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The Battle of Baton Rouge

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July, 1862 found the powerful combined Union fleets of Flag Officers David G. Farragut and Charles H. Davis hammering away at “Fortress” Vicksburg.

Following the Capture of New Orleans, Farragut’s deep water fleet had advanced up the Mississippi River, until they reached Vicksburg the Northern sailors encountered little resistance beyond the protests of the civil authorities. In the meantime, Davis’ river fleet of ironclads and rams had been fighting its way down the Mississippi. By the end of June, Farragut’s and Davis’ fleets had closed in on Vicksburg. Except for the reach of the river which lay under the Vicksburg guns, the Federal navy had succeeded in wresting control of the “Father of Waters” from the Confederacy.

Hoping to divert the Federals’ attention away from Vicksburg, the aggressive Major General Earl Van Dorn, who had recently assumed charge of the Department of Southern Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana, matured plans for an attack on Baton Rouge. As the first order of business in this direction, the general telegraphed one of his principal subordinates, Brigadier General Daniel Ruggles. At this stage of the Conflict, Ruggles commanded a small force of Confederates based at Camp Moore, Louisiana. Van Dorn asked Ruggles to forward him information concerning the strength of the Union garrison at Baton Rouge. In addition, Van Dorn wanted an estimate of the number of troops it would require to retake the city.

In messages dated July 9 and 10, Ruggles notified his chief that he had 1,500 men and one battery ready for immediate service. If reinforced by 3,500 disciplined troops and one six-gun battery, Ruggles believed he could retake Baton Rouge.¹

About dusk on the tenth, Ruggles received a message dated the ninth from one of his Bayou Sara outposts. The detachment occupying the Bayou Sara observation post reported that on the previous afternoon the steamers *Saint Maurice* and *Lewis Whiteman* had landed 2,200 bluecoats at Baton Rouge. Ruggles, realizing that this intelligence would affect Van Dorn's projected move against Baton Rouge, immediately relayed this dispatch to his superior.²

Ruggles' message threw Van Dorn into a quandary. Since the Union fleets had been unable to reduce Vicksburg, Van Dorn suggested that perhaps the Yankees were starting to pull back from the hill city. He accordingly asked Ruggles two questions: Where did these troops come from, and how many Yankees were stationed in Baton Rouge?³

On the twelfth Ruggles replied to his chief. He reported that there were 3,500 Federals, two batteries, and some heavy ordnance in the city. The reinforcements which had reached Baton Rouge on the sixth had come from New Orleans, Ruggles reported.⁴ the news that the Federals were strengthening their position at Baton Rouge forced Van Dorn, for the moment at least, to pigeonhole his contemplated offensive.

On July 15 Van Dorn received another message from

¹ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (70 Vols. In 128, Washington, 1880-1900), Series I, Vol. XV, 775. (Hereinafter cited as O. R.) General Van Dorn had been

appointed to command the Department of Southern Mississippi and Eastern Louisiana on June 20, 1862. He replaced Major General Mansfield Lovell. Van Dorn formally assumed command on June 27 with his headquarters for the moment at Vicksburg, the post of danger. General Ruggles was in charge of the first district of Van Dorn's department, which consisted of that part of Louisiana east of the Mississippi River and the counties of Mississippi fronting the Gulf. *Ibid.*, 15, 758, 768.

² *Ibid.*, 775.

³ *Ibid.*, 775-76

⁴ *Ibid.*, 776-77.

Ruggles. From this telegram, Van Dorn learned that Ruggles' New Orleans spies had picked up on some valuable information. Major General Benjamin F. Butler, the Union commander of the Department of the Gulf, was said to be organizing a force in New Orleans preparatory for an amphibious assault on Madisonville, Louisiana. To cope with this thrust and to crush the Yankee raiding parties operating out of Baton Rouge, Ruggles asked that he be reinforced with 2,000 disciplined troops and a 42-pounder gun. He proposed to have the siege gun emplaced at Port Hudson.⁵

Van Dorn, jubilant over the success of the ram *Arkansas* in fighting her way through the combined Union fleets on the fifteenth, replied immediately: "Will send you men if possible. Will let you know in a day or two. Steamer *Arkansas* came out this morning; made two enemy's boats strike colors; ran the gauntlet of the upper fleet of twelve vessels of war, and is now safe under our guns. Will attack below as soon as some repairs are made."⁶

Within a week Ruggles had received his 42-pounder. Nevertheless, he fretted over Van Dorn's failure to send him any troops. Ruggles notified his superior that the Yankees were busy converting Baton Rouge into a fortified camp. At the moment, he continued, Baton Rouge was garrisoned by three

⁵Ibid., 778-79.

⁶Ibid., 779. Farragut and Davis, during the first two weeks of July, had heard rumors that the Rebels at Yazoo City were completing work on the ram *Arkansas*. Early on the morning of the fifteenth, the Union brass sent three gunboats on Davis' flotilla—the ironclad *Carondelet*, the timber-clad *Tyler*, and the ram *Queen of the West*—up the Yazoo River to check on these reports. These vessels had not been gone long before firing was heard. Shortly thereafter, the three boats appeared at the mouth of the Yazoo, coming down river with a full head of steam, closely pursued by the *Arkansas*. It so happened that only one of the Union warships moored above Vicksburg—the captured ram *General Bragg*—had a head of steam up. Thus in broad daylight, the *Arkansas* passed through the combined fleets, receiving their broadsides. After fighting her way through the Federal warships, the *Arkansas* anchored under the Vicksburg batteries. Farragut was chagrined. He determined to run by the Vicksburg batteries, under the cover of darkness, and endeavor to destroy the ram in passage. He succeeded in passing the batteries on the night of the fifteenth with a loss of five killed and sixteen wounded. In the darkness and confusion, the Federals inflicted very little damage on the *Arkansas*.

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Infantry regiments, two batteries and a hundred cavalry.⁷

Replying immediately, Van Dorn advised Ruggles not to mount the 42-pounder at Port Hudson until he had sufficient men to guard it. Since the bluecoats were still hovering in the vicinity, Van Dorn observed it, it would be impossible for him to send reinforcements from Vicksburg. Van Dorn pointed out that if General Braxton Bragg would launch an offensive which would draw the Yankees' attention elsewhere, he proposed to send a force to assist Ruggles in reducing Baton Rouge. Van Dorn closed his message on an encouraging note: "I have ordered transportation to you; keep it always ready. Raise men in mean time. I will have some arms for them."⁸

On July 24, the same day that Flag Officer David G. Farragut's deep water squadron and Brigadier General Thomas Williams' infantry brigade departed from the Vicksburg area, a sharp clash took place on the Amite River at Denham Springs, nine miles east of Baton Rouge.⁹ At daybreak a strong force of bluecoats coming from the direction of Baton Rouge surprised and routed a Confederate outpost at Benton's Ferry, manned by the men of Captain W. B. Kemp's Company of the Ninth Louisiana Partisan Battalion. Simultaneously, a second force of Yankees had crossed the Amite farther north at Curtis'

Ford. The two columns converged on Camp Turner, the headquarters for the Ninth Louisiana Partisan Battalion. Scattering the poorly organized and trained irregulars

⁷Ibid., 785. In essence Ruggles' report of the Union strength was correct. At this time, the Baton Rouge garrison included: the Twenty-first Indiana, the Fourteenth Maine, the Sixth Michigan Infantry Regiments, the Fourth Battery, Massachusetts Light Artillery, one section, sixth Battery, Massachusetts Light Artillery, and Company B, Second Massachusetts Cavalry Battalion.

⁸Ibid.

⁹If the troubles caused by the *Arkansas* were not enough, Farragut was faced with several other problems. The level of the river was falling rapidly; the Northern brass became anxious lest their large ocean-going vessels be unable to return to deep water. Furthermore, many of the Yankee tars and soldiers were being struck down with malaria, dysentery and other tropical maladies that were prevalent in the area. It was therefore with a great deal of relief that Farragut received on July 20 the expected order from the Navy Department to return to New Orleans. He waited a few days for General Williams to embark his men. On the twenty-fourth, the Federal armada started down the river.

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to the winds, the Federals easily occupied their operating base. Having successfully accomplished their mission, the Union raiders returned to Baton Rouge. According to Lieutenant Colonel James H. Wingfield, the partisan commander, the Unionists committed "depredations...of the most shameful character on private property and on the persons of our fellow-citizens and helpless women and children."¹⁰

In reporting this raid to Van Dorn on the twenty-fifth, Ruggles commented: "Some 2,000 disciplined troops and one light battery necessary here; can you send them? Number of Partisan Rangers overstated and without discipline."¹¹

The withdrawal of Farragut's fleet and Williams' troops on the previous day having freed his hands, Van Dorn advised Ruggles that he was sending him 4,000 men and a battery of artillery. Ruggles was instructed to have the necessary wagons concentrated and ready "to move as soon as they arrive."¹²

Later in the day Van Dorn received a telegram from Ruggles which indicated that 4,000 men might not be enough. Ruggles informed his chief that he had received reports indicating that the enemy “has been re-enforced at Baton Rouge, and numbers from 7,000 to 8,000.”¹³

There was no substance to this report. Nevertheless, it alarmed Van Dorn. He immediately dashed off a telegram to Major General Sterling Price at Tupelo, Mississippi. Van Dorn pointed out that if Price would send him one of his hardy brigades, he would break up the Federal nest at Baton Rouge and have the troops back at Tupelo within twelve days.¹⁴ General Bragg, who was at Chattanooga, Tennessee, and was Price’s superior, believed that West Tennessee was open to invasion by a Confederate force. He accordingly prohibited Price from sending any troops to help Van Dorn in his Baton Rouge venture. Red tape held up “Old Pap’s” reply. It was

¹⁰Ibid., 122-23.

¹¹Ibid., 785.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid

¹⁴Ibid., 786. General Price had assumed command of the Army of the West upon Van Dorn’s elevation to departmental command.

August 4 before he finally got around to informing Van Dorn of Bragg’s decision.¹⁵

Van Dorn was fully cognizant of the numerous advantages that would accrue to the Confederates from the capture of Baton Rouge. The control of the 268 miles of the Mississippi River which separated Vicksburg and Baton Rouge would greatly facilitate communications between his department and the Trans-Mississippi. The navigation of the

Red River would be rendered secure. With good luck, the Rebels might even recapture New Orleans. Without waiting for Price's reply, Van Dorn issued marching orders to Major General John C. Breckinridge on July 26.¹⁶

Breckinridge, whose division was stationed at Vicksburg, would entrain his men and proceed to Camp Moore to join forces with Ruggles. As the senior officer Breckinridge would assume command of the expedition. After ascertaining the Yankees' strength, estimated about 5,000 officers and men, Breckinridge, if he believed his force strong enough, would dislodge the bluecoats from the Baton Rouge area. Once in possession of Baton Rouge, Breckinridge would be governed by circumstances and his own judgment. He might hold the city, or destroy the public property and retire to a point in the Vicksburg area and there await for further orders. Breckinridge was told by Van Dorn of the request that Price send one of his brigades to co-operate in the attack on Baton Rouge.¹⁷

Long before daybreak on the twenty-seventh, the area near the Vicksburg depot of the Southern Railroad of Mississippi was alive with Breckinridge's soldiers. Breckinridge planned to take two of his three brigades to Louisiana with him. Colonel John S. Bowen's hard-fighting brigade would remain in Vicksburg for the time being. Breckinridge's greyclads,

¹⁵O. R., Series I, Vol. XVII, pt. II, 663-64. At this time Bragg was in the process of transferring the Army of the Mississippi-subsequently redesignated the Army of Tennessee-to Chattanooga, preparatory to launching his invasion of Kentucky.

¹⁶Ibid., Vol. XV, 16, 786.

¹⁷Ibid., 786.

with a minimum of confusion, boarded the troop trains that were to carry them to Jackson.

A shortage of cars and the air of urgency which surrounded the division's transfer to Camp Moore prevented the troops from taking anything with them except their arms and ammunition. At Jackson the soldiers detrained, drew rations to last for five days—one half the amount Van Dorn has assured Breckinridge the quartermaster would make available—and clambered aboard the waiting cars of the New Orleans, Jackson, and Great Northern Railroad.

