

**OVERVIEW OF
BATTLES IN SOUTHEASTERN LOUISIANA
APRIL 1862–JULY 1863
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THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES did not touch Louisiana directly until April 1862, a year after the start of hostilities between the North and South. Until that time, Louisiana's coastline remained vulnerable to Union attack. Confederate authorities in Richmond, Virginia, (the Confederate capital) did little to prevent the inevitable Union invasion of Louisiana. Virtually all that protected southeast Louisiana from attack were Forts St. Philip and Jackson located opposite each other along the Mississippi, seventy-five miles south of New Orleans. When the Union navy successfully bypassed the forts in late April 1862, New Orleans surrendered, never to be reclaimed by the Confederacy. Adding to the Union victory, Baton Rouge, the capital of Louisiana, was soon occupied by Union forces.

Under the leadership of Major General Benjamin Butler, Union forces began their formal occupation of New Orleans on May 1, 1862. There was a strong but unwarranted fear by Butler that Confederate forces would attempt to reclaim the city. On August 5, 1862, there was an attempt by Confederate forces to reclaim Baton Rouge. The battle fought at the State capital turned out to be a Union victory. Nevertheless, Butler continued to fear for the safety of his home base at New Orleans.

Soon after the Battle of Baton Rouge, Union forces withdrew from the Capital and began to concentrate in and around the New Orleans' area. Confederate forces that had fought at Baton Rouge withdrew northward and began to occupy the village of Port Hudson, twenty-five miles upriver. The Confederacy held that vital river port until July 1863, essentially blocking all Union river-traffic coming from the south. Vicksburg, 110 miles upriver from Port Hudson, was a second Confederate bastion blocking Union river-traffic coming from the north. The defeat of both Port Hudson and Vicksburg was a vital objective for the Union, if there was to be any attempt to control the Mississippi, thus splitting the Confederacy in half.

Because Butler chose to concentrate his army in and around New Orleans, the land south and west of the city in the region, referred to as the Lafourche district, remained virtually unoccupied by Union forces. Fortunately for Butler during the spring and early summer of

1862 there was little in the way of a Confederate army in the Lafourche district to threaten his western flank. Most of the able-bodied men from that area who had volunteered for Confederate service had been already transported to northern Mississippi, Tennessee, and east to Virginia. However, there were small bands of partisan rangers (independent military units), or “guerillas,” as they were labeled by the Union forces, transferred from Texas and south central Louisiana that were operating in the Lafourche region. They fought to push all Yankee occupiers away from the Lafourche district’s borders. During the summer and fall of 1862, several skirmishes were fought near Raceland Station (now Raceland), at Boutte Station (now Boutte), St. Charles Court House (now Hahnville), and St. Emma Plantation, located along Bayou Lafourche three miles downriver from Donaldsonville (on La. State Hwy. 1).

In July of 1862, along the west bank of the Mississippi south of Donaldsonville, partisan rangers (recruited to the area by Governor Thomas O. Moore) began shooting at Union shipping in the river. The Union navy retaliated by shelling Donaldsonville on August 9, 1862. Nearly the entire town was destroyed in the process. However, the destruction of Donaldsonville did not deter Confederate forces concentrating in the Lafourche district. Sporadic firing on naval shipping continued, despite Union efforts to stop it.

By the third week of August 1862, Major General Richard “Dick” Taylor took command of all Confederate forces in Louisiana west of the Mississippi River. He quickly began to organize an army from the partisan rangers present in the area, along with additional men that he had recruited from Texas and southern Mississippi.

By late summer and early fall, Butler began to realize his control of the New Orleans area could never be solidified until he first annihilated Taylor’s army that was gathering strength in the Lafourche district. Only when he felt confident that his New Orleans base of operation was safe from a Confederate attack from the eastern side of the river did he begin to plan the invasion and conquest of the Lafourche district. That decision was not reached until late September 1862.

