

Alexandria National Cemetery
209 East Shamrock Street
Pineville, Louisiana 71360

Description

The Alexandria National Cemetery, established in 1867, is located in Rapides Parish near Alexandria, Louisiana. The site is rectangular in shape. The main entrance is at the center of the west side and is enclosed by wrought-iron gates supported by stone piers. There is also a small wrought-iron gate at the pedestrian entrance on the right side. These gates were constructed in 1938. The cemetery is enclosed by a brick wall, constructed in 1878. Concrete triangular coping on the top of the wall and concrete caps for pillars were added in 1934. New bronze plaques, one inscribed with the name of the cemetery and the other with the VA seal, were installed on the main entrance gate in 1963. From the main entrance, an avenue extends to the centers of the north and south sides, and at the intersection of these two avenues is a small circular mound, supporting the flagpole. The lodge is located near the main entrance, and the utility building is situated to the east of the lodge. To the east of the flagpole is a rostrum, and a committal service tent is located northeast of the flagpole. Graves are marked with upright marble headstones.



A two-story brick lodge was constructed in 1879 and contained six rooms and a basement. The lodge was rebuilt in 1931 and changed into a single-story, seven-room building with reinforced concrete foundation, a part of which was the continuation of the front and side walls, with a large concrete L-shaped basement. The walls are hollow tile with stucco surface, the foundation is concrete, and the slate roof was replaced in 1965 with an asphalt roof. There is a sun porch with a concrete floor on the east side of the lodge that was enclosed with eight glass windows. An exterior door and concrete steps to the sun porch were installed in 1938. The front porch woodwork was replaced with concrete pillars in 1946.

A rostrum with steel columns and concrete piers was constructed in 1931. It is located to the east of the flagpole. The railing is wrought iron with pipe posts. The tin roof has been removed.

Noted Burials

Major Jacob Brown, for whom Fort Brown, Texas, was named, is buried in Section B, Grave 1. He died from wounds received during a skirmish with Mexican soldiers in 1846.

Former Congressman Gillis W. Long, who died on January 19, 1985, is buried in Section B, Grave 1610-B. He was a combat infantryman who served in the U. S. Army during World War II. He maintained a residence in Alexandria.

Significant Monuments/Memorials

One grave contains the remains of 1,537 unknown soldiers who were originally buried at the Brownsville National Cemetery, Brownsville, Texas. The grave is marked with a large gray granite monument, outlined with small concrete cubes, and is inscribed as follows:

REMAINS OF 1537 UNKNOWN
FEDERAL SOLDIERS
REMOVED FROM THE
UNITED STATES NATIONAL CEMETERY
BROWNSVILLE TEXAS 1911

Another grave, also marked with a gray granite monument, contains the remains of 16 unknown soldiers, originally interred at Fort Ringgold, Texas. The marker is inscribed as follows:

REMAINS OF 16 UNKNOWN
FEDERAL SOLDIERS
REMOVED FROM THE
POST CEMETERY
FORT RINGGOLD, TEXAS
1911

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

UNITED STATES
NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERY
ALEXANDRIA, LA
ESTABLISHED 1867
INTERMENTS 1378
KNOWN 507
UNKNOWN 871

ORIGINAL PLAQUE
OF THE
ALEXANDRIA
NATIONAL CEMETERY



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 near the main entrance with the prescribed shield affixed to one. These monuments were subsequently removed, but the shield was preserved, restored, and affixed to the flagpole.

Civil War Activity in Area

Early in February 1863, Lieutenant General Edmund Kirby Smith was assigned command over the entire Trans-Mississippi Department. Only 37 years of age, his rise in the

Confederate army had been very rapid. On March 7, he assumed control of the Trans-Mississippi and set up his headquarters in Alexandria.

By March 25, 1863, General Nathaniel P. Banks, who had been assigned command of the Department of the Gulf by the War Department, had begun the first phase of his Teche campaign. With the approach of the Federal troops up the Teche on April 24, Edmund Kirby Smith issued orders transferring his headquarters from Alexandria to Shreveport. General Richard Taylor and his forces occupied Alexandria and vicinity. Taylor was extremely popular with the people of Louisiana; he was Jefferson Davis's brother-in-law and was possessed by military and political ambitions. On May 4, Banks ordered General William Dwight, Jr., to move toward Alexandria from Washington and, on the same afternoon, Lieutenant Godfrey Weitzel left from Opelousas. William H. Emory's division followed the next morning. Meeting no opposition, the army moved, arriving at Governor Thomas O. Moore's plantations below Alexandria on May 7 at 6 p.m. Earlier, the cavalry had been sent forward to Alexandria to reconnoiter the area. On May 6, Taylor had withdrawn his main forces from Alexandria and had beaten a hasty retreat toward Natchitoches. Early in the morning of May 7, Lieutenant David D. Porter took over Alexandria with his gunboats. Later in the day, Banks's cavalry burst into the town and was amazed to find Porter already in possession. Banks was greatly disappointed to learn that Porter held Alexandria, but he was determined to push on to the town, even though his tired men had already marched 25 miles that day. Porter, who disliked Banks, reported that as soon as Banks arrived, he posted guards over everything and declared martial law. Porter turned over Alexandria to Banks and left the gunboat Lafayette to aid him.