The next evening, July 28, the rugged Confederates of Breckinridge's division, mustering less than 4,000 officers and men, piled off the troop trains at Camp Moore. While the troops were establishing their bivouac, Breckinridge closeted himself with General Ruggles. At the meeting, Breckinridge, for ease of handling, organized his small command into two divisions. Brigadier General Charles Clark would command the first, and Ruggles the second.¹⁸

Ruggles informed Breckinridge that, as had been anticipated, a strong force of blueclads had launched an amphibious assault across Lake Pontchartrain. Going ashore the Federals had scattered the Rebel partisans and captured the towns of Covington and Madisonville. Perusing a dispatch from a Confederate officer at Clinton, Louisiana, which placed at fifty men the strength of the Union force that had on the twenty-fourth sent the partisans scurrying for cover along the Amite, Breckinridge determined to adopt a wait-and-see attitude. He would not divert any of his troops to contain the Federal force operating along the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain until he received definite information regarding its strength.¹⁹

The Union detachment which was operating in St. Tammany Parish consisted of five companies of the Twelfth Connecticut Infantry and a section of the Second Battery, Vermont Light Artillery, 500 strong. The raiding force was commanded by Major Frank M. Peck. Peck's combat teams had embarked on

¹⁸Ibid., 76.

¹⁹Ibid., 786-89.

The transport *Grey Cloud* on the evening of July 25. The *Grey Cloud* pulled away from the wharf operated by the Jefferson and Lake Pontchartrain Railroad at midnight and arrived off Manchac Pass soon after daybreak the next morning.

Discovering evidence that the butternut partisans were using the area for a rendezvous, Peck led his men ashore. The Northerners spent the remainder of the day burning the buildings on Jones Island, and completed the destruction of the bridge which carried the tracks of the New Orleans, Jackson and Great North Railroad across Manchac Pass. At dusk the landing party was recalled.

The next morning the *Grey Cloud* crossed the bar at the mouth of the Tchefuncte River and headed upstream. At Madisonville the Union vessel was fired on by Confederate partisans. Opening fire with their 32-pounder, the tars dispersed the greyclads. Unfortunately, they killed two civilians—a woman and a child. Continuing up the Tchefuncte, the Yankees found their progress blocked by three boats that the Rebels had scuttled in the channel.

As on the preceding day Peck ordered his men ashore. The march to Covington was taken up. The town was occupied without incident. Here the bluecoats learned from the inhabitants that the Confederates were concentrating on the banks of the Tchefuncte to dispute their return to the lake. Peck's troops set off at a forced march for the point of debarkation. As a result of the rapid pace two men collapsed and died from sunstroke.

As soon as the men were back aboard the *Grey Cloud*, the ship headed down the river. Before reaching the lake and safety, the transport was fired upon by Confederate irregulars who were ensconced in the underbrush flanking the stream. The fire of the vessel's 32-pounder, in conjunction with the projectiles from one of the Vermonters' 20-pounder Parrotts, quickly scattered the Rebels. During this brief engagement the Confederates had wounded two sailors and one soldier aboard the *Grey Cloud*.

The next two days were spent by the Yankees in refilling

the *Grey Cloud's* bunkers with coal from the supply ship *New London* and reconnoitering the south shore of Lake Pontchartrain in the vicinity of Chef Menteur. On the thirtieth the transport ascended the Pearl River as high up as Pearlington, where the landing party found the inhabitants, beset as they were by plunderers on every side, reduced to the most abject poverty.

The *Grey Cloud* visited the Bay of St. Louis the next day; patrols were put ashore at Pass Christian and Shieldsborough. Both towns were all but deserted by the male populace. The men of military age were fleeing by the boat load to escape conscription into Confederate service. Returning to Lake Pontchartrain on August 1, patrols from Peck's combat teams were disembarked at Mandeville, Madisonville, and Lewisburg without discovering any signs of Rebel activity. As soon as these squads had returned, the expedition returned to its base on the south shore of Lake Pontchartrain on the morning of the second.²⁰

On July 29 Breckinridge received reports scaling down the strength of the Yankee garrison at Baton Rouge from the 7,000 reported on the twenty-fifth by Ruggles to 3,000. About this time the general also learned that the Federal activity in St. Tammany Parish was only a small scale raid. Breckinridge now felt confident of success. He drafted the orders for the advance of his small army.

In accordance with the general's instructions, Major James De Baun assembled his partisan rangers, who up to this time had been ineffectually contesting the forays of Peck's raiders in St. Tammany Parish, at Williams' Bridge. De Baun was to hold the strategic bridge pending the arrival of Breckinridge's column. At daybreak on the thirtieth Clark's division left Camp Moore. Each man carried two days' cooked rations in his haversack. After passing through Greensburg, Clark's men camped on the night of the thirty-first at William's Bridge. Clark received reports from De Baun's and Wingfield's partisans which placed the Union strength at Baton Rouge at 5,000 men, supported by three gunboats. Clark dutifully relayed

²⁰Ibid., 124-26, 786-89.

The periodic thunderstorms and hot, humid weather proved the straw that broke the camel's back. Hundreds of the Southerners, many of whom were already suffering from malaria and dysentery, soon filled the army hospitals at Camp Moore. By July 30 Breckinridge's adjutant informed the general that his effective force had been reduced to 3,600 men.

After examining his adjutant's and Clark's reports, Breckinridge "determined not to make the attack unless" some way was found to relieve his force from the fire of the Union gunboats. Breckinridge accordingly wired Van Dorn a report of the condition of his troops, along with the latest estimated strength of the Baton Rouge garrison. Breckinridge pointed out that he would not hazard an attack on the city unless "the *Arkansas* could be sent down to clear the river or divert the fire of the gunboats."²¹

Van Dorn promptly replied that "the *Arkansas* would be ready to co-operate at daylight on Tuesday, August 5."²²

Following the receipt of this welcome information, Breckinridge, accompanied by Ruggles' division, departed from Camp Moore en route to Baton Rouge. After Clarks' and Ruggles' units had rendezvoused at Williams' Bridge, Breckinridge's command, screened by the partisan rangers, crossed the Amite. Advancing along Greenwall Springs Road, the Rebels on the afternoon of the fourth reached the Comite River, ten miles from Baton Rouge. Here Breckinridge halted his troops, while awaiting word concerning the whereabouts of the *Arkansas*.²³

A unified command was unheard of in the Civil War. If Van Dorn were to make good on his promise that the *Arkansas* would co-operate in the forthcoming attack on Baton Rouge, he would have to approach the Confederate naval officers or make a direct appeal to President Jefferson Davis.

Following the withdrawal of Farragut's deep water fleet

²¹ Ibid., 76-77, 780-81, 1124.

²² Ibid., 77.

²³ Ibid., 77, 792.

from below Vicksburg on July 24, the commander of the *Arkansas*, Lieutenant Isaac N. Brown, had turned his tars to work repairing the ram's decrepit engines and securing the sections of iron plating that had been shaken loose in the engagements with the Union warships.

As soon as this work was under way, Brown received permission from the Navy Department to turn his vessel over temporarily to his next in command, Lieutenant Henry K. Stevens. Brown called upon Van Dorn. He told the army officer that he was going to Grenada, Mississippi, and would return on the morning of the fifth. If everything went according to schedule he hoped that the ram would be ready to resume offensive operations at that time. If Van Dorn had received Breckinridge's message requesting the co-operation of the *Arkansas* at the time of his interview with Brown, he did not mention it to the naval officer. Subsequent to Brown's departure, Van Dorn approached Stevens. The general informed Stevens that it would be necessary for the *Arkansas* to participate in Breckinridge's projected attack on Baton Rouge. Stevens referred the matter to Brown, who upon reaching Grenada had been taken violently ill and was confined to his bed. Brown replied to Stevens' telegram with a peremptory order for him to remain at Vicksburg pending his return. The sick officer then had himself taken to the railroad depot, where he boarded the first southbound train.²⁴

Growing impatient with Steven's failure to comply with his request, Van Dorn sent a message to Flag Officer William F. Lynch. At this stage of the conflict Lynch, who maintained his headquarters at Jackson, was in charge of the Confederate Naval Forces on the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers. Van Dorn asked that Lynch intervene and order Stevens to honor the army's request.

Brown subsequently recalled that Lynch, "Ignorant or regardless of the condition of the *Arkansas*, fresh from Richmond on his mission of bother, not communicating with or informing me on the subject, he ordered Stevens to obey

²⁴ Isaac N. Brown, "The Confederate Gun-Boat *Arkansas*," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, (4 vols., New York, 1884), III 578-79.

Van Dorn without any regard to my orders to the contrary.” Writing in *Battles and Leaders*, Brown described Lynch in pungent terms as an officer:

...with horses and carriages, furnished by Government in place of a flagship... whose war record was yet in abeyance, [who] had attained scientific celebrity by dabbling in the waters of the Dead Sea, at a time when I was engaged in the siege of Vera Cruz [Veracruz] and in the general operations of the Mexican War.²⁵

Upon receipt of Lynch’s order to co-operate with Van Dorn, Stevens, knowing that the complement of the *Arkansas* was considerably under strength, issued a call for volunteers from the army to fill out the billets aboard his boat. Among the volunteers, whose service Stevens gratefully accepted, were a number of cannoneers from the First Tennessee Heavy Artillery. Since it was 268 river miles from Vicksburg to Baton Rouge, and Van Dorn had informed Breckinridge that the *Arkansas* would be there by daybreak on the fifth, time was of the essence.

Despite many trials and tribulations Stevens had the engines turning over, the bunkers filled with coal, a supply of ammunition in the magazine, and a crew of 242 officers and men aboard the gunboat by the night of the second. Promptly at 2 a.m. on August 3, the crew cast off the lines; the *Arkansas* pulled away from the Vicksburg wharf, heading for Baton Rouge.²⁶

As a result of the time factor, Stevens would not be able to give the cantankerous engines the tender care they required as the ram plowed ahead full speed. This resulted in the frequent breakdown of the machinery. There were frequent stoppages to key up and effect repairs. Unfortunately for Stevens, Chief Engineer George W. Clay had been left behind in the Vicksburg hospital. To make matters worse, Third Assistant Engineer Eugene H. Brown, who was in charge of

²⁵ Ibid., 579.

²⁶ *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (30 vols. And index, Washington, 1894-1927), Series I, Vol. 19, pp. 131, 135. (Hereinafter cited as O. R. N.); William P. Parks, “The

The engine room, had had very little previous experience with a screw vessel or short-stroke engines.

Being overzealous for the good repute of his department, Brown drove the machinery beyond its powers of endurance. Near the mouth of the Red River, Stevens called a council of war. He wished to determine whether to continue with the expedition or not. When asked his opinion Brown stated that he believed the *Arkansas's* engines would hold out. After hearing the engineer speak his piece, the officers voted to continue.

The *Arkansas* tied up on the night of the fourth near Port Hudson. A scouting party was put ashore. From the inhabitants the landing party learned that General Breckinridge's men were deployed ready to attack on Baton Rouge. Furthermore, the Confederate sailors were told that their old friend, the *Essex*, and several wooden gunboats, were moored near the city. After the scouts had returned the *Arkansas* again stood down river. About midnight when the gunboat had approached to within fifteen miles of Baton Rouge, her starboard engine failed. The crippled vessel sheered in toward shore. The *Arkansas* was made fast to the bank, while Brown, in order to effect repairs, turned the black gang to.²⁷

Upon his arrival in Jackson on the third, Lieutenant Brown applied at the office of the chief quartermaster he learned that the *Arkansas* had sailed four hours before. This intelligence so shocked Brown that he recovered from his illness. In hopes of overtaking his boat, he boarded the next southbound train.²⁸

Farragut's fleet en route down river from Vicksburg reached Baton Rouge on July 26. The transports disgorged the four infantry regiments and two batteries of General Williams' brigade which had participated in the ill-starred amphibious thrust against "Fortress" Vicksburg. Commenting on the condition of his troops upon their debarkation, Williams observed

²⁷ O. R. N., Series I, Vol. 19, pp. 131; George W. Gift, "The Story of the *Arkansas*," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, Vol. XII.

²⁸ Brown, "The Confederate Gun-Boat *Arkansas*," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, III, 579.