THE BATTLE OF GEORGIA LANDING OR LABADIEVILLE

October 27, 1862

Butler’s plan for the invasion of the Lafourche district called for a three-prong attack. His plan called for the Union navy (with army support) to steam up the Atchafalaya River to Berwick Bay and Brashear City (now Morgan City) and block the only Confederate escape route from the district. In the meantime, land forces would descend the New Orleans,

Opelousas, and Great Western Railroad (now Southern Pacific), departing from Algiers, and drive all Confederate resistance away from the eastern borders of the district.

The bulk of Butler's invasion force (led by newly appointed Brigadier General Godfrey Weitzel) would ascend the Mississippi, land several miles south of Donaldsonville (present area of the Sunshine Bridge – La. State Hwy. 70), and drive all Confederate forces south along Bayou Lafourche. The converging Union land forces hoped to unite near Thibodeaux (now Thibodaux) and complete the conquest by steadily driving the Confederates toward Brashear City and their entrapment.

On Monday, October 27, 1862, after landing near Donaldsonville two days earlier, Weitzel's forces ran into Confederate resistance two miles north of Labadieville along Bayou Lafourche at a site called Georgia Landing (area around the abandoned Supreme Sugar Refinery – La. State Hwy. 1). Led by Brigadier General Alfred Mouton, the Confederates occupied both sides of the bayou. Weitzel wrongly assumed that Mouton's army would confront him on the left descending bank of Bayou Lafourche (La. State Hwy. 308). As a result, he concentrated nearly all of his troops on that side of the bayou.

Weitzel's only infantry regiment on the right bank (La. State Hwy. 1) was the 8th New Hampshire. When it met stiff resistance, Weitzel changed his attack strategy and crossed two additional regiments to the right. Aiding in Weitzel's decision to cross the bulk of his troops to the right was the unexplained withdrawal of Confederate forces from his left.

Having nearly three times the number of men at his disposal than Mouton could counter, Weitzel easily overpowered his adversary. The battle ended in a Union victory, with Mouton's forces eventually retreating across Berwick Bay before the Union navy could close the trap.

Union forces engaged ~ 2,000 infantry/artillery, 250 cavalry
Union Casualties 8 killed, 74 wounded, 5 captured
Confederate forces engaged ~ 1,400 infantry/artillery /cavalry
Confederate Casualties 5 killed, 18 wounded, 186 captured

Union forces soon quartered their troops in the Lafourche district after the Battle of Georgia Landing. The first permanent Union camp in the district was located on Acadia Plantation (present day Nicholls State University), one mile south of Thibodeaux. Christened Camp Stevens, it served as a base for Union forces in Lafourche until the following spring.

No pursuit of Taylor's forces west of Brashear City was attempted in earnest until spring of 1863. By then, Major General Nathaniel P. Banks had replaced Butler. By the first week of

April, Banks amassed a force of 18,000 men from his 19th Army Corps at Brashear City. Taylor's army, a dozen miles to the west, had barely 4,000 men to counter the Union threat.

**BATTLES OF BISLAND – April 12–13, 1863 and
IRISH BEND or NERSON'S WOODS – April 14, 1863**

To trap Taylor's army, Banks choose to divide his force. Brig. Gen. William H. Emory, the overall commander of the first wing, took his 3rd Division with Weitzel's 2nd Brigade of Maj. Gen. Christopher Augur's 1st Division (~ 10,000 men) and crossed Berwick Bay at Brashear City. Ten miles west of Berwick City (now Berwick), Emory confronted Taylor at his campsite and fortified position near Thomas Bisland's Fairfax Plantation (location of the Calumet Spillway and La. State Hwy 90 intersection). Defending Camp Bisland, Taylor positioned 3,000 men divided equally along both banks of Bayou Teche (Calumet Spillway cuts through Bayou Teche). Brigadier General Mouton defended the left descending bank, while Brigadier General Henry H. Sibley from Texas defended the right.

For two days, April 12–13, Union forces tried in vain to break the stubborn Confederate resolve at Camp Bisland. A Confederate retreat from Camp Bisland was ordered only after Taylor became aware of Banks' scheme to flank them by way of Grand Lake.