Faced by limited supplies and long supply lines, Banks lived off the country as much as possible. He felt that in order to prevent the reorganization of the rebel army and to deprive the rebel government of all possible means of support, he deemed it expedient to take possession of mules, horses, cattle, and the staple products of the country—cotton, sugar, and tobacco. Citizens loyal to the Union were to be compensated for all products seized by the United States. By May 4, Banks reported that 20,000 cattle, mules and horses were forwarded to Brashear City, with 5,000 bales of cotton and many hogsheads of sugar. Operating from several locations, detachments of Banks's men gathered cotton, vegetables, molasses, rum, sugar, saddles, bridles, horses, mules, cattle, corn, and sweet potatoes. It was estimated that the Teche and lower Red River regions were stripped of legitimate forage valued at more than ten million dollars. These goods, along with thousands of Negroes, were sent by wagons and boats back to Brashear City for safekeeping.

The effect of the Union army upon the Negroes during Banks's first Red River expedition was overwhelming. Provost troops left behind by Banks to restore law and order and to help the loyal citizens with their labor problems had their hands full. Around May 10, while Banks mulled over various plans of action at his encampment in Alexandria, General Dwight's brigade and attached troops had been sent to catch the retreating enemy and to reconnoiter the area for a

possible movement against Shreveport. The men marched some forty or fifty miles but did not sight Taylor's army. The troops were preparing to push farther into the desolate region when word arrived that a movement toward Port Hudson was underway. The men began the long drudge back to Alexandria.

Grover's troops were the first to leave Alexandria. On May 15, Colonel Halbert E. Paine followed. Weitzel and Dwight pulled out of Alexandria on May 17, followed at a safe distance by a small Confederate force composed of Colonel W. P. Lane's regiment, fresh from Texas, Edward Waller, Jr.'s battalion, and a detachment from Henry H. Sibley's brigade.

By the end of 1863, Banks had occupied several points in Texas. General Henry W. Halleck was far from satisfied. He had not yet surrendered his ideas concerning the most effective route of operations against Texas. He wrote to Banks on January 4, 1864, that Generals William T. Sherman and Frederick Steele agreed with him that the Red River would be the shortest and best line of defense for Louisiana and Arkansas at a base of operations against Texas. Banks had strongly objected to the use of this route, but bowed to Halleck's decision. The sudden reversal of his opinion was not only based on pressing demands but to other factors, including politics. With an eye on the forthcoming election, Abraham Lincoln had strongly urged Banks to hold a constitutional convention, draft a new constitution, and bring Louisiana back into the Union as soon as possible. Lincoln wanted Louisiana's electoral votes. Unknown to Lincoln, Banks himself aspired to the Republican nomination. If he failed to bring Louisiana back into the Union, Lincoln might remove him from command, which would probably weaken his political chances.

On March 1, Sherman met with Banks in New Orleans. After learning that Banks intended to command the Red River expedition and that General John A. McClernand might also take part, Sherman gracefully refused to go, saying that Grant needed him. However, he promised to send ten thousand of his best troops along with Porter's flotilla, to join Banks on March 17 at Alexandria. Three-year enlistment terms of the older regiments of the corps were soon to expire. The men were offered a bounty and a 30-day furlough at home if they would re-enlist for another three-year period. Every one of the 19 regiments and six batteries of the 19th Corps accepted the offer. Banks concentrated most of his troops on the Teche. On the evening of March 13, the cavalry advance moved out on the road to Alexandria. When Edmund Kirby Smith received word of Sherman's visit to Banks in New Orleans, he was convinced that the two would cooperate in a drive against Red River. Taylor, with only 7,000 men, sorely needed reinforcements and orders were given to several divisions to move into Alexandria. More regiments of infantry and batteries of light artillery sailed from Vicksburg, Mississippi, for Red River. Porter informed Smith that Taylor had built a strong fortification and river blockade halfway between the mouth of the Red River and Alexandria. Before the gunboats and transports could proceed to Alexandria, this fortification had to be taken. Porter immediately sent nine of his gunboats into the Atchafalaya, followed by Smith's transports. The remainder of the gunboats proceeded up the Red to remove the river obstructions. They were to await the arrival of the troops, or until Porter could come up, before they bombarded Fort DeRussy.

