

The War in Louisiana

As you read, look for:

- the importance of the Mississippi River to both sides during the war,
- the purpose of the Red River campaign, and
- vocabulary terms **campaign** and **Bailey's dam**.

The first eager volunteers from Louisiana fought with General Robert E. Lee's army in Virginia. One famous company was known as the Louisiana Tigers. They gained a reputation as being wild and uncontrollable off the field but heroic fighters once the battle began.

However, the bodies shipped home from Shiloh silently predicted what lay ahead. This reality brought fear and anxiety. There were few troops left in Louisiana for protection. The state was almost defenseless against an attack.

Below: This 1861 map entitled "Panorama of the Seat of War" gives a bird's eye view of the Gulf Coast of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.



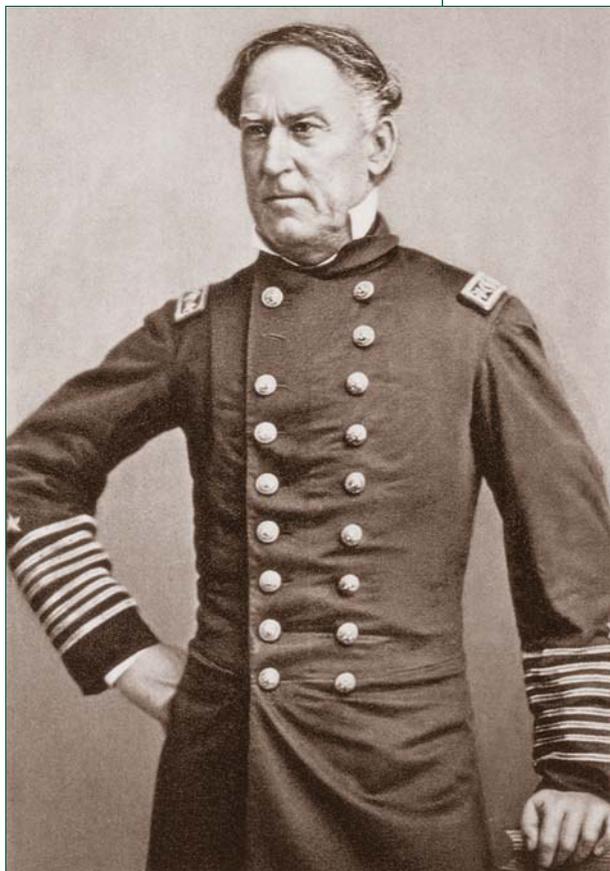
The Fall of New Orleans

The port of New Orleans was a key location for the state and for the Confederacy. The Union navy had already blocked the mouth of the Mississippi. If the Union could seize the city, the Confederacy would be crippled. General Beauregard had warned the Confederate government not to leave New Orleans unguarded. But Confederate President Davis thought the Union would attack from upriver. The Confederate navy was not sent to protect New Orleans.

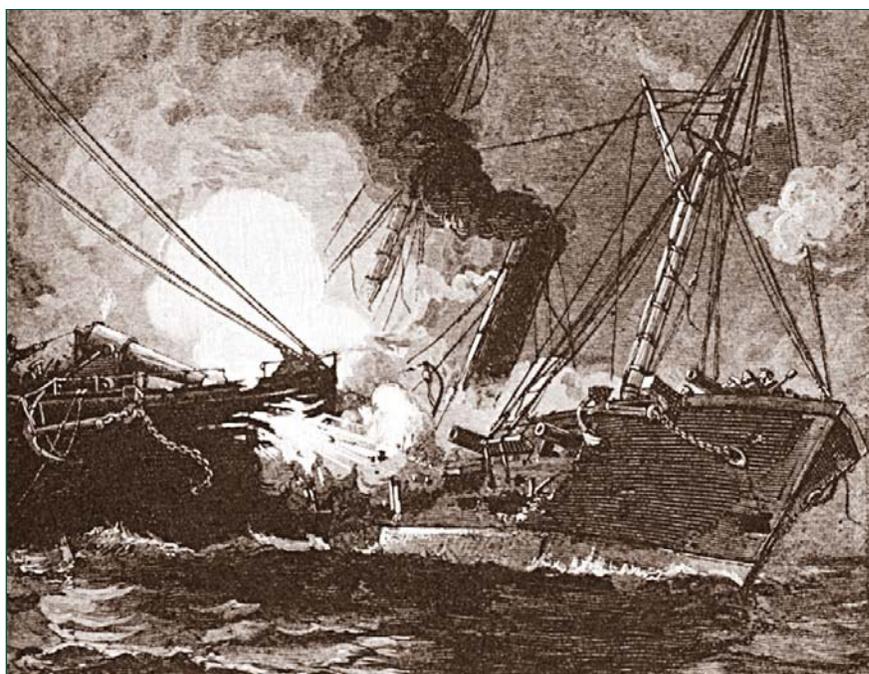
South of the city, the Confederates held the river with Fort Jackson and Fort St. Philip. They added to the defense by blocking the river with chains. Cypress rafts carrying pine knots and cotton ready for burning were added to the defense efforts.