They were "numerically little reduced by disease, effectively greatly so."²⁹

The two vessels of Davis's flotilla, the ironclad *Essex* and the captured Rebel ram *Sumter*, which had passed below the Vicksburg batteries had been detached by Farragut prior to his arrival at Baton Rouge. The officers in charge of these two vessels were given the mission of blockading the mouth of the Red River. They were to keep the Rebel gunboats *Webb* and *Music* out of the Mississippi. Leaving the gunboats *Katahdin* and *Kineo* to support Williams' Baton Rouge command, Farragut proceeded to New Orleans. He arrived off the Crescent City with the remainder of his deep-water fleet on the twenty-eighth.³⁰

On August 2 one of Butler's confidential agents, John Mahan, who had left New Orleans on July 25, passed through the Rebel lines. After visiting Jackson, Mississippi, Mahan hastened to Baton Rouge. Following his arrival the spy asked to have an interview with Williams. Upon being ushered into the general's office, Mahan reported that on the evening of July 28 he had been at Camp Moore. While there he had observed Breckinridge's force. Talking with some of the Confederates, the spy had learned that Breckinridge intended to attack on Baton Rouge.

Williams immediately relayed the intelligence conveyed by Mahan to the ranking naval officer in the area, the commander of the *Essex*, Commander William D. Porter, and to his superior, General Butler. In his letter to Butler, Williams pointed out that the

presence of two additional gunboats at Baton Rouge would be most desirable. He also expressed the wish that “the rebels have a many sick exert all the effects of the best tonic of the pharmacopoeia.”³¹

²⁹ O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 26, 33. These units disembarked at Baton Rouge on the twenty-sixth: the Ninth Connecticut, the Thirtieth Massachusetts, the Seventh Vermont, and the Fourth Wisconsin Infantry Regiments, and the Second and two sections of the Sixth Batteries, Massachusetts Light Artillery.

³⁰ O. R. N., Series I, Vol. 19, pp. 96-97.

³¹ O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 34.

Porter was disturbed by the receipt of Williams’ dispatch. At the time that it arrived the crew of the *Katahdin* had her machinery apart. Porter, however, consoled himself with the thought that, in the event of an attack the gunboat moored, as she was, opposite the town could render efficient service as a floating battery. After forwarding a request to Farragut for an additional gunboat, “Dirty Bill” Porter made the following disposition of the available warships of his task force: the flagship *Essex* took position a mile above the town, the *Kineo* one-half mile below, while the *Sumter* continued to blockade the mouth of Red River.³²

Butler was of the opinion that the Rebel concentration at Camp Moore was to counter Peck’s foray into St. Tammany Parish. He therefore informed Williams: “While I would not have you relax your vigilance, I think you need fear no assault at present. When it does come I know you will be ready.”³³

The next day, a rumor reached Butler that the greyclads were endeavoring to emplace a number of field guns on the reaches of the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. If successful the Confederates would be able to interrupt river traffic between the two cities. This news, taken in conjunction with Williams' report of the day before, convinced Butler that perhaps the Rebels were moving on Baton Rouge. Butler immediately notified Farragut of this development.³⁴

Farragut felt that there was no substance to these reports. To soothe Butler's nerves, the flag officer had the gunboat *Cayuga* patrol the river between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. The crew of the *Cayuga* would be alerted to keep a close watch for any masked batteries which the butternuts might be establishing. Simultaneously, Farragut sent a letter to Porter. He pointed out that Porter should be blockading the mouth of the Red River, and not stationed off Baton Rouge.

³² O. R. N., Series I, Vol. 19, pp. 105-106.

³³ O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 34-35.

³⁴ O. R. N., Series I, Vol. 19, p. 109.

The flag officer believed that the *Kineo* and *Katahdin* were sufficient support for the army.³⁵

Porter, on the fourth, learned that the crew of the *Sumter* was greatly reduced by illness. In direct contradiction to Farragut's orders, Porter ordered the ram to abandon the blockade of the Red River and proceed to Baton Rouge. Thus, on the evening of the fourth, there were four warships anchored off Baton Rouge. One of them, the gunboat

Katahdin, would have to be used as a floating battery, pending repairs of her engines.

The rumors telling of Breckinridge's approach were verified on the afternoon of the fourth. At that time Williams' scouts pinpointed the greyclads' advance as it crossed the Comite, ten miles east of Baton Rouge. Williams immediately alerted his subordinates to the impending danger. They were told to have their men draw rations and ammunition; the soldiers were to be prepared to resist an attack at daybreak on the following morning. For ease of handling, Williams divided his command into wings. Colonel Thomas W. Cahill of the Ninth Connecticut would be in charge of the left; Colonel Nathan A. M. Dudley of the Thirtieth Massachusetts was to lead the right. The brigade casualties were to occupy the entrenchments which had been thrown up around the Baton Rouge Barracks.

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Before retiring for the night, Colonel Cahill inspected the camps of the units which constituted his wing. At this time the Fourteenth Maine, its right flank resting on Greenwall Springs Road, covered the road that intersected Bayou Sara and Clinton Plank Road; the Twenty-first Indiana was posted in front of Magnolia Cemetery, south of Greenwall Springs Road. The Indianans' left flank rested on the right of the Fourteenth Maine. Two regiments, the Ninth Connecticut and the Fourth Wisconsin, occupied the entrenched camp near the Baton Rouge Barracks.

³⁵ Ibid., 111.

³⁶ O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 55-56, 58-59; *Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1891-1895), Plate XXIV, Fig. 1

The units belonging to Dudley's right wing bivouacked as follows: the Sixth Massachusetts at the intersection of Clay Cut and Perkins roads, next to the race track; the Seventh Vermont was stationed east of the penitentiary grounds, behind the cantonment of the Twenty-first Indiana; one regiment, the Thirtieth Massachusetts occupied the state capitol.

There were three Massachusetts batteries at Baton Rouge. The Second Battery camped southeast of the penitentiary, the Fourth Battery in the entrenched camp, while the Sixth Battery took position between the cantonments of the Fourteenth Maine and the Twenty-first Indiana, the Sixth Michigan, and the Seventh Vermont were in heavily wooded areas.³⁷

On the afternoon of the fourth General Williams had Colonel Dudley remove the Thirtieth Massachusetts from the capitol. After moving out of the building, the regiment was posted in support of the Sixth Michigan, its left resting on the camp of the Second Massachusetts Battery.

After making careful reconnaissance of the area, Dudley called for the three cannons which were manned by a detachment from the Twenty-first Indiana. Dudley had the Indianans emplace one of their guns on Greenwall Springs Road; the other two were unlibered near the intersection of Clay Cut and Perkins roads. The first gun would be supported by the Twenty-first Indiana, the others by the Sixth Michigan.³⁸

Williams had heard rumors that Breckinridge's attack would be supported by the fire of the ram *Arkansas*. If these reports were true, he felt that the Rebels would center their thrust across the open fields of Doughertys' plantation north of Bayou Gross. Williams believed that the Confederates' initial objective would be to gain possession of the Baton Rouge Barracks. To cope with this movement, Williams instructed Cahill to have the Ninth Connecticut and the Fourth Wisconsin ready to move on an instant's notice into position on the ridge overlooking Bayou Gross.³⁹

³⁷ O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 55-56, 58-59.

³⁸ Ibid., 59.

³⁹ Ibid., 56.

As soon as word was received from his various subordinates that they had covered their camps with a strong line of outposts, Williams retired for the night. The general had established his headquarters in the house formerly occupied by the commandant of the Baton Rouge arsenal. Before turning in, Williams told his staff that he was confident that his 2,500 effectives would give a good account of themselves in the morning.⁴⁰

While his army was crossing the Comite at Corinth bridge on the afternoon of the fourth, Breckinridge learned by express messenger that the *Arkansas* had passed Bayou Sara. The courier told the general that the ram would undoubtedly reach Baton Rouge by the designated hour. Despite the attrition caused by the tropical maladies which had reduced his effective force to about 3,000 men excluding the 200 partisans that were picketing the approaches to the Baton Rouge perimeter, Breckinridge determined to attack. He ordered his subordinates to have their men prepare for the assault which was scheduled for daybreak.

Prior to the departure of his column from the Comite, the general learned that a co-operating force of militia was advancing down Clinton Plank Road. Breckinridge accordingly detached a combat patrol led by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Shields to contract the state troops. Leaving the Comite, Shield's detachment moved cross-country. After a hectic march, set up a roadblock. Not wishing to waste any time while waiting for the militia, Shields decided to attack a Federal outpost reported to be stationed at the intersection of the Clinton Plank and Bayou Sara Roads.⁴¹

Accompanied by the remainder of his force, Breckinridge left his camp on the Comite at 11 p.m. Marching along Greenwell Springs Road, the head of the column reached the bridge across Ward Creek, three miles east of Baton Rouge, at 3 a.m.

⁴⁰ Thomas H. Murray, *History of the 9th Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry* (New Haven, 1903), 113.

⁴¹ O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 77, 104. Shield's combat patrol consisted of one company of the Thirtieth Louisiana, two companies of Partisans-one mounted, the other dismounted- and a section of Semmes' Confederate Battery.

Here the general called a brief halt to organize his small army preparatory to launching the attack.

While the general was attending to this matter, the advance guard and a company of partisans crossed the creek. Breckinridge, who was well aware of the limited combat capabilities of the irregulars, had not intended for them to follow his vanguard across the creek. Forgoing to the front the partisans pushed rapidly down Greenwell Springs Road toward Baton Rouge. A mile east of Magnolia Cemetery, the irregulars ran afoul of the picket line manned by the Twenty-first Indiana. When the Rebels failed to give the pass word, the bluecoats opened fire. The partisans bolted for the rear. Without warning, the panic-stricken militia came thundering down upon the main column which was crossing Ward Creek.

In the darkness shots were exchanged; the bewildered greyclads fired at one another. Several men were killed, wounded, or injured when thrown from their horses. The teams attached to two of Captain Robert Cobb's field pieces stampeded. The guns were upset and disabled. Among the casualties were two of President Abraham Lincoln's Confederate brothers-in-law. Lieutenant Alexander H. Todd was killed, and Brigadier General Ben Hardin Helm was severely injured when his horse fell with him. Colonel William H. Hunt of the Fifth Kentucky took charge of Helm's brigade.

After order was restored, the Confederates completed their passage of Ward Creek. Shortly before daybreak, the Southerners deployed into line of battle—Clark's division on the right of Greenwall Springs Road, Ruggle's on the left. A shortage of manpower precluded a double line of battle. Breckinridge was obliged to content himself with a single line. A regiment of infantry and a piece of artillery were detailed to constitute a strategic reserve for each division.⁴²

The sound of firing on the Twenty-first Indiana's picket line aroused the Union encampments. Reveille was sounded, rolls called, and the troops mustered. In the grey of

the

⁴² Ibid., 52, 56, 63, 71, 73, 75, 77, 90. Lt. Col. John W. Caldwell of the Fifth Kentucky was injured at the same time as Helm. Major J. C. Wickliffe assumed command of the regiment upon Hunt's elevation to brigade command.

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Approaching dawn, made more dismal by the thick wisps of fog rising from the river, the blueclads moved into position.