While Emory fought at Camp Bisland, Banks' second wing boarded troop transports at Brashear City and steamed west into Grand Lake (at the time the lake – starting at Brashear City – roughly paralleled Bayou Teche). Under command of Brigadier General Cuvier Grover (~ 8,000 men), his 4th Division was ordered by Banks to flank Taylor's army by way of Grand Lake and get to the rear of the Confederates near Franklin before Taylor realized his entrapment.

When Grover's troop transports were spotted in the lake by Confederate patrols, Taylor ordered an evacuation of Camp Bisland during the night of April 13. Confederate forces at Franklin quickly moved into Nerson's Woods at the base of so-called "Irish Bend," a horseshoe bend in Bayou Teche, to prevent Grover from closing the Confederate escape route.

Taylor, at the Battle of Irish Bend or Nerson's Woods (April 14), succeeded in stopping Grover's attempt to get to the rear of his army. As a result, Taylor was able to escape capture and continue his orderly retreat northwest along Bayou Teche. Banks' failed attempt at capturing Taylor's army at Franklin resulted in an expanding offensive through the Teche region, which in the long run accomplished nothing for the Union, other than

driving Taylor's army away from the Lafourche region's western borders. Though Taylor eventually retreated beyond Alexandria, he was never annihilated as Banks desired.

Casualties

Bisland

Union 40 killed, 184 wounded

Confederate – unknown, but probably less

Irish Bend or Nerson's Woods

Union 49 killed, 274 wounded, 30 missing or captured

Confederate – unknown, but probably less

With Banks confident that Taylor's army had been pushed into extreme northwestern Louisiana and no longer posed a threat to his western flank, his full attention turned toward the defeat of the Confederate garrison at Port Hudson. Further north at Vicksburg, Major General U. S. Grant had been given the task of defeating the Confederates at that locale. If the Union was to control the entire span of the Mississippi, both Confederate ports would have to be captured.

Stripping nearly his entire manpower in the Lafourche district in order to concentrate his forces at Port Hudson, Banks began his investment of the port village in May 1863. The result left the Lafourche district short of Union troops and ripe for a Confederate counterattack.

By the beginning of June 1863, Taylor's forces slowly began to reenter the Teche region. Confederate forces under Taylor's watch had attempted to relieve pressure on Vicksburg and Port Hudson by threatening Union forces in northeast Louisiana along western banks of the Mississippi. By the first week of June this strategy had failed. There was hope by the Confederate high command that Banks would relinquish his investment of Port Hudson and redirect his army towards the Crescent City, if he felt his home base and his western flank in the Lafourche district were threatened.

Taylor's first task in reclaiming the district was the capture of Brashear City. To accomplish this, Taylor divided his army. One cavalry brigade, led by Colonel James P. Major, crossed the upper Atchafalaya River, headed east to the west bank of the Mississippi, and entered the district by way of Bayou Lafourche. Once at Thibodeaux, Major was ordered to travel west to Brashear City and cut off the Union escape route to New Orleans.

Major's 176-mile flanking maneuver was brilliantly performed. On June 20, 1863, Major's advance guard easily overran the Union garrison at Thibodeaux, capturing badly needed supplies and arms. However, Major's descent into the district would not go totally

unchallenged. Lieutenant Colonel Albert Stickney, Union commander of the Lafourche district, was aware of Major's presence and fortified a position on the eastern banks of Bayou Lafourche at Lafourche Crossing (La. State Hwy. 308). Unaware that Taylor soon threatened Brashear City from the west with the remaining portion of his army, Stickney withdrew several hundred troops from that locale and raced by rail toward Lafourche Crossing during the predawn hours of June 20. Stickney was mistakenly informed that Lafourche Crossing was Major's next target.

BATTLE OF LAFOURCHE CROSSING

June 20–21, 1863

In the late afternoon of June 20, a Confederate force nearing Lafourche Crossing was fired upon by Stickney's artillery. The Battle of Lafourche Crossing had begun. The Confederates quickly returned to their base at Thibodeaux to report the Yankee presence and strength at the Crossing.