The Union threat came when the United States Navy sent forty-seven ships under the command of Admiral David Farragut up the river. Farragut ordered David Porter, the commander of the Union gunboats, to open fire on the two forts on April 18, 1862. The constant shelling was heard fifty miles away. One soldier described the noise as being like an earthquake. But the forts held.

On the night of April 23, Farragut decided to take his ships past the forts. Exploding shells lit the night to the brightness of day. The Confederates at the forts saw excitement and fear on the faces around them. When the Union ships broke the Confederate chain, no barriers were left between the Union fleet and New Orleans.



Above: Admiral David Farragut led forty-seven Union ships up the Mississippi River, capturing New Orleans. **Right:** In this engraving, the Confederate ship *Governor Moore* is firing through its bow at the Union ship *Varuna*.



The river was high with spring floods, and the ships easily sailed up the river. Union gunboats faced directly into Jackson Square. The church bells warned that the city had fallen. The children and teachers in their schoolrooms counted the twelve bells and left their books, crying "The Yankees are here." Panic filled New Orleans.

Once the people knew the city was lost, they made sure the Union army could not seize their valuable goods. The wharf blazed with 29,000 bales of burning cotton. The huge fire also consumed warehouses filled with rice, corn, sugar, and tobacco. An amazed onlooker reported that molasses flowed in the gutters. The wealth of the city was destroyed.

On May 1, 1862, Union General Benjamin Butler took command of the city. The residents lived through the war in an occupied city, isolated from the rest of Louisiana.

Baton Rouge Falls

Admiral Farragut then headed up the Mississippi to take the state capital. Union gunboats fired on the unprotected city, which surrendered on May 7, 1862. The Union army moved in to hold the location.