In accordance with Williams' orders of the previous evening Colonel Cahill led the Ninth Connecticut and the Fourth Wisconsin out of the entrenched camp at the Baton Rouge Barracks. On the ridge overlooking Bayou Gross where the government cemetery was located, the two regiments filed into position. The Wisconsin regiment was stationed on the left, the Connecticut unit on the right. Two sections of artillery manned by the cannoneers of the Fourth Massachusetts Battery were posted in support of these troops, while the other section was sent to bolster the Twenty-first Indiana. The Fourteenth Maine, the Twenty-first Indiana, the Seventh Vermont, and the Thirtieth Massachusetts were quickly formed into line of battle in front of their camps.⁴³ The Sixth Michigan, except for three companies on outpost duty, was organized into two battalions. One battalion, led by Captain John Corden, was massed in support of the two guns manned by a detachment of the Twenty-first Indiana which were emplaced at the junction of Clay Cut and Perkins roads. Captain Charles E. Clarke, with the second battalion, was sent to stiffen the Twenty-first Indiana at Magnolia Cemetery.⁴⁴ The cannoneers of the Second Massachusetts Battery wheeled their guns into position east of the penitentiary. These six guns were supported by the infantrymen of the Thirtieth Massachusetts. The gunners of the Sixth Massachusetts Battery limbered up their six pieces preparatory to moving to the point of danger.⁴⁵

Despite the fog which greatly reduced visibility, the greyclad line of battle surged forward just before daybreak. The strong line of skirmishers covering Breckinridge's

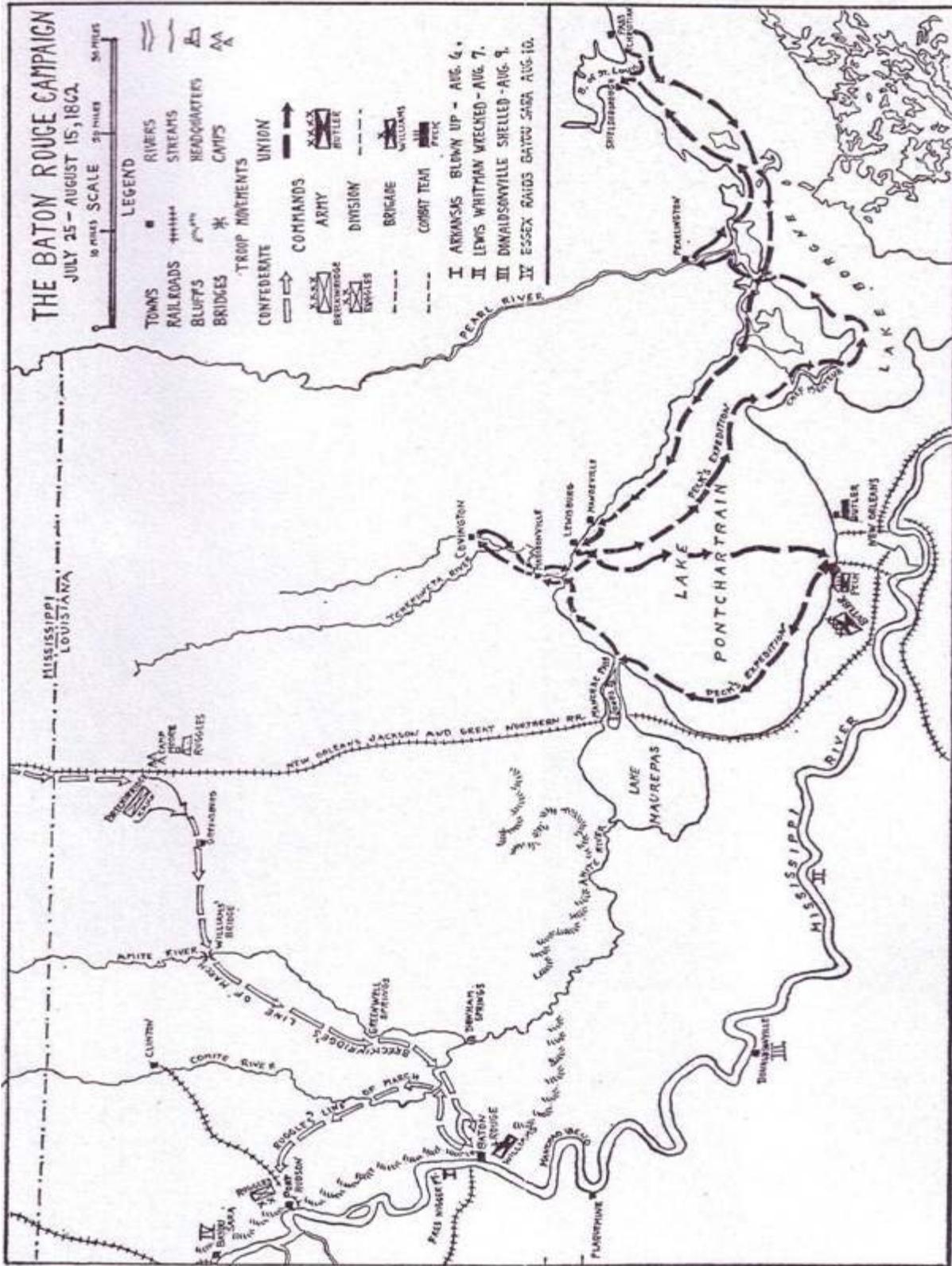
battle line drove in the Union outposts.

Lieutenant Colonel John A. Keith of the Twenty-first Indiana took cognizance of the steadily approaching gunfire. This could mean only that his outposts were being driven

⁴³ Ibid., 66, 69, 73.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 62, 64.



In. without a moment's hesitation, Keith bellowed out the command, "Forward March!" The combative colonel led his Hoosiers down Greenwall Springs Road on the double toward the sound of battle. By the time that he had reached a point 600 yards east of his encampment, Keith realized that the sound of gunfire was very close. Taking advantage of

the cover afforded by the hedgerows and trees which surrounded a house about 150 yard south of Greenwell Springs Road, Keith deployed his men.⁴⁶ Just at this moment the cannoneers of the Sixth Massachusetts Battery came thundering up. Unlimbering their six guns next to Greenwall Springs Road, the artillerists went into battery on the Indianians' left.⁴⁷

As the Confederate left, led by General Ruggles, swept through the wisps of fog, the picket fences and hedgerows which bounded the fields and intervening wood served to disrupt the battle line. At this time, Ruggles' right rested on Greenwell Springs Road, while his left guarded Clay Cut Road. Colonel Albert P. Thompson's brigade was on the right, Colonel Henry W. Allen's on the left. Four guns of Semmes' Battery were in the center; a squadron of cavalry led by Captain Augustus Scott screened the extreme left flank of the division.⁴⁸

Keith's Indianians and the cannoneers of the Sixth Massachusetts Battery, forewarned by their outposts of the Southerners' proximity, were ready for action the moment Ruggles' troops emerged out of the gloom. Blasting the Southerners with artillery and musketry, the Yankees brought Ruggles' advance to a rude halt. On the Confederate left, Allen's troops were sheltered by a thick wood and escaped practically unscathed from the Yankees' fire. Thompson's troops, however, were caught in a pea patch. They suffered a number of casualties

⁴⁶ Ibid., 73. A company of sharpshooters led by Lieutenant G. C. Hubbard covered the advance of Ruggles' division.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 90-91, 93-94, 100-101. From right to left, the units of Ruggles' division were deployed: the Third Kentucky, the Seventh Kentucky, the Thirty-fifth Alabama, the Sixth Kentucky, Semmes' Battery, the Thirtieth Louisiana, the Ninth Louisiana Battalion, and the Fourth Louisiana.

before their commander ordered them to hit the ground. Unlimbering their four guns, Semmes' cannons returned the Federals' fire.

As soon as the artillery had softened up the Indianians' position, the Rebel infantry surged forward. Yelling wildly, the greyclads forced the badly outnumbered Indianians to beat a hasty retreat. Following the withdrawal of the Twenty-first Indiana, the Confederates closed in on the Sixth Massachusetts Battery. Quickly limbering up their pieces, the artillerists succeeded in escaping in the nick of time. While his infantry commanders were regrouping their units preparatory to resuming the forward movement, Ruggles shifted Semmes' guns into position on Thompson's right. The Confederate Battery was posted on Greenwell Springs Road.⁴⁹

Falling back the Twenty-first Indiana halted briefly south of Magnolia Cemetery to reform. Confused by the fog, Colonel Keith took this opportunity to get his bearings. Here the Hoosiers were reinforced by Clarke's battalion of the Sixth Michigan, which had been rushed to their support by Colonel Dudley. Fearful lest Colonel Thompson's brigade turn his left, Keith shifted his front in that direction. He deployed his troops immediately in front of the cemetery on De Frocq Street—the Hoosiers on the left and the Michiganders on the right.⁵⁰

When the Indianians moved down Greenwell Springs Road to engage the advancing Rebels, Colonel Frank S. Nickerson formed his command, the Fourteenth Maine, into line of battle east of its camp. While confidently awaiting the greyclads' advance Nickerson was shocked to learn that his outpost, which was stationed at the junction of the Bayou Sara and Clinton Plank roads, had been routed by a strong force of butternuts—Shields' combat patrol. Since this threat to his flank was more immediate, Nickerson wheeled his regiment to the left. Feeling their way through the pea soup like fog,

⁴⁹ Ibid., 64-65, 91, 108.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 68, 73. Companies I, H, G, and K of the Sixth Michigan reinforced the Twenty-first Indiana.

Which at times limited visibility to 25 yards, the soldiers from Maine advanced to engage Shields' patrol.

After scattering the Union outpost at the junction, Shields was able to learn from several civilians where the Fourteenth Maine was encamped. Shields accordingly directed Lieutenant T. K. Fauntleroy to put his two guns into battery. The Rebel cannoneers then opened fire on the Union cantonments. While the gunners were unlimbering their pieces, Shields dismounted his partisans. Covered by the fire of Fauntleroy's gunners, the Colonel led his men forward. Shields hoped to strike the Federals flank, while Clark's division caved in their front.

The dense fog added to the chronic difficulties that the Civil War soldier had with communications and doomed the Confederates' covering attack. After advancing a short distance, the bluecoats of the Fourteenth Maine took cover behind a rail fence and awaited the Southerners' approach. A section of guns belonging to the Sixth Massachusetts Battery was emplaced on the right of the regiment.

Shortly after Nickerson's troops had taken position, they sighted Shields' command emerging out of the haze. According to instructions previously received from Colonel Nickerson, the infantrymen sent five volleys crashing into the Rebels' ranks. Shields' combat team scattered and beat a rapid retreat.

Several minutes later while the soldiers of the Fourteenth Maine were busy congratulating themselves over their easy success, Nickerson learned from his scouts that a strong Confederate force—Clark's division—was approaching from the east. To cope with this threat, the Colonel shouted for his regiment to wheel to the right. During the execution of this movement the Fourteenth Maine was exposed to a ranking fire from the eight Rebel guns emplaced near Greenwell Springs Road.⁵¹

⁵¹ Ibid., 64-65, 69-70, 104-105. Upon being forced to retire from their advance position, the cannoneers of the Sixth Massachusetts Battery had emplaced two of their guns on the right of Nickerson's line of battle. The other four guns were placed northeast of the orphan asylum. Four of these Confederate cannons belonged to the Pettus Flying Battery, the remainder to Semmes' Confederate Battery.

Clark's division—Colonel Hunt's brigade on the left and Colonel Thomas B. Smith's on the right—moved cautiously toward the Union cantonments north of Greenwell Springs Road. Clark's advance was hindered by poor visibility. Unlike Ruggles' troops south of the road, Clark's did not encounter any organized resistance until they ran into the Fourteenth Maine.

After a sharp contest, Hunt's initial assault wave, composed of the Thirty-first Alabama, Fourth Kentucky and Thirty-first Mississippi, forced the Mainemen and their supporting artillery to give way. Having occupied the deserted cantonment of the Fourteenth Main, the Rebel officers, finding that the fog, fences, buildings and Union resistance had severely disorganized their battle line, called a halt to regroup and reconnoiter. At this time Shields' battered combat team straggled in. Clark disbanded the patrol. Shields would retain control of the artillery, while the infantry would be attached to the Twenty-second Mississippi of Smith's brigade.

In making their escape from the butternuts, Nickerson's Yankees found their route barred by a stout board fence. The Yankees quickly solved this problem by demolishing the fence. Reaching the vicinity of the orphan asylum, Nickerson quickly and efficiently reformed his unit.⁵²

At the same time that the Fourteenth Maine was falling back in the face of Clark's attack, Ruggles' division had re-established contact with the Federal forces south of Greenwall Springs Road. On Ruggles' left, Colonel Allen's brigade easily smashed the feeble resistance offered by the scattered Union outposts. Allen's brigade forged ahead as rapidly as the woods and fog would allow. Suddenly, as the brigade debouched into the open fields north of the race track, they were fired upon by the two guns which were emplaced at the intersection of Clay Cut and Perkins roads.

Because of the fog, Allen's soldiers, at first, had considerable difficulty pinpointing the cannons. When Colonel Allen eventually spotted the guns, he found that they were supported by

⁵² Ibid., 70, 78, 83-86, 88.

Corden's infantry battalion of the Sixth Michigan. To make matters worse, the bluecoat infantry was in position to enfilade Allen's brigade as it swept forward. Realizing that these cannons would have to be taken before he could continue his advance, Allen oblique his brigade to the left. Seizing the colors of the Ninth Louisiana Battalion, Allen roared out, "Charge!" Almost 300 yards of open ground had to be crossed by the greyclads before they could come to grips with the Yankees. Corden's Michiganders were sheltered behind rail fences and in buildings.

Surging forward with a wild Rebel yell, the Southerners were subjected to a galling fire of canister and Minie balls as they swept toward the foe's main line of resistance. A number of Rebels—including Colonel Allen and the leader of the Ninth Louisiana Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Boyd—were cut down. Allen's legs were riddled with canister, while Boyd had a Minie ball lodged in his arm.

The wounding of Colonel Allen seemed to paralyze the men of his former command—the Fourth Louisiana. In spite of Allen's frenzied shouts to go forward, the regiment fell back in confusion, carrying the wounded colonel with them. The other two units of the brigade, the Ninth Louisiana Battalion and the Thirtieth Louisiana Regiment, responded to their wounded leaders cries. Once they closed with the Yankees, the issue was not long in doubt. The Michiganders in Indianians were compelled to beat a hurried retreat, leaving their two cannon and half a score of prisoners behind. Preparatory to continuing the pursuit, the greyclads paused to regroup and reorganize. As senior officer present Colonel Gustavus A. Breaux of the Thirtieth Louisiana assumed command of the brigade which had been considerably reduced by the withdrawal of the Fourth Louisiana.⁵³

Captain Corden of the Sixth Michigan noticed that the Confederates were not following his command. They seemed unable to capitalize o their success. The captain quickly rallied his small but determined command. Retracing their

Steps the bluecoats beat the Rebels to the punch. A vigorous counterattack was delivered against Breaux's milling command. Taken completely by surprise by this audacious move, the Louisianians gave way. Abandoning the two cannons which had just been captured, they scattered into the woods north of the race track. Here, bolstered by a section of Semmes' Battery which had arrived at this opportune moment, Breaux was able to stay the panic that had briefly gripped his brigade.

It appears that neither the men in blue or in grey had taken time to spike the two cannons, because the Indianians soon had them back in action. After a brief duel the Federal artillerists gained the upper hand. Semmes' gunners were forced to limber their two pieces to the rear. Breaux's line of battle, seeing that its artillery support was being withdrawn, collapsed for a second time. The Rebel officers found that it was fruitless to rally again their dejected, exhausted men. The brigade retired from the field of battle. Fortunately for the Southerners, Corden's command, an under strength battalion, was too small to capitalize on its success. No efforts was made to pursue Breaux's shattered brigade.⁵⁴

Concurrent with Clark's attack on the cantonment of the Fourteenth Maine, Thompson's brigade advanced on the left of Greenwell Springs Road. Thompson's troops worked their way cautiously through the grounds of Magnolia Cemetery. The Hoosiers and Michiganders of Keith's command, from the shelter afforded by a picket fence, watched the butternut's line of battle emerge out of the haze. Sighting the Federals, the Rebels opened fire. Since Keith's troops were lying down, this volley had very little effect. The Yankees, in their turn, raked the greyclads with a fierce blast of musketry. A deadly fire fight erupted.

Suddenly, the Confederates stopped firing. This was caused when one of General Clark's aides galloped up. The staff officer excitedly told Thompson that Hunt's brigade, which had just captured the camp of the Fourteenth Maine, was in his line of fire. Thompson accordingly shouted for his men

⁵⁴ Ibid. In addition to the two guns recovered, Corden's men captured 20 prisoners, 50 stands of arms, and the colors of the Fourth Louisiana.

To cease firing; they were to get ready to storm the Union position at the point of the bayonet.

During this brief respite, Colonel Keith learned that Hunt's brigade, spearheaded by the Thirty-first Mississippi, was pushing boldly forward along North Street. To complicate matters further, Hunt's movements were partially screened by the fog and smoke of battle. Keith deduced correctly that the Rebels' objective was the capture of the guns of the Sixth Massachusetts Battery emplaced near the orphanage. Hoping to check this thrust, Keith left the battalion of the Sixth Michigan, supported by a section of the Fourth Massachusetts Battery, to hold the line in front of Magnolia Cemetery. Accompanied by his hard-fighting Hoosiers, the colonel moved to cope with this new threat. Coming up on the double, the Indianians struck Hunt's flying column in the left flank. Taking cover behind houses and trees, the Federals blazed away at the Mississippians.

Thrown into confusion by the sudden onset, the Rebel vanguard fell back upon its supporting elements. His nerves badly frayed by this ambush, Colonel Hunt bellowed instructions for his men to fall back. Hardly were these words out of the Colonel's mouth, before he fell, wounded. He was carried from the field by his devoted staff officers. Captain John A. Buckner of Breckinridge's staff assumed command of the brigade. Before the captain could restore a semblance of order, the brigade had retired to the captured cantonment of the Fourteenth Maine. In the shelter afforded by a ravine,

Buckner succeeded in reforming his brigade.⁵⁵

It was fortunate for the blueclads that Hunt's Confederates had retired so quickly, because the Twenty-first Indiana soon found itself in a very embarrassing situation. Almost simultaneous with Keith's daring coup, Thompson's greyclad infantrymen had swarmed forward. They smashed their way through the lines of the Michigan battalion, capturing the deserted encampment of the Twenty-first Indiana. The cannoneers of the Fourth Massachusetts Battery were compelled to abandon one of their guns.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 68, 74, 83-88.

While Captain Charles E. Clarke quickly rallied his Michiganders on the left of the guns of the Second Massachusetts Battery, Thompson wheeled his brigade to the right. This enabled Thompson's combat-ready soldiers to take the Twenty-first Indiana in the flank. To add to the Hoosiers' consternation, they were now fired upon from the rear by the Seventh Vermont. The Vermont regiment had been drawn up a line of battle to the Indianians' right and rear. This was too much for the sturdy Indianians. They retired in confusion.

After reforming his men in the wooded area between North and Florida Streets, Colonel Keith reported to General Williams. He tersely told the general what had happened. Hastening forward, General Williams blistered the Vermont soldiers for their conduct. He then directed Colonel George T. Roberts to put his Vermonters into action on the Indianians' right. While urging his men to press forward to the Indianians' support, Colonel Roberts was mortally wounded. Following the wounding of Colonel Williams experienced difficulty in rallying the Seventh Vermont.

After the Hoosiers had fallen back, Thompson's troops mopped up the captured cantonment. Thompson immediately began maturing plans to take advantage of the blueclads' discomfiture. Before the advance could be resumed, the men on drawing in considerable confusion. Thompson shouted instructions for these men to halt, turn about, and join his brigade in an attack on the Northerners.

Before this movement could be executed, one of Clark's staff officers rode up. The aide informed Thompson "that it was the order for all troops to fall back." Thompson sadly complied with the general's order. In retiring, the Thirty-fifth Alabama and the Sixth Kentucky, the organizations constituting Thompson's left wing, became separated from his right wing, the Third and Seventh Kentucky. The two left wing units occupied a position in line of battle, 100 yards to the Kentucky regiments' left and rear.

Following the withdrawal of Thompson's brigade, a group of volunteers from the Thirtieth Massachusetts advanced and

Recovered the cannon abandoned by the Fourth Massachusetts Battery.⁵⁶

In spite of the grave misgivings caused by the failure of the *Arkansas* to put in an appearance, Breckinridge issued instructions for Ruggles and Clark to have their brigade issued instructions for Ruggles and Clark to have their brigade commanders regroup their organizations preparatory to another assault on the city. It was now past 8 a.m. and the fog was beginning to lift. Breckinridge, despite the rout of Allen's brigade, was confident that one more push would give him victory.

General Williams utilized this hiatus to redeploy his forces. It was now apparent to the Union brass that the Confederate attack would be centered along Greenwell Springs

Road. Consequently, the Ninth Connecticut, the Fourth Wisconsin, and two sections of the Fourth Massachusetts Battery stationed north of Bayou Gross were shifted to the opposite side of the stream. They went into position at the orphanage, 300 yards west of where the guns of the Sixth Massachusetts Battery were emplaced. These troops were under Colonel Cahill's command and would constitute Williams' strategic reserve.

While Cahill's troops were filing into position, General Williams redeployed the rest of his units in the wooded area east of the penitentiary. The left flank of Williams' reorganized main line of resistance was anchored on the guns of the Sixth Massachusetts, its right on those of the Second Massachusetts Battery. From left to right, the line was held by the Fourteenth Maine, Twenty-first Indiana, two guns of the Fourth Massachusetts Battery, Seventh Vermont, and Thirtieth Massachusetts. Clarke's battalion of the Sixth Michigan was massed to the right of the six guns manned by the Second Massachusetts.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid., 74, 94. Subsequent to the battle, General Butler published a general order punishing the Seventh Vermont for its conduct. Butler proposed to forbid the unit to carry its colors "until such a time as they shall have earned the right to them, and the earliest opportunity will be given this regiment to show whether they are worthy descendants of those who fought beside Allen and Starke at Bennington." A court of inquiry called at the instigation of Governor Frederick Holbrook of Vermont met in New Orleans in November. The court cleared the regiment of the charges of cowardice in the face of the enemy brought against it by Butler.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 60, 66, 70-72, 74-75.

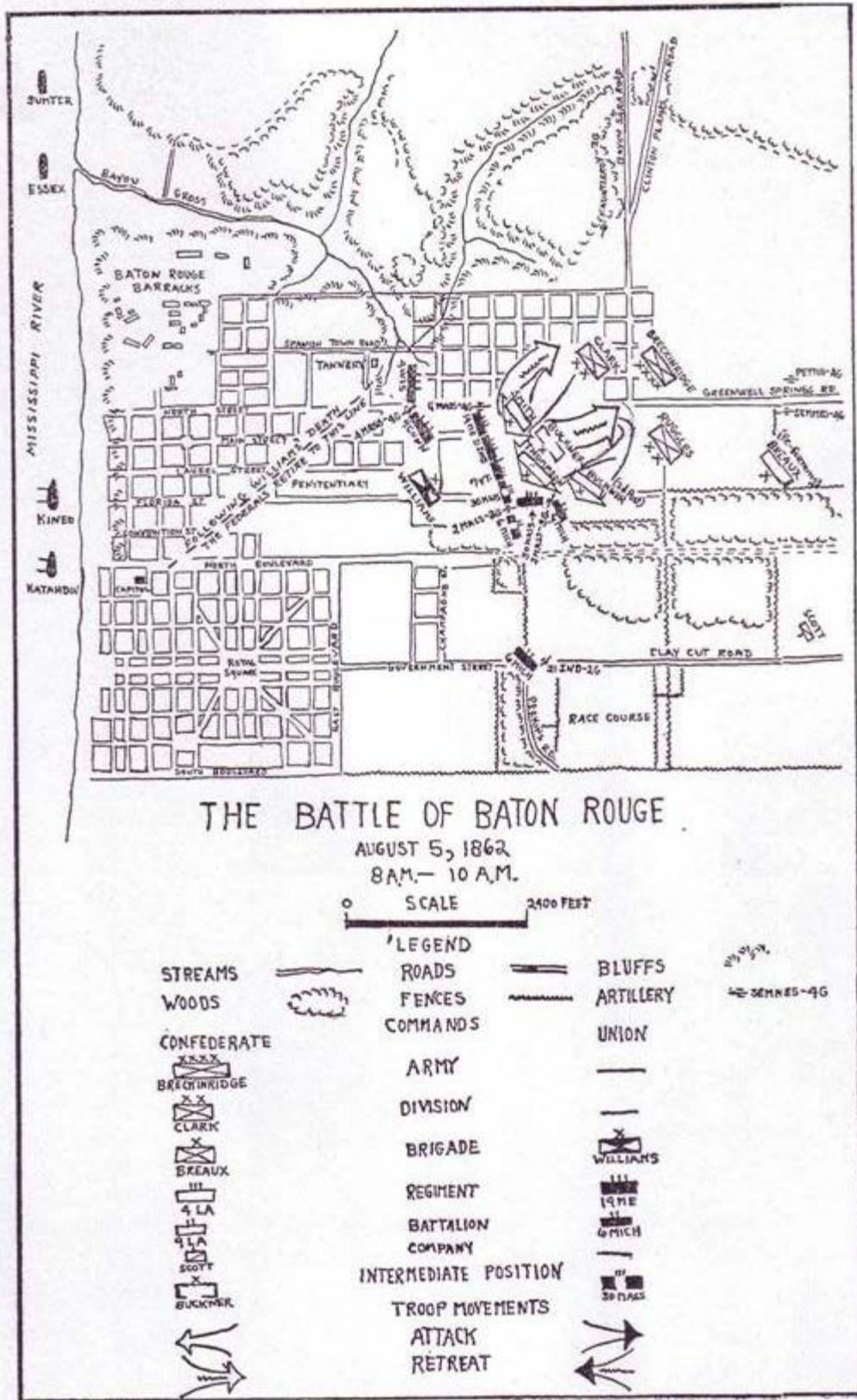


Fig. 3

During the second phase of his attack on Baton Rouge, Breckinridge lost control of the situation. His brigade commanders launched a series of disjointed and piecemeal attacks on Williams' line of battle.