In the early morning hours of June 21, Major entered Thibodeaux with the rest of his brigade. Aware that his order from General Taylor was to cut off the Union's eastern escape route from Brashear City, Major ordered Colonel Charles Pyron and his 2nd Texas Mounted Cavalry to feint an attack at the Crossing to keep Stickney occupied. Meanwhile, by the evening of June 20, Stickney received reinforcements from New Orleans. His collective force by June 21 numbered ~ 850 men. Pyron's cavalry regiment was numbered at ~ 206 men.

A fierce thunderstorm at midday, June 21, delayed the second day's fighting until late afternoon or early evening. Pyron, probably flushed with past victories or wrongly assuming his adversary was easy prey, attacked the Union position in full force, rather than feint an attack as Major had ordered. The result was disastrous for Pyron's regiment. Stickney held his ground even in the face of hand-to-hand combat with the Texas troopers. As night fell, Pyron's battered force retreated back to Thibodeaux.

Casualties

Union – 8 killed, 41 wounded

Confederate – 53 killed, 60 wounded (Union reports)

Major, wanting to get to the rear of Brashear City as quickly as possible, ordered an evacuation of Thibodeaux during the late evening of June 22. His brigade reached Chacahoula Station (now Chacahoula) by dawn, June 23. Union forces reoccupied Thibodeaux that same morning. The Union occupation of Thibodeaux lasted until the following day.

Initially wanting to get to the rear of Major's brigade, a small Union force at Lafourche Crossing was sent towards Chacahoula with instructions to repair rail bridges burned by Major's force as the Confederate forces moved west toward Brashear City. On June 24, a sharp skirmish occurred near Chacahoula Station as Union workmen and soldiers brushed against some of Major's rearguard.

Union forces advanced no further than Chacahoula. On that same day, June 24, the Union authorities at Thibodeaux were wrongly informed that a Confederate army consisting of 7,000 men was advancing down Bayou Lafourche toward their position. Though the information was totally erroneous, the effect was to cause a general evacuation of all Union troops from the Thibodeaux area. They withdrew back to New Orleans leaving Major's brigade unmolested and free to complete its task.

BATTLE OF BRASHEAR CITY

June 23, 1863

As Major's brigade rode into Chacahoula the morning of June 23, distant artillery shells exploding were heard coming from Brashear City. The Battle of Brashear City had begun.

Taylor, with the bulk of his army along the western shores of Berwick Bay (that portion of the Atchafalaya River at Brashear and Berwick City was called Berwick Bay), knew he could not attack Brashear City from the west. The bay was at least a quarter-mile wide and he lacked sufficient transports to cross. In addition, the Union garrison at Brashear City had one gunboat, the U.S.S. *HOLLYHOCK*, patrolling the bay.

If Taylor was to succeed in capturing Brashear City, he needed a bold attack strategy. He settled for a risky but necessary surprise flank attack. With his artillery ready to shell the town from the western shores of the bay, a small contingent of volunteers paddled through Grand Lake landing their rowboats northeast of the village and to the rear of the Union garrison (present day Lake End Park).

In the early morning hours of June 23, in order to distract the enemy's attention away from the landing party, Taylor ordered his artillery to shell Brashear City. During the chaos,

Confederate forces (numbering under 300 and led by Major Sherod Hunter) surprised the Union garrison overwhelming Fort Buchanan (located north of the village) and Fort Brashear or Star (located near the south end). The battle was a complete Confederate victory. (During the battle the *HOLLYHOCK* withdrew, streaming south toward the gulf.) A Union garrison seven miles to the east of Brashear City at Bayou Boeuf (present-day Amelia) surrendered the next day when they realized that their escape route to New Orleans was closed. By then, Major's brigade was pressing them from the east, while the rest of Taylor's army was advancing from the direction of Brashear City.