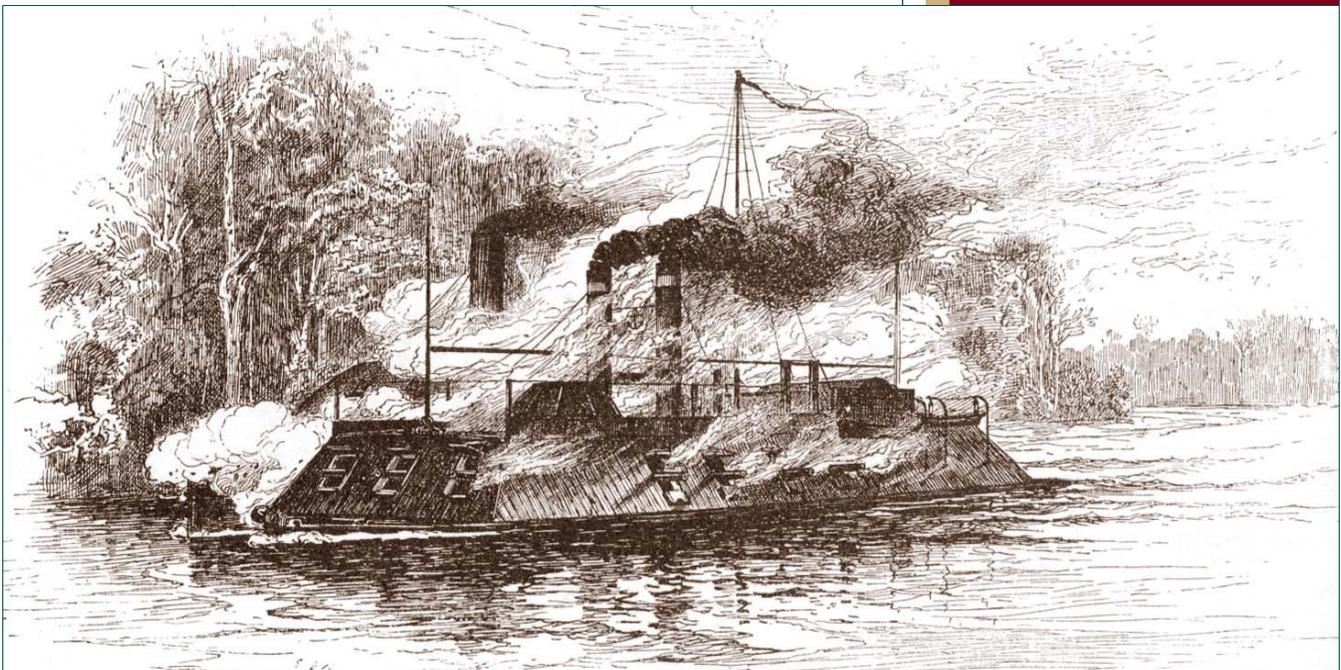
The Confederates under General John Breckinridge tried to retake Baton Rouge on August 5. They attacked by land from the east, but the Union gunboats stopped their drive at the river. The Confederate ironclad *Arkansas* headed south from Vicksburg to join the attack. But it did not reach Baton Rouge. As the ship rushed south from Vicksburg, its engine overheated. The *Arkansas* was burned to keep it out of Union hands.

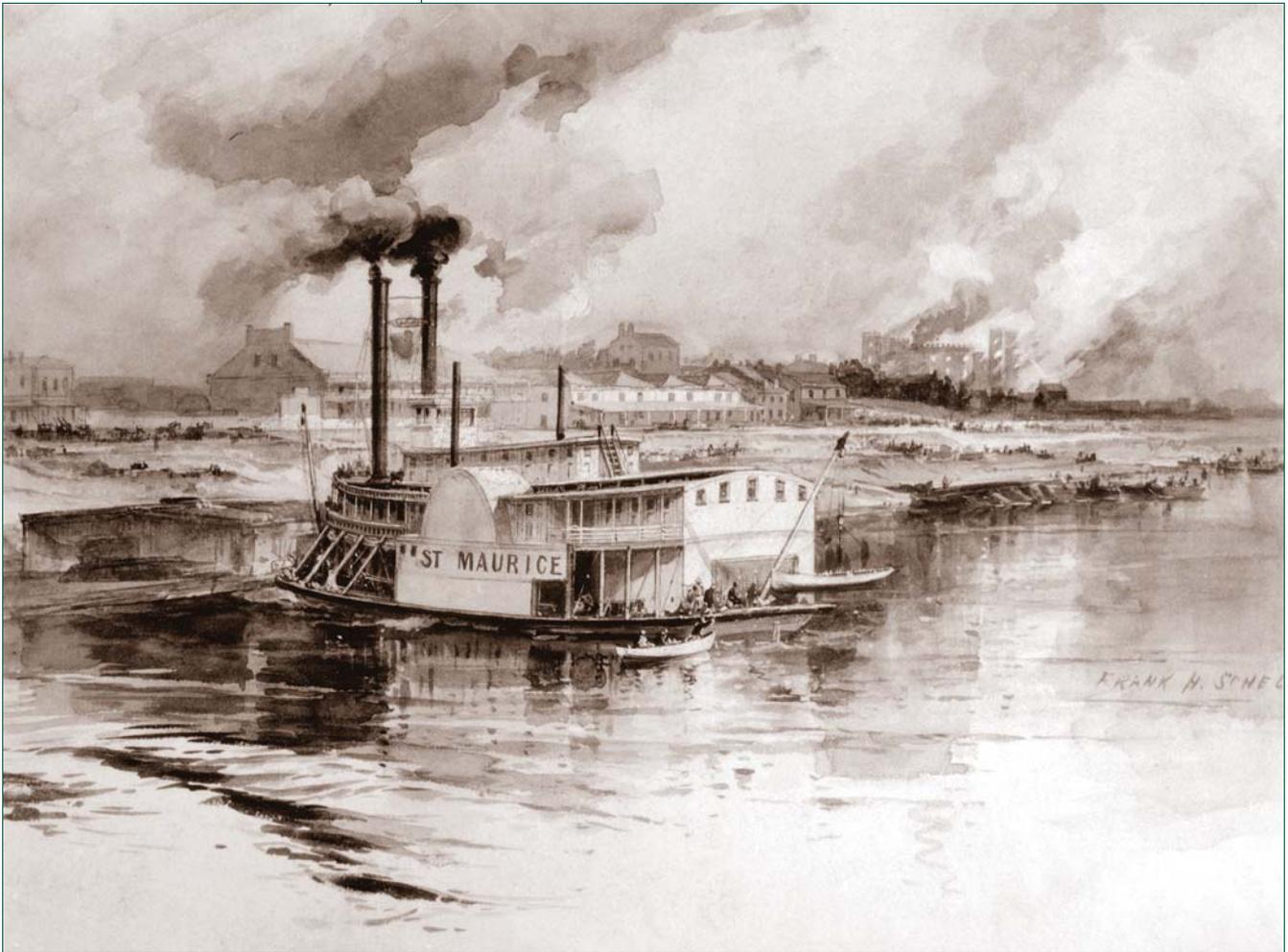
The Union army left Baton Rouge on August 21, because the Confederates threatened to recapture New Orleans. But federal troops returned to Baton Rouge