First, the brigade led by Captain Buckner surged forward. Since Buckner was a very junior officer, General Clark accompanied the attacking force. Crossing to the south side of Greenwell Springs Road, Buckner's troops masked any fire support they might have received from Thompson's brigade as they pressed ahead. Driving the Union skirmishers before them, Buckner's greyclads recaptured the camp of the Twenty-first Indiana. Buckner then halted his men while they traded volleys with the blueclad line of battle. Less than 50 yards separated the combatants. Buckner shouted for his bugler to sound the charge.

In the face of a deadly hail of artillery and small-fire, the Fourth and Fifth Kentucky prepared to carry out this order. General Clark, however, decided to intervene. He believed that it would be suicidal for the men to carry out Buckner's command. He countermanded Buckner's order, and the troops fell back. During the withdrawal Clark was severely wounded.

As soon as Buckner's brigade had been pulled out, Smith's brigade was committed by Breckinridge. Smith's greyclads were to try to cut their way through the Union main line of resistance. Spearheaded by the Twenty-second Mississippi, Smith's infantrymen moved to the attack.

To counter this fierce onslaught, Colonel Dudley had the officer in charge of the Second Massachusetts Battery shift three of his pieces. These guns were sighted to fire obliquely across the Federals' front. As if breasting the well-aimed volleys of the Union infantry were not bad enough, the Southerners found that the enfilading fire delivered by the Massachusetts cannoneers was worse. Subjected as it was to a storm of musketry and canister, Smith's attack quickly foundered.

A strong Union combat patrol sallied forth to harass the retreating Southerners. These bluecoats had the misfortune to collide head on with Colonel Thompson's brigade. As soon as Smith's line had started to recoil, Thompson's cheering

Greyclads had taken up the attack. The men in blue and in grey met in bloody combat. Among the first to fall was Colonel Thompson, who was carried to the rear badly wounded. Despite the loss of their fearless leader, the butternuts quickly beat the Yankees back on their main line of resistance. Thompson's troops were reinforced by Buckner's brigade, which Breckinridge had personally brought forward. The grim Southerners took cover in the woods where the ransacked camp formerly occupied by the Twenty-first Indiana was located.⁵⁸

For most of the next hour the troops blazed away at one another. Among the first to fall in this engagement was hard fighting Colonel Keith. He was taken to the rear, badly wounded.

Shortly thereafter, General Williams, feeling that perhaps the moment for a counterstroke had arrived, spoke to the men of the Twenty-first Indiana, "Boys, your field officers are all dead; I will lead you." The Hoosiers answered with three resounding cheers for the general. The echoes had scarcely died away when Williams was knocked from his horse. A Minie ball had struck the general in the chest. He was dead almost before his aides could pick him up. Upon the general's death, Colonel Cahill assumed command of the Baton Rouge defenders.⁵⁹

The hard-pressed Cahill realized that if the navy were to give him any fire support, he would have to withdraw his troops from their proximity to the foe. To accomplish this, Cahill gave the order to retire to a previously designated position a quarter of a mile to the rear. After sending his artillery to the rear, Cahill covered his withdrawal with a strong skirmish line. Skillfully disengaging his troops, Cahill redeployed them. His left was anchored on Bayou Gross at the tannery, while his right rested near the capitol. Apparently

⁵⁸ Ibid., 60, 78, 83, 89. Upon the wounding of Thompson, Colonel J. W. Robertson of the Thirty-fifth Alabama assumed command of the brigade.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 57. Williams was the third Union general to die in battle in the Civil War.

taken by surprise, the Confederates' pursuit was lackadaisical.⁶⁰

Glancing at his watch, Breckinridge saw that it was now 10 a.m. The *Arkansas* was long overdue. Heavy casualties had been suffered by the Confederates, especially among the officers. Preliminary reports submitted by the general's subordinates indicated that less than 1,000 men would be available in case he decided to renew the attack. In addition, the water supply was critical. Since leaving the Comite the soldiers had been unable to procure any water.

Worse, the captains of the *Essex* and the *Sumter*, whose gunboats were above the town, had learned that Cahill had broken contact with the butternuts. They ordered their tars to open fire. Giant shells from these two gunboats were soon exploding among the Confederates. Although his troops had displayed the utmost contempt to danger and death and expressed themselves as reluctant to retire, Breckinridge under the circumstances, deemed it unwise to launch an attack on the new Federal defense line.

Since an acute shortage of transportation precluded the removal of the captured booty, the general detailed demolition teams to burn the captured Federal cantonments and stores. As soon as this task had been completed, Breckinridge withdrew his command to Ward Creek, where he hoped to be able to obtain water for his men. Captain Buckner was placed in charge of the Seventh Kentucky and a section of Semmes' Battery, and

covered the Rebels' retreat. Reaching the creek the greyclads were distressed to discover that the stagnant water was unfit to drink. Advised by the inhabitants that the cisterns in the suburbs might contain sufficient drinking water, Breckinridge moved his troops back into Baton Rouge. From the cisterns the thirsty Confederates were able to secure a limited supply of water.⁶¹

During the afternoon, the gunboats *Katahdin* and *Kineo*,

⁶⁰ Ibid., 57, 63, 65, 79.

⁶¹ Ibid., 79; O. R. N., Series I, Vol. 19, pp. 114, 117. The Rebels burned the camps of the Twenty-first Indiana, the Fourteenth Maine, and the Seventh Vermont, and the Second and Sixth Massachusetts Batteries.

which were anchored below Baton Rouge, opened fire on the Confederates who were camped in the eastern fringes of the town. To direct the fire of these gunboats which were firing across the city, Lieutenant George M. Ranson, captain of the *Kineo*, had placed an officer in the tower of the capitol. This officer, through a system of prearranged signals, was able to correct the gunners' aim.

A shortage of picks and shovels, which had kept the Southerners from burying their dead, prevented them from digging in. Thus they were unable to throw up earthworks to neutralize the effect of the naval bombardment.

Breckinridge still hoped that the *Arkansas* would put in an appearance. If she did, he planned to resume the attack. In spite of the fire of the gunboats, Breckinridge held his men in position until late afternoon. Finally, a courier reached his command post with the

news that the *Arkansas*' engines had failed. At this very moment, the ram was lying helpless near the right bank of the river. Breckinridge now gave the order to retire.

Mustering on Greenwell Springs Road, the Southerners, screened by a strong rear guard, retired to the Comite River on the evening of the fifth. Just as the Confederates were moving out, the gunboat *Cayuga* came chuffing up the river. She joined the *Essex* and the *Sumter* above the city and saluted the departing foe with several eleven-inch shells.⁶²

In this hard-fought battle the Rebels, out of a force of about 3,000 had lost 95 killed, and 302 wounded, and 56 missing. The Union officers listed their casualties as 84 killed, 266 wounded, and 33 missing.

About 4 a.m., the distant roar of battle became distinctly audible aboard the *Arkansas*. This was a clear indication that Breckinridge's troops had launched their attack on Baton Rouge. The engineers had spent a trying night striving to get the starboard engine back in running order. When repairs were affected, the ram got slowly under way at 8 a.m. Rounding the tip of Free Nigger Point, five miles above Baton Rouge,

⁶² O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 79; O. R. N., Series I, Vol. 19, pp. 118-20.

Lieutenant Stevens sighted the Union fleet—the ironclad *Essex*, the ram *Sumter*, the gunboats *Katahdin* and *Kineo*, and a number of transports.

The crew was immediately beat to quarters; the guns were cleared for action. Almost immediately thereafter, the starboard engine again failed. The boat drifted helplessly toward the right bank of the Mississippi, grounding on some submerged

cypress stumps.

While the engineering force toiled away repairing the machinery, the remainder of the crew kept a sharp watch, their fingers crossed, hoping that the Union fleet would not attack. After the engine was repaired Stevens discovered that it would be necessary to lighten the ram before it could be freed from the submerged stumps. To lighten the vessel a large quantity of railroad iron which had been on deck to shield the ram from plunging fire, was thrown overboard.

Finally at 5 p.m. the vessel drifted free. Before casting off Engineer Brown approached Stevens. He informed the captain that he feared the engines would not hold up much longer. To test the machinery and pick up a supply of coal, reported to be stockpiled on the bank a short distance upstream, Stevens turned the vessel about. Just as the ram was drawing abreast of the coal yard, the “wrist” connecting rod on the starboard engine broke. Fortunately for the Confederates one of the engineers was a blacksmith. A forge was set up ashore and another pin forged. The entire night was spent effecting repairs and coaling the vessel.⁶³

After the fog had lifted on the morning of the fifth, the Union sailors aboard Porter’s squadron had sighted a dense cloud of smoke on the horizon. From the information gleaned from army scouts on the previous evening, the naval officers felt certain that the rapidly approaching smoke cloud indicated that the *Arkansas* was moving to the attack. After coming into view around the head of Free Nigger Point, the ram stopped and remained stationary until late in the afternoon. At that time she turned about and headed back up the river.

⁶³ O. R. N., Series I, Vol. 19, pp. 131, 135, 720, 771; Gift, “The Story of the *Arkansas*,” S. H. S. P., XII.

Colonel Cahill was very jittery. He was afraid that Breckinridge’s force, which he

estimated to total 15,000, might momentarily renew the assault. The colonel impressed upon the naval officers that it was mandatory that they keep their gunboats standing by. They were to keep the guns cast loose and the crews at their battle stations, ready to provide fire support in case the Rebels launched a new thrust. For this reason the combative Porter's squadron made no effort to engage the *Arkansas* on the fifth.⁶⁴

In the meantime, Cahill and Porter had sent dispatches via the steamer *Tennessee* to their superiors in New Orleans. Besides informing Butler that the Rebels seemed "determined to take the city at all hazards," Cahill pointed out the "Navy is threatened by the ram *Arkansas*, which will divert them from our service; therefore, if more gunboats can be sent they will be out of great use."⁶⁵

In his message Porter cautioned Farragut: "If General Butler does not send at least 5,000 troops as a re-enforcement, it is my opinion the army will be defeated." Porter observed: "If I had a gunboat to take my present position I could then attack the ram, and a tug is absolutely necessary if we expect to get this vessel [the *Essex*] up the river at all."⁶⁶

By midnight the *Tennessee* had reached New Orleans, and the message were in Butler's and Farragut's hands. Farragut responded with alacrity to the news of the appearance of the *Arkansas*. Liberty parties were recalled; the captains of the *Hartford*, *Brooklyn*, *Jackson*, and *Westfield* were directed to have their ships ready to sail by daybreak.⁶⁷

Butler was not taken in by Cahill's rash estimate that he had been attacked by 15,000 butternuts. After scaling down the Colonel's estimate of the strength of Breckinridge's force to between 6,000 and 7,000 men, the ex-Massachusetts congressman

⁶⁴ O. R. N., Series I, Vol. 19, p. 116.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 120; O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 54. The speedy fleetcoaler *Tennessee* had reached Baton Rouge during the morning.

⁶⁶ O. R. N., Series I, Vol. 19, p. 114. Like the other Eads ironclads, the *Essex* was under powered. To operate efficiently when proceeding upstream, she needed the assistance of a tug.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 707, 719.

determined to send Colonel Halbert E. Paine to take command at Baton Rouge in Cahill's place. A young staff officer, Lieutenant Godfrey Weitzel, would accompany Paine. Weitzel would investigate and report whether it would be feasible, with limited number of troops available in the Department of the Gulf, to continue to hold Baton Rouge. If Weitzel believed that it would be necessary to evacuate the city, Butler—in spite of his belief that Baton Rouge should be burned—informed his youthful protégé that he would leave the matter entirely to his and Paine's discretion.