Casualties at Brashear City

Union – 46 killed, 40 wounded, 1,300 prisoners
at Bayou Boeuf – additional 275 prisoners taken
Confederate – 3 killed, 18 wounded

BATTLE OF FORT BUTLER

June 28, 1863

With Brashear City secure and all Union forces at Lafourche Crossing in retreat toward New Orleans, all that stood in the way of total Confederate control of the Lafourche district was the Union fortification at Donaldsonville called Fort Butler. (The structure, a star-shaped earthen fortification located at the confluence of Bayou Lafourche and the Mississippi River, was built between November 1862 and February 1863.) Major had chosen to bypass Fort Butler on his earlier descent of Bayou Lafourche. Brigadier General Tom Green with approximately 1,200 men in his command was given orders to take possession of the Union fort.

Arriving nine miles short of Fort Butler by the morning of June 27 (juncture of La. State Hwy 1 and 70), Green sent word to the Union commander, Major Joseph D. Bullen, to surrender his garrison of approximately 180 men, but Bullen refused. Both sides spent the remaining portion of the day preparing for battle. Because of the topography and other concerns, Green chose to attack Fort Butler in the early morning hours of June 28, under the cover of darkness. Due in large part to faulty Confederate reconnaissance and Union naval support that sped to the scene once the battle got underway, the Confederate attack failed.

Casualties

Union army – 8 killed, 13 wounded (Navy – 1 killed, 2 wounded)
Confederate – 40 killed, 114 wounded, 107 missing or captured

Having failed to capture Fort Butler, Green ordered a portion of his force to the west bank of the Mississippi below Donaldsonville. For nearly two weeks, a near constant bombardment between Confederate batteries and the Union navy was heard below Donaldsonville. The effect was to disrupt Union–shipping coming to and from New Orleans.

The Confederate attacks on shipping ended July 10 when Green ordered the batteries back to Bayou Lafourche. By that time, Vicksburg had surrendered (July 4) and Port Hudson soon after (July 9). Union forces at Port Hudson soon began to concentrate their numbers at Donaldsonville. The Union plan called for a final push to trap and crush Dick Taylor's army.

BATTLE OF KOCK'S OR COX'S PLANTATION

July 13, 1863

Advancing down both sides of Bayou Lafourche on July 12, two Union brigades, approximately 3,000 men, briefly skirmished with a portion of Tom Green's forces of 1,550 men. Green's men were divided equally on both sides of the bayou. The skirmish of July 12 was only a prelude to a larger battle that was fought the next day.

Approximately four miles south of Donaldsonville, Union and Confederate forces confronted one another in the early morning hours of July 13. Green, in direct command of Confederate forces on the right descending bank of the bayou (La. State Hwy. 1), succeeded in flanking his adversary, a Union brigade lead by Colonel Nathan A. M. Dudley. On the opposite bank, Union commander Acting Brigadier General Joseph S. Morgan withdrew his forces without orders. Colonel Walter Lane (in command of Confederate forces on the left bank of the bayou – La State Hwy. 308) was then able to fire upon Dudley's left flank. Union reinforcements on the right (sent for and under the command of Colonel Charles J. Paine) could do little to blunt the Confederate advance, in light of Morgan's unwarranted retreat. The battle ended with Union forces driven off the battlefield and fleeing toward the safety of Fort Butler and the Union navy off the waters at Donaldsonville.

Casualties

Union – 56 killed, 223 wounded, 186 missing or captured

Confederate – 3 killed, 30 wounded, 6 mortally

On July 14, Taylor, aware then of the surrender of Vicksburg and Port Hudson, ordered the evacuation of the Lafourche district, despite Green's success at the Battle of Kock's Plantation. By the 3rd week of July 1863, the district was again under Union control.

The Battle of Kock's Plantation marked the last hurrah between organized units from the North and South. Numerous skirmishes and affairs between Confederate guerrillas and Union occupying forces continued in the district until war's end, but the clash of full scale battles ended in July of 1863.

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Reference: Peña, Christopher G. (2004), *SCARRED BY WAR: CIVIL WAR IN SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA*,
Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse.