# Baton Rouge National Cemetery
## 220 North 19th Street
## Baton Rouge, Louisiana  70806

### Description

The Baton Rouge National Cemetery, established in 1867, is located in East Baton Rouge Parish, about one and one-quarter miles from the grounds of the state capitol.  It is adjacent to the city cemetery.  The grounds are rectangular in shape and are enclosed by a brick wall constructed in 1878.  The entire wall was surfaced with stucco in 1936.  The main entrance is located on 19th Street at the center of the west side and is protected by a double iron gate with a pedestrian gate on each side.  These gates were constructed in 1933.  There are two additional gates, one on Convention Street near the utility building, and a service gate on the east side along 22nd Street, which was constructed in 1952.  The lodge is located near the main entrance, and the utility building is situated just south of the lodge.  As you enter the cemetery, the flagpole is located across the avenue from the lodge. It is situated on a mound with a six-inch concrete coping laid in octagon shape.  Near the center of the cemetery is a rostrum.  Graves are marked with upright marble headstones.

The lodge, constructed in 1931, is a one-story, seven-room stucco structure, with a sun porch and basement.  The roof is asphalt shingles.  The enclosed porch was renovated in 1962. A wall of the same material as the cemetery perimeter wall surrounds the lodge.

The brick utility building, containing public restrooms, was constructed in 1932.  The original roof was made of asbestos shingles and was replaced circa 1992 with an asphalt shingle roof.

The octagon-shaped rostrum is constructed of iron frame with the lower section made of brick with a stucco surface.  The posts and supporting steps are made of cast iron, with black steel railings.  The galvanized iron roof has been removed.

### Noted Burials

A grave of interest is that of General Philemon Thomas.  Thomas directed the capture of Baton Rouge from the Spanish in 1810 and fought in both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812.  At the request of the Mayor of Baton Rouge, his remains were disinterred from an abandoned cemetery and reinterred in the Baton Rouge National Cemetery in 1886.

## Significant Monuments/Memorials



Massachusetts Monument - A large granite monument erected in 1909 by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In 1908, the legislature authorized the monument in memory of the officers of the 31st and 41st Infantry and the men from Massachusetts who lost their lives in the Department of the Gulf during the Civil War. It was constructed by J. N. White and Sons of first-class Quincy monumental granite at a cost of $5,000. The eagle, Massachusetts seal, etc., are made of bronze.

A cast bronze plaque affixed to the flagpole is inscribed as follows:



UNITED STATES
NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERY
BATON ROUGE
ESTABLISHED 1867
INTERMENTS 2936
KNOWN 2442
UNKNOWN 494

In many national cemeteries, such a plaque was affixed to a large monument made of an original cast iron seacoast artillery tube, secured by a concrete base. Records indicate that there were two large gun monuments placed in the central avenue of the Baton Rouge National Cemetery. These monuments were subsequently removed, but the plaque was preserved and restored.

## Civil War Activity in Area

In early May 1862, Captain Thomas T. Craven, with seven vessels, was sent to Baton Rouge to take the capital city. On May 7, 1862, Commander James S. Palmer from Craven's detachment, proceeded to Baton Rouge aboard the Iroquois and demanded the surrender of the city. Receiving no satisfactory answer, Palmer landed a force on the morning of the 9th and claimed possession of the arsenal and barracks. Captain David G. Farragut also moved up to Baton Rouge.

At Baton Rouge, James B. Kimball, the chief engineer of the Hartford, had dumped his dirty laundry into a small boat manned by four sailors and started for a house near the wharf to find a wash woman. As the party neared the shore, about 40 guerrillas rushed down the levee and blasted the boat with buckshot, slightly injuring Kimball and two of the sailors. When Farragut learned of this, he ordered the Hartford and Kennebec to open fire. Surprisingly, only one woman was killed, three were wounded, and two drowned while trying to escape. The gunboats continued to shell the town as long as they thought they could see any trace of the guerrillas. Later, Farragut assured the citizens, and later the mayor, that unless he were attacked again, he would

not fire into the city.  The next morning, May 29, General Thomas Williams arrived in Baton Rouge with his troops.  Farragut requested that he go ashore and protect the lives and property of the loyal citizens.  The guerrillas had threatened to return and destroy Baton Rouge in order to keep the Federal troops from taking over the city.  General Williams landed and took possession of the United States barracks and set up his artillery.  Feeling that Baton Rouge was relatively safe, Farragut left two gunboats to aid General Williams and departed for New Orleans to obtain supplies.  Williams subsequently left a small force to protect Baton Rouge and left for Vicksburg, Mississippi.