Accompanied by Paine and Weitzel, Butler visited Farragut aboard his flagship, the *Hartford*, early on the morning of the sixth.⁶⁸ Following a brief conference with the naval officer, the army brass went ashore. At 5:30 a.m., the *Hartford*, *Jackson*, and *Westfield* pulled away from the wharf, en route to Baton Rouge. These three warships were followed five hours later by the *Brooklyn*. Later in the day Paine and Weitzel, accompanied by their staffs, sailed for Baton Rouge aboard the fast steamer *Sallie Robinson*.⁶⁹

When the Federal naval officers learned that Breckinridge had withdrawn his command from the eastern fringes of Baton Rouge, the matured plans to destroy the Confederate ram. The attack was scheduled for the next morning, the sixth.

In accordance with the plans drawn up by Commanders William D. Porter and Donald M. Fairfax, the *Essex*, *Cayuga*, and *Sumter* stood up river at 9 a.m., their crews at their battle stations. The *Kineo* and *Katahdin*, the latter's engine having been reassembled during the night, remained moored off Baton Rouge. These two ships were to furnish fire support to the army if the Confederates returned in force to the area.⁷⁰

About the time that the three Union warships cast off, Engineer Brown reported to Lieutenant Stevens. He informed Stevens that the *Arkansas*' "wrist" connecting rod was again functioning; but, he warned, it was unreliable. While Stevens huddled with his officers to determine what to do next, the

⁶⁸ O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 543.

⁶⁹ O. R. N., Series I, Vol. 19, pp. 707, 719.

Question was rendered academic. The lookout sang out the news that the Federal fleet was rapidly approaching. Stevens ordered the ram cleared for action.

As the *Arkansas* slowly chugged downstream to engage the Union gunboats, the “wrist” connecting rod on her port engine failed. The ram immediately sheared in toward the right bank. Moments later her starboard engine also stopped. She now drifted toward the oncoming Yankee warships, a helpless cripple.⁷¹

At 10 a.m., as the three Union gunboats rounded the head of Free Niger Point, their captains sighted the *Arkansas* chuffing slowly toward them.

As soon as the Yankee tars sighted the feared and hated ram, they cast loose their guns. A prearranged signal was hoisted by the *Essex*, ordering the *Kineo* and *Katahdin* to join the squadron. At range of about two miles, the *Essex* opened a desultory fire on the *Arkansas* with the three nine-inch Dahlgren smoothbores mounted in her bow. Immediately after the *Essex* opened fire, the helpless *Arkansas* drifted aground near the right bank of the river, her stern pointed downstream.

Lieutenant Charles W. Read returned the *Essex*'s fire with the two 32-pounder rifles mounted in the stern of the *Arkansas*. Read quickly took into account the extreme range that made both his and the *Essex*'s fire ineffective. He ordered his gunners to cease firing.⁷²

The *Essex*, however, continued to shell the *Arkansas* at extreme range. Since these projectiles fell short, they had no effect. On being notified by Engineer Brown that the engines were beyond repair, Stevens sadly realized that, to keep the *Arkansas* from falling into the Yankee's hands, he would have to scuttle her. Most of the officers and crew were sent ashore with small-arms and ammunition. Since one of the lookouts reported that the bluejackets were putting a landing party ashore below the stricken ram, the ram's crew was fallen in and marched off into the hinterlands.

⁷¹ Ibid., 131, 135.

⁷² Ibid., 118-20, 131, 135.

Stevens, assisted by six of his officers, remained aboard the *Arkansas* to insure her destruction. The machinery was smashed with axes and the wardroom bedding was fired in several places. Bales of cotton used to reinforce the bulkheads were cut open and the torch applied. The magazines were opened and the cartridges scattered about. Finally, the battery was loaded and the guns run out. With the wardroom a raging inferno, the officers abandoned the ram. Since Lieutenant Steven's hands had been badly burned when a had grenade had prematurely exploded while he was sabotaging one of the engines, the other officers had to help him off the stricken vessel. Scrambling ashore, the greyclads retreated to a safe position from where they viewed the ram's final moments.⁷³

Shortly after the *Essex* had opened her harmless long-ranged bombardment, the Northern tars observed that a fire had broken out on the *Arkansas*. As they approached Free Nigger Point the captains of the *Kineo* and the *Katahdin* were hailed by the *Cayuga* and directed to return to Baton Rouge. In the distance a cloud of white smoke could be seen rising from the eastern fringes of the city. This led the naval officers to fear that Breckinridge had inaugurated another attack on the city.

Shortly after the two gunboats had started down the river, the lookouts aboard the other vessels of Porter's squadron observed that the *Arkansas* had floated free. She drifted down river, a flaming derelict, her guns being discharged as the fire reached them. The crews of the *Essex*, *Cayuga*, and *Sumter* had heard numerous tales regarding the terrific blast that had occurred when the *Louisiana* was blown up several months before.⁷⁴ To be on the safe side, they gave the hulk a wide berth. At 1 p.m., the ram blew up with the tremendous explosion. Her destruction enabled the Union naval leaders on the "Western

Water” to breathe a deep sigh of relief.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid., 135-36. The officer that assisted Stevens in scuttling the ram were: Lieutenants Read, John A. Wilson, Richard A. Bacot, Dabney M. Scales, Thomas B. Travers, and Daniel B. Talbott.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 118-20, 125, 136. At the time of the surrender of Forts Jackson and St. Phillip on April 28, the Rebels had scuttled the ironclad *Louisiana*, which blew up with a tremendous explosion.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Reaching Baton Rouge the tars aboard the *Kineo* and *Katahdin* were disgusted to discover that the supposed Rebel attack on the city was a false alarm.

Most of the crew of the *Arkansas* succeeded in begging, borrowing, or stealing rides across the Mississippi. Upon reaching the east bank, many of the sailors made their way to Clinton where they met Lieutenant Brown. The Lieutenant was understandably distressed to learn that the *Arkansas* had been scuttled the previous day. From Clinton the crew marched to Camp Moore where they entrained. By the ninth the sailors had reached Jackson, Mississippi.⁷⁶

All was quiet along the Baton Rouge perimeter on the sixth. Both sides took advantage of the hiatus to rest while waiting for the other to make the next move. During the morning the Union officers found that it was impossible to keep the men busy strengthening their lines. Whenever the officer in charge turned his back, the men slipped away. On escaping from the fatigue parties, the soldiers filtered down to the water front where they joined the crowds of civilians, who were watching the engagement between the Federal warships and the *Arkansas*. When the ram blew up the spectators in blue let out a tremendous cheer; the inhabitants grimly returned to their homes.

Even before the Confederate naval threat had been eliminated, the transport *Lewis Whiteman* sailed for New Orleans. On board the vessel were a number of Union wounded, Confederate prisoners, and General Williams' body.⁷⁷

Prior to the departure of the *Lewis Whiteman*, Major De Baun, under a flag of truce, entered the Union lines with a message from Breckinridge. The Confederate general wanted the Federal officers to permit a burial party to visit the battlefield to inter his dead. In addition, Breckinridge wanted to communicate with General Clark, who had been badly wounded and left behind when the Confederates had retired to the Comite. Cahill rejected Breckinridge's requests pointing out

⁷⁶ Ibid., 130-31, 136.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 116, 138-39.

that the Yankees were already busy burying the Southern dead, and that Clark was a prisoner and being cared for by Union surgeons.⁷⁸

Breasting a strong current the *Hartford*, *Westfield*, and *Jackson* slowly churned their way up the mighty river on the sixth. Farragut realized that he would be unable to reach Baton Rouge before dark. Not wishing to be on the treacherous river at night, he gave orders for his squadron to anchor in the bend of the river above Manchac.

About dark a little below Donaldsonville the fast steamer *Sallie Robinson*, with Paine and Weitzel aboard, overhauled and passed the sloop of war *Brooklyn*. Shortly after the transport had drawn out of sight, the crew of the *Brooklyn* as startled to hear the sound of artillery fire ahead. Commander Henry H. Bell, the captain of the *Brooklyn*, recalled that a steamer had recently passed. He correctly deduced that the transport had drawn the fire of a masked Confederate battery. Bell ordered the port guns of the *Brooklyn* cleared for action.

Passing Donaldsonville the bluejackets observed nothing unusual until the *Brooklyn* had reached a point two miles above the town where the powerful sloop of war was saluted by a volley of musketry. Because of the darkness the crew was unable to spot any targets ashore. After firing one warning shot the *Brooklyn* continued up river.

Encountering the transport *Lewis Whiteman*, en route down river on her mission of mercy, the *Brooklyn* turned about and conveyed her past Donaldsonville. After parting company with the transport the man of war again headed upstream, rendezvousing with Farragut's squadron about midnight. Here Bell learned that the *Sallie Robinson* had utilized her great speed and had suffered no ill effect from the Rebels' fire as she sped past Donaldsonville. At this very moment, the fleet transport was churning her way toward Baton Rouge.⁷⁹

After leaving the *Brooklyn*, the transport *Lewis Whiteman* continued downstream at forced draft. By 1 a.m., the vessel had reached Thirty-five Mile Point, the patrol station of the

⁷⁸ O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 55.

⁷⁹ O. R. N., Series I, Vol. 19, pp. 140-41, 707, 719.

Gunboat *Oneida*. In compliance with a recent directive from Farragut, the gunboat was proceeding without lights. Suddenly the watch spotted the transport bearing rapidly down on her. The pilot sounded her whistle. It was too late! In spite of the bright moonlight, the transport seemed oblivious to the gunboat's prescience. She plowed head on into the port bow of the *Oneida*. Within a few minutes after the collision, the *Lewis Whiteman* had foundered, carrying with her a number of litter cases. The warship was only slightly damaged, and she stood by to pick up survivors. As soon as she had accomplished her mission of mercy, the *Oneida* headed for New Orleans at forced draft.⁸⁰

At daybreak on the seventh Farragut's flotilla again cast off. It was 10:30 a.m. when

the warships reached Baton Rouge. The flag officer learned, much to his joy, that the *Arkansas* was no more.⁸¹

The *Sallie Robinson* had reached the city many hours ahead of the fleet. Colonel Paine and Captain Weitzel had immediately disembarked; the colonel to assume command of the garrison and the captain to inspect the defenses of the city. Hoping to discover just what the Rebels were doing, Colonel Paine immediately sent out five reconnaissance patrols. These groups were to scour the countryside to the east. By dusk, all the patrols had returned. While the scouts had failed to contact the foe, they had located and brought back five caissons, partially filled with ammunition. These had been abandoned by the greyclads during their retreat to the Comite.

Meanwhile, Weitzel had completed his examination of the Union position. He found the city of no military importance and recommended its speedy evacuation. Unlike Butler, Weitzel did not believe that Baton Rouge should be burned. Justifiably he pointed out: "The difficulty about burning this town is there is a large orphan asylum and a tremendous insane asylum, both of which humanity forbids us to destroy."⁸²

Before Colonel Paine could issue instructions implementing

⁸⁰ Ibid., 138-39.

⁸¹ Ibid., 116, 707.

⁸² O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 53, 545-46.

Weitzel's decision, he received a message from Butler dated the seventh. Butler notified Paine that upon mature thought he had decided that the political importance of Baton Rouge necessitated its continued occupation.⁸³ Consequently, before the eighth had

passed, Weitzel had laid out a new defensive perimeter covering the Baton Rouge Barracks. The left flank of this line rested on the Mississippi at the point where Bayou Gross discharged into the river, it's right on the "Father of Waters" at the foot of North Street.⁸⁴

Early the next morning the troops were turned out. Fatigue parties were organized and work on the new defense line started. It was freely predicted by the Federal officers that as soon as he had regrouped his command, Breckinridge would make another attack on the city. By the thirteenth, the bluecoats had dug a line of rifle pits, had thrown up emplacements for twenty-four guns, felled an abatis, and loopoled the buildings within the new perimeter.

Colonel Paine now put demolition teams to work clearing the fields of fire in front of his main line of resistance. In carrying out their assignments these groups were forced to burn a number of dwellings on North Street, as well as those on the Dougherty plantation.⁸⁵

Breckinridge exploded when he learned that the Federals were burning private property. He dashed off a letter to Paine informing him that he regarded this destruction of private property as a violation of the customs of civilized warfare. Furthermore, the general wrote, in case of any future departure for these usages, he had been authorized by Van Dorn to "raise the black flag, and neither give nor ask quarter."⁸⁶

Fearing that Breckinridge's note presaged an attack, Paine, before drafting his answer, had the long roll sounded. The troops were sent scurrying to their battle stations. In his reply

⁸³ Ibid., 544.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 546.