Lagniappe

Both Fort Jackson and Fort St. Philip were built by the United States before the War of 1812.

Below: The Confederate ironclad *Arkansas* was burned to keep it from Union hands.





Above: Union soldiers preparing supper accidentally started a fire in the State Capitol. The fire totally gutted the building.

A hogshead of sugar weighed 1,000 pounds.

before the year's end. In December 1862, the State Capitol burned, and many official state records were lost. The fire was apparently caused by careless troops.

Battles along the Bayous

In the fall of 1862, General Butler turned his attention to the rich Bayou Lafourche. This plantation region helped support the Confederate army. Butler wanted to seize the riches and supplies of the region for the Union army. He ordered that any goods belonging to "disloyals" along the bayou be confiscated (seized). This included the valuable hogsheads of sugar ready for shipping.

As the Union and Confederate armies moved through southeast Louisiana, they fought along Bayou Lafourche and Bayou Teche. The residents of this region faced either battles or an occupying Union army during most of the war.

Taking the Mississippi River

Union General Winfield Scott advised President Lincoln to take the Mississippi River. Early in the war, the Union's strategy was to block all of the Confederate ports and seize the Mississippi. Taking control of the river would split the Confederacy in two, leaving Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana stranded. This

strategy was called the “Anaconda Plan,” because it would squeeze the Confederacy to death, just as the huge anaconda snake does its prey.

If the Union plan worked, the Confederacy would not be able to send supplies to its troops on the eastern front. However, Vicksburg and Port Hudson stood in the way of the strategy’s success. Both stood high above the river on bluffs, which gave the Confederates an advantage.

Vicksburg

Union General Ulysses S. Grant began preparing to take Vicksburg in late 1862. The land to the north and east was swampy, and there were few roads. Because of the Confederate guns high on the bluffs, Grant needed to find another approach. He wanted to dig canals on the Louisiana side of the river to create a shortcut to Vicksburg. Once the canals were complete, he could carry his troops past Vicksburg’s guns and attack from the south.

But despite the hard work of the troops and many former slaves, the canals collapsed. Grant had to march his army along the swampy Louisiana riverbanks. Ferries took the men across the river south of Vicksburg. The Union troops then laid siege to the Mississippi city. That is, Grant’s army surrounded Vicksburg and prevented any supplies from reaching it.

