

Civil War 150 years ago, April 1864

With weather improving the Armies came out of winter quarters. Most of the action occurred in Louisiana during a fascinating but obscure campaign--the Red River Expedition or Campaign.

The last major campaign involving the U.S.S. Eastport, and the Mississippi Squadron U.S. Navy as a whole, was the Red River Campaign in the spring of 1864. This Federal campaign was a combined Army-Navy venture involving a move up the Red River to gain control of western Louisiana and Arkansas and cut-off Confederate supplies flowing from Texas.

The overall commander of the campaign was General Nathaniel P. Banks, while Rear Admiral David Porter commanded the naval forces. The plan was for General Banks to march 22,000 men overland from New Orleans to the lower Red River where they would meet Porter's naval forces. Aboard transports with Porter's fleet were 11,000 men detached from Sherman's army at Vicksburg under the command of General A.J. "Whiskey" Smith. General Smith's troops were to join Banks's army as it marched up the south side of the Red River to Alexandria and eventually to Shreveport, while Porter's ships moved up the river in support. A third force, under General Frederick Steele, was to march from Little Rock, Arkansas, and join Banks when he reached the upper Red River. Ultimately, General Steele remained in Arkansas and never became involved in the campaign.

Opposing the Union forces were Confederate troops under the command of General Richard Taylor, son of former President Zachary Taylor.

The Union had four goals at the start of the campaign:

- To destroy the Confederate Army commanded by Taylor.
- To capture Shreveport, Louisiana, Confederate headquarters for the Trans-Mississippi Department, control the Red River to the north, and occupy east Texas.
- To confiscate as much as a hundred thousand bales of cotton from the plantations along the Red River.
- To organize pro-Union state governments in the region.

Union strategists in Washington thought that the occupation of east Texas and control of the Red River would separate Texas from the rest of the Confederacy. Texas was the source of much needed guns, food, and supplies for Confederate troops.

Other historians have claimed that the campaign was also motivated by concern regarding the 25,000 French troops in Mexico sent by Napoleon III and under the command of Emperor Maximilian. At the time, the Confederates offered to recognize

the government of Maximilian in return for French recognition of the Confederacy; the Confederates also hoped to gain access to valuable war goods through this recognition.

