brighteners are any number of types of materials, modern materials that were put into contemporary papers and contemporary fabrics to make them appear brighter and whiter. What I see right now is that it's fluorescing, and it's fluorescing in a manner that's very consistent for the period.

Tukufu: So it passes the UV test.

Diane: So the test shows we have a period document.

Tukufu: This is exciting. Now I need to figure out exactly what's happening on this map. There's only one place to do that: the battlefield itself. I've come to Vicksburg, Mississippi.

The city has turned the scene of its greatest tragedy into a memorial. Terry Winschel is one of the leading historians of the battle. He's taking me to the area pictured on the map. On the way, he tells me what happened here that spring and early summer almost 150 years ago. May 1863: All eyes are on Vicksburg. The Union is desperate to capture the Mississippi stronghold, and on May 25th, Union commander Ulysses S. Grant orders a siege of the city. 35,000 Union troops surround Vicksburg. By June 20th, the date on our map, the siege is a month old.

Terry Winschel: These are all original Civil War-period artillery pieces.

Tukufu: Terry tells me that Grant believed he could use artillery to pound the garrison into submission.

Terry: By June 20th, these guns are raining death and destruction onto the Rebel positions. Day and night, twenty-four hours a day, virtually around the clock, Union artillery is in operation hurling solid shot and shell. Fields before you would have been shrouded by the thick smoke of battle. So it would be a bloodbath on the Confederate side of the line.

Tukufu: On the Confederate side, they are suffering casualties. These Union guns are hammering relentlessly because the siege is only going to last a few more days. These men are preparing for the final push to crush the shell that defends the city of Vicksburg and capture the city, and with it gain control of the Mississippi river. Was Fred Gumbart's great-grandfather a witness to this carnage? And did he carry this map on the battlefield? Inside, I give Terry his first look at our document. He's immediately captivated by the amount of information he sees.

Terry: This is a beautiful map. Seldom do you see a map from this time period with as much detail as you see here.

Tukufu: What can our map tell him about the Vicksburg battle?

Terry: The map here depicts the location of federal units and specifically artillery batteries. As of June 20th of 1863. These Union forces depicted on the map under Jacob Lauman are within 150 to 125 yards of the Confederate defenders. So they were fighting inch by inch, and the Union army was really getting close to the Confederates. It is the objective of these federals to get as close to the Confederates as possible, where they could tunnel underneath the enemy fortifications, hollow out rooms, fill them with black powder, and destroy the fortifications of Vicksburg.

Tukufu: Again, I'm struck by the image of George Gumbart carrying this map in the thick of battle. But Terry isn't so sure. So, could our guy have had this map on the battlefield with him as he's approaching the Confederate lines?

Terry: Not at that point in time. If you take a look at the precision of this map with the streams, the roads, the calligraphy, this map took a lot of time to produce. I'm convinced this was drawn based on notes made during the course of the siege but finalized afterwards.

Tukufu: Terry says the detail on the map suggests that it likely wasn't a battle map, but drawn up almost 40 years later by the experts and historians who turned this battlefield into a national monument.

Terry: They took maps similar to this of different portions of the siege and defense lines, sent them out to survivors, Union and Confederate survivors of the siege of Vicksburg, and asked them, where on this map was your unit during the course of the siege or defense of the city?