Map 34 The Siege of Vicksburg

Map Skill: Based on information in the map, why was Vicksburg so important?



Left: For six weeks, the Union Army laid siege to Vicksburg, Mississippi, finally capturing it on July 4, 1863. The defeat of the Confederate army at the Battle of Gettysburg on the same day was the turning point in the war.



Above: Union troops under General Augur cross Bayou Montecino on their way to Port Hudson, the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River.

Port Hudson

At Port Hudson, 150 miles south of Vicksburg, the Confederates had stopped Union forces from moving supplies upriver to Grant's army. The fort controlled a large bend in the river. From its high bluffs, the Confederates fired on Union ships heading north from New Orleans. An assault by the Union navy failed to silence the Confederate guns.

The next Union attack came by land. On May 23, 1863, General Nathaniel Banks surrounded Port Hudson, trapping the Confederate army within the earthworks (embankments) and trenches. For forty-eight days (the longest siege of the Civil War), the 30,000-member Union army assaulted the 6,800 Confederate troops.

In the hot Louisiana summer, soldiers collapsed from the heat and sickened from the bad water. The tiniest enemies—mosquitoes and lice—tormented both armies. The worst were the snapping beetles, which crawled into the ears of sleeping soldiers. Surrounded on all sides by Union troops, the barefoot and ragged Confederate troops ran out of food. Their hunger forced them to eat the horses, the mules, and finally the rats.

Despite these hardships, the Confederates held out until they learned that Vicksburg had fallen on July 4. A Union officer claimed he informed the Confederates by wrapping the surrender notice around a stick and throwing it into

their trenches. An official dispatch from General Grant informed General Franklin Gardner, the Confederate commander, that the Union had taken Vicksburg. General Gardner then surrendered to General Banks. The long siege at Port Hudson ended on July 9. Later, Lincoln praised the Union victory by announcing, "The father of waters again flows unvexed to the sea." The Union now had full control of the Mississippi River.

The Red River Campaign

The final Union campaign in Louisiana headed toward Shreveport and Texas. (A **campaign** is a military plan with a specific goal that may have several battles in more than one location.) By 1864, Shreveport was the Confederate capital of Louisiana and the headquarters for the Confederate command west of the Mississippi. The Confederates shipped cotton from Shreveport through Texas to Mexico. Eager European buyers bought all the cotton the southerners could supply. Often, the cotton was exchanged for essential supplies.

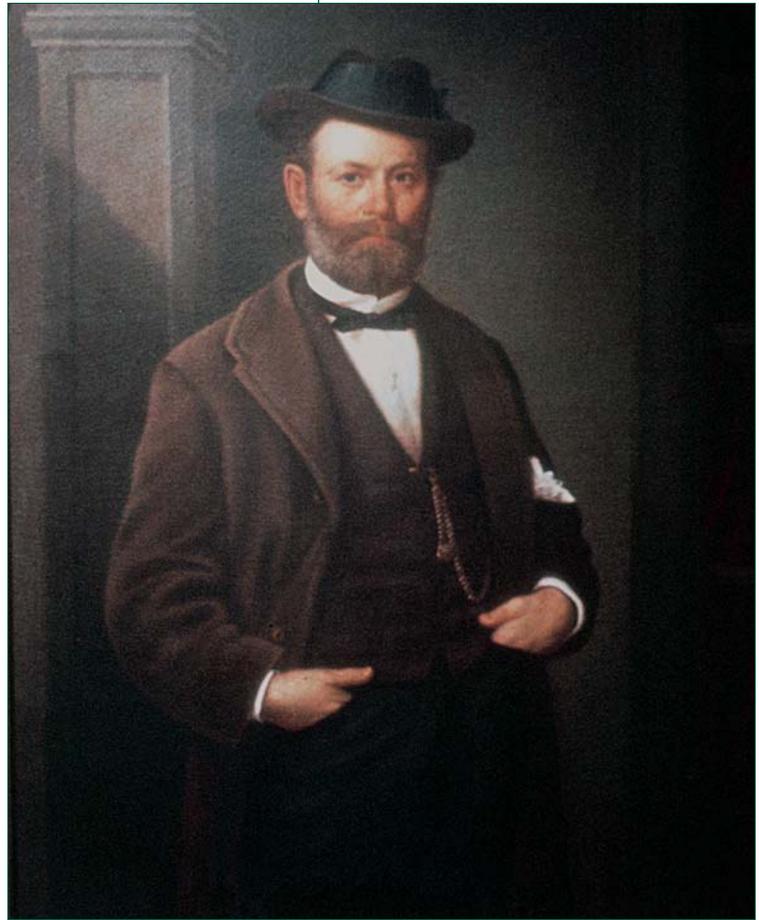
The Union planned to seize the cotton from the Red River Valley and then take Shreveport.