⁸⁵ Murray, *History of the 9th Connecticut*, 126-27; Richard B. Irwin, "Military Operations in Louisiana," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, III, 584.

⁸⁶ O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 549-51.

Paine pointed out that because of military exigencies, he had been forced to burn a small number of houses. But, he continued, as far as he knew, no wanton destruction of private property had occurred. Paine, in turn, accused the greyclads of a number of war crimes, stating: "I am informed that a corps of blacks fought against us in the recent battle of Baton Rouge, and that our pickets were found tied to trees shot through the head, and I am sorry to remind you that a most barbarous system of guerrilla warfare is authorized by your officers and practiced by your troops in this department." Paine closed his letter by casting a sharp aspersion at the ex-vice President: "I shall never raise the [black] flag which all civilized nations abhor; but I shall try to maintain the flag which you have too often promised to defend."⁸⁷ Apparently having satisfied their literary appetites, the two officers ceased their verbal duel.

Van Dorn, on being notified of the failure of the attack on Baton Rouge, decided that the objective of the expedition—the occupation of a point on the bluffs below the mouth of the Red—could be just as well achieved by fortifying Port Hudson.⁸⁸ He therefore telegraphed Breckinridge on the thirteenth: "Move your whole force to Port Hudson, and make dispositions for holding it and to guard roads, to Camp Moore and Clinton. Port Hudson must be held if possible."⁸⁹

To bolster Breckinridge's sadly depleted legions, Van Dorn had already ordered the brigade commanded by General Bowen, which had remained at Vicksburg, to move to the Comite.⁹⁰ Disappointed by the performance of the Partisan Rangers during the campaign, Van Dorn determined to remedy this situation. He decided to have the "Swamp Fox of the Confederacy," Brigadier General M. Jeff. Thompson, report to Breckinridge. Thompson would be charged with the task

⁸⁷ Ibid.; Murray, *History of the 9th Connecticut*, 126-27.

⁸⁸ O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 17.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 797.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 80. Bowen's brigade consisted of: the First Missouri Infantry, the Ninth and Tenth Arkansas, the Sixth Mississippi, the Second Confederate Battalion, and Watson's Louisiana Battery.

Or organizing the militia in the parishes east of Baton Rouge.⁹¹

On August 14 the day before he received Van Dorn's instructions pertaining to the occupation of Port Hudson, Breckinridge anticipated his superior's wishes. He ordered General Ruggles' division, reinforced by the Pettus Flying Battery, to Port Hudson.

Reaching Port Hudson on the evening of the fifteenth Ruggles put his men to work throwing up fortifications. Within a relatively short time the 42-pounder, which had been sent to the area in July, had been placed in battery. Ruggles made arrangements to draw supplies from Camp Moore via Williams' Bridge and the Clinton-Port Hudson Railroad.⁹²

Bowen's brigade and Van Dorn's message directing Breckinridge to move his entire command to Port Hudson arrived on the Comite on the fifteenth. Consequently Breckinridge moved the remainder of his force, except for Bowen's brigade reinforced by the Twelfth Louisiana, to Port Hudson. Bowen's reinforced brigade would remain on the Comite and function as a corps of observation.⁹³

Arriving at Port Hudson on the sixteenth, Breckinridge was pleasantly surprised by the vast progress which the fatigue parties, under Captain James Norquet's supervision, had made on the fortifications. The only thing that displeased the general was the lack of any heavy ordnance to mount in the works. In a jubilant frame of mind Breckinridge wired Van Dorn: "Port Hudson is one of the strongest points on the Mississippi (which Baton Rouge is not) and batteries there will command the river more completely than at Vicksburg."⁹⁴

In the meantime, General Braxton Bragg had been perfecting his arrangements for his great Kentucky invasion. Since Bragg felt that his Kentucky Campaign would have grave political

⁹¹ Ibid., 797-800; Jay Monaghan, *The Swamp Fox of the Confederacy: The Life and Military Services of M. Jeff. Thompson* (Tuscaloosa, 1956), 56.

⁹² O. R. Series I, Vol. XV, 795.

⁹³ Ibid., 800. The Twelfth Louisiana had been sent down from Abbeville, Mississippi, during the second week of August to reinforce Breckinridge's command. The Louisiana arrived at Camp Moore simultaneously with Bowen's brigade.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 81.

Implications, he was convinced that Breckinridge's presence in his native state, where he had great political power and influence, would be of tremendous value. Bragg therefore requested that Van Dorn order the ex-Vice President and those of his troops from Kentucky and Tennessee to join him in time to participate in the pending offensive.⁹⁵

Breckinridge, on the eighteenth, received a message from Van Dorn directing him to turn over his command to Ruggles. The next morning the general, accompanied by the Twelfth Louisiana and his Kentucky and Tennessee units, hit the road at an early hour. From Port Hudson, the Rebels moved to Camp Moore. Boarding troop trains they were transferred to Jackson, the first stage on their long, roundabout journey to join Bragg.⁹⁶

While Farragut's squadron was anchored at Baton Rouge, the hard-boiled flag officer incensed at the citizens of Donaldsonville. He learned that a Rebel masked battery emplaced near the town had fired on the unarmed steamer *St. Charles*. A cutter was sent down river by Farragut. Reaching the town the officer in charge warned the inhabitants to send their women and children to the country because the Union navy upon its return from Baton Rouge had determined to destroy Donaldsonville.

At 5 a.m. on the ninth the *Hartford*, *Brooklyn*, and *Cayuga* started down river. A flotilla of gunboats was left at Baton Rouge to support the occupying force. Drawing abreast of Plaquemine, the warships hove to. A landing party was sent ashore to inform the residents, "if they ever fired on any of our ships...[the Federals] would burn their town down." After landing party had been recalled, the warships again cast off.

At 11 a.m. as the vessels approached Donaldsonville, "General quarters" sounded; the crews were sent scrambling to their battle stations. As soon as the "commence action" signal was hoisted by the *Hartford*, the three warships began the

⁹⁵ O. R., Series I, Vol. XVI, pt. II, 771-72.

⁹⁶ O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 81, 800-801.

Bombardment. After about fifteen minutes the shelling ceased. Farragut ordered a landing party of marines and sailors ashore. The Federals set fire to a number of buildings. With its work of destruction completed the landing party was recalled. After warning the inhabitants that if they continued to fire on his vessels additional sections of the town would be destroyed, Farragut proceeded to New Orleans. Upon his arrival in the Crescent City Farragut was handed a communication from Washington, informing him that he had been advanced to the rank of rear admiral.⁹⁷

Following the departure of Farragut's squadron, the gunboats which had remained at Baton Rouge found plenty to keep them busy. While several patrolled the river, the others stood by ready to give fire support in event the Rebels renewed their attack on the city. The day after Farragut's ships had bombarded Donaldsonville, the *Essex*, accompanied by one transport, visited Bayou Sara. After the ironclad had shelled the town, the steamer tied up at the wharf. A strong landing force was put ashore. The Federals discovered a large cache of sugar of approximately 500 hogsheads stored in the village. Impressing a number of slaves from the surrounding plantations, the bluecoats put them to work loading this valuable commodity aboard the transport for shipment to New Orleans.⁹⁸

Advised of the heated verbal exchange between Breckinridge and Paine, the naval officers had picked up a ridiculous bit of scuttlebutt indicating that a Confederate ram and

several gunboats were en route down the river. Becoming greatly alarmed the naval brass forwarded a request to New Orleans asking that they be reinforced by the power side-wheeler *Mississippi*.⁹⁹

Before the *Mississippi* reached Baton Rouge the Union naval force operating in the area had been reduced by one. While on a routine patrol the ran *Sumter* had run aground near

⁹⁷ O. R. N., Series I, Vol. 19, pp. 141-43, 153, 707, 721. Farragut had been advanced to rear admiral on July 16. News of his promotion did not reach New Orleans until the second week in August.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 779.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 153-54.

Bayou Sara. All efforts by the steamer *Ceres*, which came to her assistance, to pull the ram off the bar were to no avail. The ram was abandoned by her crew. Subsequently, the derelict was burned by the Confederates.¹⁰⁰

When General Butler learned that fresh Confederate troops—Bowen’s brigade and the Twelfth Louisiana—had reached the Comite, he decided that Breckinridge was undoubtedly contemplating an attack on New Orleans. To counter such a movement, Butler decided to concentrate his forces for the defense of the Crescent City. Colonel Paine was directed to begin the evacuation of Baton Rouge. After the troops had been removed the town was to be “destroyed.” Butler justified this ruthless order in the following terms: “after mature deliberation I deem this a military necessity of the highest order—much more than the burning [of] Hampden by Magruder. That town was burnt by its own friends in August to prevent it giving shelter to our troops. The shelter of Baton Rouge to them is a necessity in the long winter campaign, to say nothing of its advantages

as a summer residence.”¹⁰¹

Moss Bates, the Superintendent of the State Penitentiary, on being notified of Butler’s order for the destruction of Baton Rouge, called on the general. He pointed out that within the city were located the various state charitable and penal institutions. The inmates of which would be made homeless if the general’s scorched earth policy were applied. As a result of Bate’s visit, Butler on the nineteenth countermanded his orders for burning the city.¹⁰² Fortunately for the inhabitants, Butler’s directive sparing the city reached Colonel Paine before he put his demolition teams to work.

The evacuation of Baton Rouge began about 2 a.m. on the eighteenth. At that hour the troops started packing their gear and sending it to the levee, where it was placed aboard the waiting transports. On the morning of the eighteenth Colonel Paine issued orders for his men to prepare two days’ cooked

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 159.

¹⁰¹ O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 552. Hampden, Virginia, was burned August 7, 1861, by the Confederate forces commanded by Brigadier General John B. Magruder.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Rations and hold themselves ready to embark on a moment’s notice.

About noon on the twentieth a strong combat patrol from the Ninth Louisiana Partisan Battalion led by Major De Baun drove in the Union outpost stationed on Greenwell Springs Road. In this skirmish, the greyclads captured 23 cattle and 40 horses. Harking to the rattle of musketry Colonel Paine ordered the “long roll” sounded. The Baton Rouge garrison sprang to arms. Two companies of the Twenty-first Indiana, supported by the fire of the side-wheeler *Mississippi*, sallied forth. Encountering the

partisans the Hoosiers repulsed them with ease.

The next day the bluecoats began evacuating Baton Rouge. They took with them aboard the transports the contents of the state library and the statue of Washington which had stood in the capitol. De Baun's partisans sought to attack the Yankees' rear guard as it was withdrawing to the levee. Drawing the fire of the gunboats *Kineo*, *Itasca*, and *Katahdin*, the Louisianians beat a hasty retreat. As soon as all the troops had embarked the convoy started down the river. It reached New Orleans at daybreak, where the men disembarked at Camp Parapet.¹⁰³

After the departure of the convoy, the gunboats *Essex* and *Itasca* remained anchored off Baton Rouge. They remained in position, their guns trained on the city, until the twenty-third. At that time, the *Essex* proceeded up the river to reconnoiter the defenses of Port Hudson, while the *Itasca* returned to New Orleans.¹⁰⁴ Following the departure of the two warships, the Confederates reoccupied Baton Rouge.

After Van Dorn had been notified that the Federals had abandoned Baton Rouge, he ordered Ruggles to send Robertson's and Bowen's brigades to Camp Moore. In the meantime, Van Dorn had formulated plans for an advance into West

¹⁰³ Ibid., 129-30; O. R. N., Series I, Vol. 19, pp. 166; *History of the 9th Connecticut*, 127; Irwin, "Military Operations in Louisiana in 1862." *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, III, 584. The gunboat *Itasca* had been ordered to Baton Rouge by Farragut upon his return to New Orleans.

¹⁰⁴ O. R. N., Series I, Vol. 19, pp. 181, 784-785.

Tennessee. At Camp Moore, the two units would be loaded on troop trains and sent to Jackson, Mississippi. On the twenty-ninth Ruggles was directed to turn over the Port

Hudson command to Brigadier General William N. H. Beall and proceed to Jackson where Ruggles would assume command of the troops Van Dorn was concentrating at that point for his projected drive into West Tennessee.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ O. R., Series I, Vol. XV, 803-804. General Beall had formerly been in charge of the Second District of Van Dorn's department, with headquarters at Jackson, Mississippi.