After the capture of the fort, Brigadier General Thomas Kilby Smith's command of the Seventeenth Corps was kept behind to dismantle the fort and to destroy the magazines and casemates. Great excitement possessed Taylor's troops at Alexandria when they learned of the capture of Fort DeRussy. Taylor proceeded to Carroll Jones's plantation, which was a large

forage depot located only 12 miles from Bayou Rapides and Cane River. From this area, he could draw additional supplies from other depots and could watch Porter's fleet along the Red River. General Joseph A. Mower's troops, accompanying Porter, peacefully occupied Alexandria. Two days later, on March 18, Thomas Kilby Smith's troops came up and joined in the occupation. The first portion of Banks's expedition, 100 men, arrived in Alexandria on March 19. The next day, the main body of the cavalry division entered the town and went into camp. Banks's Chief of Staff and several other members of his staff arrived by steamer from New Orleans. On March 20, Taylor sent the Second Louisiana Cavalry, led by Colonel W. G. Vincent, into the Bayou Rapides valley to push as close to Alexandria as possible. He sent Edgar's battery of light artillery to strengthen the cavalry. Later General Mower and his troops set out to dislodge Vincent and took over 200 prisoners, 200 horses, and all of Edgar's guns. The next day, Mower marched back to Alexandria. Franklin was busy moving his forces from the Teche up to Alexandria. The movement to Alexandria was reported to be one of the most orderly ever made by the Union Army. During the interim and before Banks's arrival, Porter had whiled away the time collecting cotton. He took all cotton wherever he found it and netted the navy some 3,000 bales.

Banks left New Orleans and proceeded to Alexandria aboard the steamer Black Hawk, arriving on March 24. Banks was furious with Porter when he learned that the admiral was scouring the interior for cotton. While waiting for the Red River to rise so that he could go on to Shreveport, Banks busied himself not only with recruiting and with collecting cotton for the United States but also with political matters. On March 26, Banks ordered Andrew J. Smith to march to Cotile Landing, some twenty miles above Alexandria, and there to wait for transports. Banks had not intended to leave a garrison at Alexandria but conditions on the river and the inability of transports to pass the falls made it necessary to establish a depot of supplies at Alexandria and a line of wagon transportation from the steamers below to those above the falls. To protect the depot and the transports, General Cuvier C. Grover and his division were left at Alexandria. Banks proceeded with his campaign plans to go to Shreveport. Battles were fought at Mansfield and Pleasant Hill in early April. Banks consulted with Porter on April 15, and the Admiral expressed confidence that the move toward Shreveport could be resumed. Porter was wrong. Instead of rising, the river continued to fall. Porter began to move his fleet below to Alexandria. Later, with most of Porter's gunboats before Alexandria and the rest on their way, Banks was ready to begin his retreat to Alexandria.

Late in the afternoon of April 21, Banks was ready to leave for Alexandria. When his army was moving from Grand Ecore to go to Alexandria, they left a trail of destruction. On April 26, General McClernand arrived from Texas with most of the reinforcements requested by Banks.

The Federal army was convinced that its stay in Alexandria would be a long one. The troops were allowed to make themselves as comfortable as possible. The men busied themselves by building wooden tent floors, benches, and furniture. Regimental details were set to work enclosing Alexandria with a zigzag line of fortifications. Banks intended to make a protracted stand at Alexandria. He knew he could not advance again until there was a rise in the river. On May 9, Banks informed the Quartermaster that all transportation facilities would be needed to transport the material of the army and the property of the Government, and the freight of private individuals not connected with the army could not be taken under any circumstances whatever. The next day he ordered that all cotton on the transports would be taken off to make room for Government stores. Detachments were put to work immediately removing the cotton

and loading army stores aboard. The cotton was thrown in piles along the levee. With the fleet safely below the rapids, Banks issued orders for the army to move out early on May 13.

When the Federal army had returned to Alexandria, it was understood among some of the commanders that should it be necessary to withdraw, the town would be burned. Banks testified before the Joint Committee that he did not see any necessity for burning the town. For two days and nights before the evacuation, the town was protected by men of the 113th New York Regiment, who were relieved on the morning the army departed by a cavalry detachment of five hundred men.

To the music of the bands, the men stepped lively as they began their departure from Alexandria early on the morning of May 13. The route of march followed the river bank as far down as Fort DeRussy in order to cover the removal of the gunboats and transports. Despite Banks's orders, Alexandria was set on fire and, as the last of the army moved eastward, the city was wrapped in flames. Citizens claimed that Andrew J. Smith's men fired at a store on Front Street. A strong wind spread the flames rapidly from one building to another. Banks was still in Alexandria when the fire broke out. He later told the Joint Committee that the fire broke out in the attic of one of the buildings on the levee inhabited by either soldiers or refugees. He had ordered out the colored engineers and other troops to stop the fire, but because of the long drought, the buildings and trees were so dry that nothing could be done. A part of the fleet still remained at the docks. Admiral Porter, who had not yet departed, expressed sympathy for the suffering people but felt that the burning of Alexandria was a fit termination of the unfortunate Red River expedition.