To prepare for this assault, federal troops moved north along Bayou Teche. Along the way, the Union army seized horses and anything else they found useful. After they had passed, the people along the bayou had little left.

From there, the federal army headed to Alexandria. The Union navy's gunboats moved up the Red River to join them. On March 16, 1864, Union forces took Alexandria. General Banks then led his troops upriver to Natchitoches. He turned away from the river and headed toward Shreveport, choosing the shorter and more traveled route. When Banks moved his army away from the river, he lost the protection of Admiral Porter's gunboats. Confederate General Richard Taylor used this to his advantage. The outnumbered Confederates, led by General Taylor, waited for Banks in the wooded hills forty miles south of Shreveport.

The fierce Battle of Mansfield was fought on April 8, 1864. The Confederate cavalry and infantry charged the Union forces, following Taylor's orders to draw first blood. Their respected General Alfred Mouton was killed as he led his men in battle. Later, General Taylor commented, "The charge made by Mouton across the open was magnificent." More than 1,500 Union soldiers were killed, wounded, or captured.

Amid the confusion, General Banks called for a night retreat. At Pleasant Hill, twenty-two miles further south, Taylor again struck the Union army. This battle had no clear winner, but Banks continued retreating.



Above: At the Battle of Mansfield, Confederate forces were led by General Richard Taylor, the son of President Zachary Taylor. The Confederate victory stopped the Union from advancing into Texas.

Lagniappe

Confederate cotton was shipped out of the port at Brownsville, Texas.



Lagniappe

General Banks wanted to build a political career and run for president.



By the time the Union troops returned to Alexandria, the level of the Red River had fallen. Their gunboats were now trapped above the rapids. But a Union army engineer developed an amazing plan. Union troops built a *wing dam* to force the water to back up and deepen along a narrow channel. To the surprise of all, **Bailey's dam** worked. The water level rose, and the boats floated past the rapids. The Union navy was finally able to leave Alexandria after two weeks of hard work on the makeshift structure.

As Union troops left the city, a fire was set. At least twenty-two blocks of the city, including the courthouse and the Episcopal and Methodist churches, were burned. It is unclear who started the fire. Some residents blamed Union soldiers, while others blamed outlaws. General Banks did not order his troops to burn the town, but records show that Admiral Porter considered the action "a fitting termination of the Red River expedition." One resident reported that some Union officers tried to help save homes while other soldiers looted and robbed.

General Banks took his army back to New Orleans. He claimed victory in the Battle of Mansfield, but his fellow officers did not agree. Admiral Porter reported to General Sherman that "the army was shamefully beaten by the rebels."



Map 35
The Civil War in Louisiana
Map Skill: Did any battles take place close to where you live?

Check for Understanding ✓

1. Why was New Orleans so important to the Confederacy?
2. Why did the people burn the cotton and destroy other valuable goods when New Orleans fell to Union forces?
3. Why did the Union army want to control the Mississippi River?
4. What event caused the Confederates at Port Hudson to surrender?
5. Why was it a mistake for General Banks to turn away from the river?

Opposite page, above: A reenactment of the Battle of Mansfield. These men are portraying Union cavalry.
Opposite page, below: This fence in the woods at Mansfield marks the position of the Union line.