On July 16, Williams was urged by General Butler to return down-river as soon as possible to blockade Red River and help protect Baton Rouge.  He arrived in Baton Rouge on July 26.  Williams was a stickler for petty regulations.  In the enervating heat of Baton Rouge, he continued to hold regular drill and frequent full-dress inspections.  More and more men sickened and died.  Nearly half of the entire garrison at Baton Rouge was on the sick list.

When the Federal fleet took leave of Vicksburg, Major General Earl Van Dorn quickly assumed the offensive and ordered General John G. Breckinridge to lead an expedition to strike at Baton Rouge.  He and his men reached the capital in the early morning of August 5.  Breckinridge placed his forces on the left and right side of Greenwell Springs Road in a single line of battle.  The Confederate troops waited in line for daylight to begin the attack.  The citizens of Baton Rouge had been awakened at dawn by the fire of musketry and the deeper roar of the cannon.  As the battle neared, many persons panicked.  Men, women, and children ran to escape the horrors of the bursting shells, the flying bullets, and the hand-to-hand fighting in the city.

Some 300 hundred miles above Baton Rouge, the ram Arkansas had completed her repairs and hastily left Vicksburg to reinforce the Confederate force in its attack on Baton Rouge.  Delays were caused by several stops for repairs.  The troops had done all that could be done until the coming of the Arkansas.  Just four miles above Baton Rouge, the ram developed new difficulties and was tied up to the bank.  Enemy gunboats appeared.  The last engine trouble proved worse than expected, and when the enemy gunboats began their cautious approach, the Arkansas could not be moved.  Several shots were exchanged by the two forces with little or no effect.  Lieutenant Henry K. Stevens ordered the crew ashore, set the ship afire, cut the moorings, and set her adrift.  When the flames reached the guns, they discharged.  The fire finally reached the magazine, and the ship exploded.  At 4 p.m., Breckenridge learned of the fate of the Arkansas and abandoned all plans to resume the attack.  Around dark he ordered his troops to withdraw to the Comite River.  The following day, they reached the river and went into camp.  An outpost was established only five miles from Baton Rouge, but the Confederates were in no danger, as the enemy did not leave the city.

The battle had lasted only a short time, but the fighting had been severe.  The Union had 383 casualties: 84 killed, 266 wounded, and 33 either captured or missing.  Confederate losses were estimated to be 84 killed, 315 wounded, and 57 missing.

For nearly two weeks, the work of building up defenses for Baton Rouge went forward, in anticipation of a second attack from the Confederates.  One-third of the town was burned or torn down so that the gunboats, located above and below town, would have a clean sweep and be able to converge their fire on the rear and side approaches to the town.  Colonel H. E. Paine of the 4th Wisconsin assumed command on August 6.

General Butler, who had previously decided to hold Baton Rouge, changed his mind. He feared that the next Confederate target would be New Orleans and wanted to concentrate his men there. He ordered Colonel Paine to burn Baton Rouge to the ground. Three days later, he countermanded his orders and advised Paine to leave Baton Rouge as intact as possible. Butler also ordered the release of several hundred convicts from the Penitentiary and ordered them to enlist in the United States Army. On August 21, the troops with all their guns, equipment and spoils, moved down to Carrolton, just above New Orleans, and began strengthening the defenses of Camp Parapet in anticipation of a Confederate movement against New Orleans.

Two gunboats, the Essex and the No. 7, remained before Baton Rouge and threatened to shell the entire town if Confederate forces entered. Citizens who had fled before the battle began to move back into town.

Captain David G. Farragut had suggested that Baton Rouge should be reoccupied without delay. About half the expeditionary force, several thousand men, under Brigadier General Cuvier Grover, was ordered to accompany the Richmond and four of Farragut's gunboats up to Baton Rouge and to occupy the place. On December 17, 1862, the mission was successfully accomplished.

The town presented a desolate appearance. Many of the houses had been punctured by cannon balls. Work was started to clean up the battle debris and strengthen the fortifications. On the night of December 28, the beautiful Gothic capitol building was set on fire by careless troops occupying the place. All through the night, the Baton Rouge skyline was lighted up by the bright flames. Despite the efforts of the Union commander to extinguish the fire, the next morning the building was a shell with only blackened, scorched, and windowless walls remaining.

The Battle of Baton Rouge was fought in close proximity to the site on which the Baton Rouge National Cemetery was established. Some troops were stationed directly behind the Magnolia Cemetery, which is adjacent to the national cemetery.