Mansfield
State Commemorative Area

Louisiana
STATE PARKS

RECEIVED
FEB 09 1998
LOUISIANA GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS
With the fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson in July 1863, the Mississippi River was entirely controlled by the Union. President Lincoln and his staff decided that the capture of Texas would be the next objective in the trans-Mississippi area. The Red River was chosen as the best approach into Texas, and a navy-army advance was planned with the army (35,800 troops) under the command of General N. P. Banks and the navy under the command of Flag Officer D. D. Porter.

The Union surmised that a successful Red River campaign would accomplish several important goals: it would lead to the confiscation of cotton for New England mills and to the destruction of Confederate supply plants; it would prevent the French-Mexican force from joining Confederate forces and prevent supplies from reaching the Confederate troops; it would provide protection for the loyal Union population in Texas; and it would bring Texas back into the Union as a voting state.

Following the course of the Red River, the Union army and navy progressed with little opposition through Alexandria and reached Natchitoches by early April 1864. At Natchitoches the army veered away from the Red River, going toward Shreveport by way of Mansfield, which left them without the support of the navy. This and other tactical blunders on the part of General Banks, as well as a series of successful maneuvers by Confederate commander General Richard Taylor (son of President Zachary Taylor), decisively influenced the final outcome of the battle.
Confederate Victory at Mansfield

Like many important battles, the Mansfield-Pleasant Hill engagement was actually a series of encounters taking place over several days. After a two-hour cavalry fight with Union forces near Wilson's Farm on April 7, 1864, General Taylor elected to defend a site about four miles south of Mansfield, now the location of the state commemorative area. General Banks did not expect the Confederates to fight until he reached Shreveport, so the Union army became stretched out along the narrow road leading to Mansfield. This allowed Taylor to deal with his opponents on more equal terms since the Confederate troops were heavily outnumbered.

At 12 p.m. on April 8, the head of the disorganized Union army (5,700 troops) was confronted by the Confederate army (8,800 troops) in battle formation. The Union troops quickly formed a line of battle along a rail fence and a ridge known as Honeycutt Hill. On orders from Taylor, General Alfred Mouton's Division charged the rail fence. Mouton was killed leading the attack, but French born General C. J. Polignac, along with other Confederate forces, continued the attack and overwhelmed the Union line.

A fresh unit of 1,700 Union troops formed another line of battle about a mile south of the first. After a brief encounter, Taylor and the Confederates routed the Union forces, taking many prisoners and seizing guns, small arms and wagons abandoned by the fleeing soldiers.

The Battle of Pleasant Hill

Two miles south of the second line, another 6,000 Union troops formed a defensive position at Chapman's Bayou and held this location until dark. During the night the defeated Union forces fell back to Pleasant Hill. On April 9, the fierce Battle of Pleasant Hill was fought, with both sides taking heavy losses and withdrawing from the field after dark.

The Union army rejoined the navy in Natchitoches and began a long retreat down the Red River. The river had dropped to an unusually low level, trapping the navy in a series of rapids near Alexandria. Union engineer Joseph Bailey solved the problem by having wing-dams built in the river to raise the water level. The navy finally floated free and
the combined Union forces left Alexandria. Confederates opposed the Union retreat first at Mansura and then at Yellow Bayou.

On May 18, 1864, the Union forces crossed the Atchafalaya River, ending the disastrous Red River campaign. By turning back these large Union forces, the Confederates were able to prevent complete Union control of Louisiana and stop progression of the war into Texas. In fact, the Confederate victory at Mansfield may have prolonged the war by several months.

**Step Back in Time**

Through living history events, exhibits, battle reenactments and interpretive programs, Mansfield State Commemorative Area allows you to travel back to the unrest of the Civil War years. Interpretive trails and a picnic area will make your stay memorable and pleasant. Watch for musket demonstrations, candlelight tours of the battlefield and other exciting events scheduled throughout the year.

**Nearby Attractions:**

**North Toledo Bend State Park**—(9 miles southwest of Zwolle off LA 3229)—Located on Toledo Bend Reservoir, the park offers fishing, boat launch, improved campsites, 10 vacation cabins, group camp facilities, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, picnicking, pavilion, playgrounds, trails and a conference center.

**Rebel State Commemorative Area**—(3 miles northwest of Marthaville on State Hwy. 1221, and 25 miles west of Natchitoches and I-49)—Features the gravesite of an unknown Confederate soldier and is the home of the Louisiana Country Music Museum. An amphitheater offers concerts featuring gospel, country and folk music, as well as the Annual Fiddling Championship.

**Los Adaes State Commemorative Area**—(1 mile northeast of Robeline on LA Hwy. 485)—The 14-acre site, located on the “El Camino Real” near Natchitoches, features the remains of a Spanish fort built in the 1700s to protect Texas from the French. It is a major archaeological site and offers interpretive programs.

**Fort St. Jean Baptiste State Commemorative Area**—(130 Moreau Street, Natchitoches)—Located on the banks of historic Cane River, the fort is a full-scale replica of a French colonial fort built in the 1730s. Featured are log walls sharpened to protect the barracks, a warehouse, chapel, mess hall, powder magazine, Indian dwellings and interpretive programs.

**Fort Jesup State Commemorative Area**—(6 miles east of Many off LA 6, formerly the “San Antonio Trace”)—The site of a fort established in 1822 by Zachary Taylor to secure the western border of the U.S. frontier. It features the original field kitchen, a replica of officers’ quarters which serves as a museum and visitors center, and interpretive programs.

**Historic Town of Mansfield**—(Off Hwy. 171)—This was the scene of some of the heaviest fighting of the Civil War. The town is noted for its quiet southern charm, tree-lined streets, and dignified antebellum mansions.

**Historic Town of Keachie**—(Take LA 5 northwest of Mansfield)—The small antebellum community is the site of a Confederate cemetery, the Greek Revival-style Keachie Plantation Store built circa 1840, and Keachie Presbyterian Church built circa 1856.

**Sabine Wildlife Refuge**—(5 miles south of Zwolle)—The 14,780-acre area of loblolly and short leaf pine is open to visitors to enjoy hunting, birding, and camping.
Mansfield State Commemorative Area (15149 Highway 175, Mansfield, LA 71052; 318-872-1474 or 1-888-677-6267) is located in DeSoto Parish, four miles south of the town of Mansfield on LA 175. Exit I-49 to the town of Mansfield and follow LA 175 south. The 177-acre site has a museum exhibiting Civil War weapons, arms, uniforms, letters, diaries, documents and other related artifacts. An interpretive trail named in honor of General Mouton winds through the site. In 1973 this State Commemorative Area was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, an honorary designation for significant historical sites.