

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

The Helena Campaign

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Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Urwin, Gregory J. W.	“A Very Disastrous Defeat: The Battle of Helena, Arkansas,” in <i>North & South</i> 6 (December 2002): 26-39.

Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year. “Title,” in <i>Journal</i> ##, no. # (Date): #.
Banasik, Michael E., ed.	<i>Missouri Brothers in Gray: The Reminiscences and Letters of William J. Bull and John P. Bull</i> . Iowa City, IA: Camp Pope Bookshop, 1998, chap. 9, “Battle of Helena, Arkansas (July 4, 1863)”.
Bearss, Edwin C.	“The Battle of Helena, July 4, 1863,” in <i>Arkansas Historical Quarterly</i> 20 (Autumn 1961): 256-97.
Brent, Joseph E. and Maria Campbell Brent	“Civil War Helena: A Research Project and Interpretive Plan.” Versailles, KY: Mudpuppy and Waterdog, 2009.
Castel, Albert	<i>General Sterling Price and the Civil War in the West</i> . Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968, chap. 8, “Helena”.
Christ, Mark K.	<i>Civil War Arkansas, 1863: The Battle for a State</i> . Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010, chap. 4, “‘A Grivous Calamity’: The Battle of Helena”.

Christ, Mark K., ed.	<i>Rugged and Sublime: The Civil War in Arkansas</i> . Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994.
Cutrer, Thomas W.	<i>Theater of a Separate War: The Civil War West of the Mississippi River, 1861–1865</i> . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017, chap. 12, “Courage and Desperation Rarely Equaled: The Rebel Assault on Helena, 4 July 1863”.
DeBlack, Thomas A.	<i>With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-74</i> . Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003, chap. 3, “‘The Very Spirit of Destruction’: The War in 1863”.
Grabau, Warren E.	<i>Ninety-Eight Days: A Geographer's View of the Vicksburg Campaign</i> . Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000, chap. 40, “Forlorn Hope: Battle of Helena”.
Popchock, Barry, ed.	<i>Soldier Boy: The Civil War Letters of Charles O. Musser, 29th Iowa</i> . Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995.
Schieffler, G. David	“Civil War in the Delta: Environment, Race, and the 1863 Helena Campaign.” PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2017.
Sperry, A. F.	<i>History of the 33rd Iowa Infantry Volunteer Regiment, 1863–6</i> . Gregory J. W. Urwin and Cathy Kunzinger Urwin, eds. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999, chap. 5 and 6.
Thompson, Alan, ed.	“‘Frank and out spoken in my disposition’: The Wartime Letters of Confederate General Dandridge McRae,” in <i>Arkansas Historical Quarterly</i> 72 (Winter 2013): 333-65.

Organizations

Web Resources

URL	Name and description
https://www.arkansascivilwar150.com/	The Arkansas Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission has resources relating to the Civil War in Arkansas.
http://www.visithelenaar.com/content/civil-war-helena	Civil War Helena provides information, links, and ideas for exploring Civil War

	Helena.
http://shilohnick.blogspot.ca/2011/09/battle-of-helena.html	The remains of the battlefield at Helena are all in private hands and scattered throughout the town. Battlefield Wanderings provides directions for a walking tour.

Other Sources

Scholars

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G. David Schieffler	dschieffler@gmail.com
Mark K. Christ	
Thomas A. DeBlack	
Gregory J. W. Urwin	gurwin@temple.edu
Alan Thompson	pg1862@gmail.com

Topic Précis

The battle of Helena occurred on July 4, 1863, a day when Union armies scored key victories in three different locations. One of those was at Gettysburg, where on July 1-3 federal forces defeated Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia, which retreated on July 4. On that same day, 1,000 miles to the southwest, Union forces under Ulysses S. Grant forced the surrender of Vicksburg, the most important rebel stronghold on the Mississippi River. Among the smallest military engagements of the day occurred at Helena, 200 miles upriver from Vicksburg, but while overshadowed and mostly forgotten, Helena was by no means insignificant. The Union occupation of Helena was a constant threat to the Confederacy’s control of the Mississippi River and the Arkansas interior. The Helena campaign was initiated to eliminate that threat. In the end, the July 4 attack was too little and too late to save Vicksburg. Still, the battle of Helena proved to be among the most significant engagements of the Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi. Over 1,800 men were killed, wounded, or captured in the campaign (over 15% of those involved), and its outcome ensured federal control of the Mississippi River. General Theophilus Hunter Holmes led the Confederate army that attacked Helena, while Major General Benjamin Mayberry Prentiss commanded the 4,100-man federal garrison at Helena. Prentiss took advantage of commanding terrain to construct strong fortifications, while Holmes struggled with difficult terrain and weather to bring his forces to confront Prentiss. A combination of natural and built obstacles, as well as errors made by the Confederate commander, combined to defeat the Confederate attackers. After several hours of intense combat, the Confederates were forced to retreat. The Helena campaign was a disaster for the Confederates, and nature molded the actions and intentions of both armies and played a fundamental part in a campaign that ensured federal control of the Mississippi River,

preserved the Union foothold in eastern Arkansas, and paved the way for federal control of Little Rock only two months later.