Tukufu: Terry's verdict is a bit of a letdown, and I'm not sure what to believe about Fred's story. I want to get hold of his great-grandfather's military records. The National Archives in Washington, D.C. houses many records from the Civil War. I should be able to find out something about George Gumbart here, if his papers have survived. As I waded through this mass of pension files, service records, and letters, I make a bizarre discovery. Casualty sheet? It seems George Gumbart was killed a year before Vicksburg. This can't be possible. Fred told us that his great-grandfather fought at Vicksburg. Then I find a letter in George Gumbart's handwriting. He hadn't been killed after all. Listen to what he says in his own hand. "Sir, I have the honor to request a leave of absence until I recover fully from wounds received at the late battle of Fort Donaldson." So, our guy wasn't killed, but he had wounds sufficient to request a leave. What we need to know is if he had recovered by the time of the battle at Vicksburg. This is something from the pension files. It says, "This is to certify that captain G.C. Gumbart of the 2nd Regiment, Illinois Light Artillery Volume, has served as Chief of Artillery in the 4th Division, 16th Army Corps, since September 1862." So our guy did make it back. And that "he performed his duties to my full satisfaction. Although he was sick, he commanded my artillery during" -- get this -- "the siege of Vicksburg." It's signed Brigadier General J.G. Lauman, which has to be the Lauman of Lauman's Division, the guy on our map. So Gumbart's story is checking out. He was the chief of artillery for a key division at Vicksburg. But I still can't say for sure if this is a map George Gumbart might have carried in battle or, as Terry Winschel suggested, a map from a later date. There's one place left to find an answer, at the best map collection in the country. I've brought the map to the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress, home to some 5.2 million maps.

Tukufu: John Hébert, welcome...But despite the library's extraordinary collection and the importance of Vicksburg, John tells me that they don't have a single map from the battlefield. These ornate maps were done weeks and months after the battle was over.

John Hébert: Here is a map of the Battle of Vicksburg after the siege has taken place, after the victory.

Tukufu: They're beautiful, but don't look anything like Fred Gumbart's.

John: I assume this came out of an archive someplace.

Tukufu: Well, it comes from an individual whose grandfather was a captain of the artillery.

John: I'm quickly looking at information here. I see references to a cannon. Look how crude it is compared to the finished product that we have over here.

Tukufu: What John said next sent me back to Fred with an answer. I told Fred about his great-grandfather's role on the battlefield as an artillery captain during the Vicksburg bombardment, and that we'd found a letter showing how badly he'd been wounded.

Fred: This is fantastic. It's in his own handwriting.

Tukufu: I also told him how the Library of Congress's top map expert had been stunned at what had been in Fred's

family all these years.

John: With its mix of detail and utilitarian style, it was almost as if the smell of battle clung to the old document. This doesn't look like anything that would have been later. I would say this is a map prepared on the field at the time of the siege itself. And the person who possesses this must realize that they should preserve it and that they have a slice of history in their hands. By the way, if you go back to the person whose map this is and they're interested in giving it to the Library of Congress, we'd be more than happy to receive it. It would be a nice addition to our collection, and from what you've seen of our Vicksburg maps, it would be a very important addition.

Tukufu: You know, it's an incredible story, and I've really appreciated the opportunity to investigate it.

Fred: I appreciate all the work that you've done for me.

Tukufu: Our story has a final twist. After our visit, Terry Winschel at the Vicksburg park had done some additional research and made what may be a startling discovery. He points us to the official Civil War history, which refers to a battlefield-era map of Vicksburg. It reads, "the skeleton map accompanying this report will exhibit all the batteries, the old roads, and the roads constructed during the siege." The only problem: an asterisk illustrates that the map had never been found. John believes George Gumbart may have simply held on to the map after the battle, and that Fred has a missing fragment of American history. It's conceivable you might have that little part of the puzzle that is missing, not found. It's actually a priceless piece of history. I would say it is because it's been referenced, and it's when these things come available that we begin to really write the history of what happens in these events. You have such a piece. In the early summer of 1863, the end finally came for the besieged garrison. The one-two punch of starvation plus the endless hail of shells from Union artillery proved to be too much. On July 4th, just two weeks after the date on Gumbart's map, the Confederates surrendered their control of the Mississippi. Ten days after that, exhausted from his wounds and the campaign, George Gumbart resigned from the army and returned home, taking his map with him. For the Union, final victory in the Civil War was now in sight. The capture of the Mississippi and the battlefield triumph that same July at Gettysburg would pave the way for the close of the conflict.

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