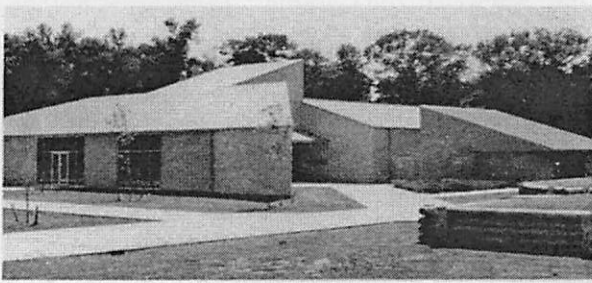
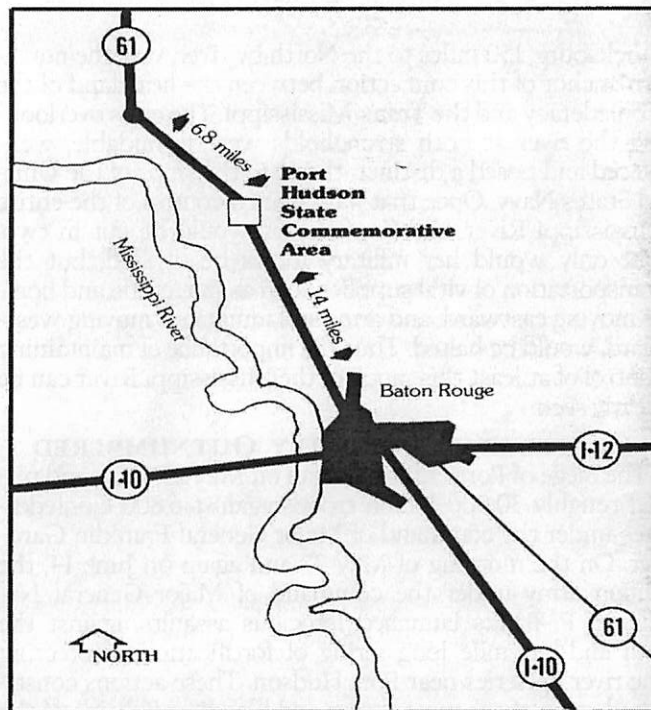


Cover Photo: 1st Sgt. Wm M. McCormick, mustered in as First Sergeant, Company D, 91st New York Infantry, September 30, 1861, wounded in action, May 25, 1863 before Port Hudson. Photograph courtesy National Archives and Records Administration, RG-98-5. PHSHS. File.



**Interpretive Center:** The Interpretive center includes a museum with displays of original Civil War artifacts and an audio-visual program that introduces visitors to the siege of Port Hudson and the state historic site.



Port Hudson State Historic Site is located on U.S. Highway 61 in East Feliciana Parish, 14 miles north of Baton Rouge. The 643 acre site encompasses a huge battlefield, museum, and an elevated boardwalk over the breastworks in the Fort Desperate area. Other facilities include a picnic area with pavilions and restrooms. School groups, seniors 62 and above, children 3 and under are FREE. Fees for those between the ages of 4 and 61 are \$4.00 per person.

Hours: 9 AM—5 PM. Open daily. Closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

**Port Hudson State Historic Site**  
 236 U.S. Hwy 61  
 Jackson, La. 70748

Phone: 888-677-3400 or 225-654-3775  
 Fax: 225-654-4413  
 e-mail: [porthudson@crt.la.gov](mailto:porthudson@crt.la.gov)



WELCOME TO

## Port Hudson Battlefield



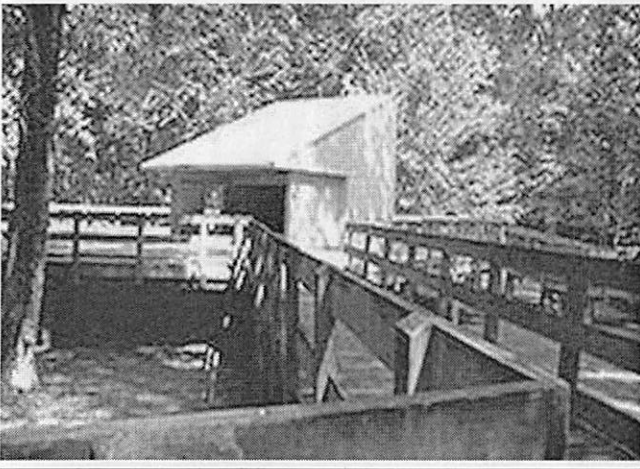
A LOUISIANA STATE  
 HISTORIC SITE

## THE LONGEST CIVIL WAR BATTLE WAS FOUGHT AT PORT HUDSON

Walk along the six miles of trails at Port Hudson State Historic Site, and you'll be back in the turbulent days of the War Between the States.

This area's geographic location as a potential military post had first been noted by the British a century before the American Civil War. Port Hudson was situated high on the bluffs overlooking a substantial bend in the Mississippi River that required ships passing downstream to reduce speed considerably. Fighting the current upstream was always a slow, painstaking process. As such, the strategic importance of Port Hudson was quickly grasped by the Confederate authorities following the fall of New Orleans. The terrain along the east bank of the Mississippi River abounded with natural ravines which could be easily adapted as a defensive perimeter, and earthworks joining these could be readily constructed so as to make the place virtually impregnable. It is this environment and setting which led to the siege of Port Hudson.

From the standpoint of military strategy, the Confederate fortifications at Port Hudson formed the southern end of the Confederate defenses along the Mississippi River.



**Confederate Stronghold** - The original breastworks in the Fort Desperate area are today in much the same condition as they were during the siege. A wooden boardwalk provides the visitor a complete view of the area where the fiercest fighting took place. An interpretive building is visible in the background.

Vicksburg, 150 miles to the North by river, was the northern anchor of this connection between the heartland of the Confederacy and the Trans-Mississippi. The guns overlooking the river at both strongholds were formidable, well-placed and posed a distinct threat to the ships of the United States Navy. Once that navy gained control of the entire Mississippi River, the Confederacy would be cut in two. Not only would her military forces be divided, but the transportation of vital supplies such as salt, cattle and horses moving eastward, and arms and munitions moving westward, would be halted. Thus the importance of maintaining control of at least this much of the Mississippi River can be clearly seen.

### CONFEDERATES GREATLY OUTNUMBERED

The Siege of Port Hudson began on May 23, 1863, and pitted roughly 30,000 Union troops against 6,800 Confederates under the command of Major General Franklin Gardner. On the morning of May 27 and again on June 14, the Union army under the command of Major General Nathaniel P. Banks launched ferocious assaults against the four-and-half-mile long string of fortifications protecting the river batteries near Port Hudson. These actions constituted some of the most severe and bloodiest fighting of the entire Civil War, and places such as Fort Desperate, the Priest Cap, Slaughter's Field and the Citadel became names forever etched in the pages of American Civil War history.

As the siege continued into July, the Confederates had nearly exhausted their ammunition and were reduced to eating mules, horses and rats. When word reached Gardner that Vicksburg had surrendered, he realized that his situation was hopeless and nothing could be gained by continuing the defense of Port Hudson. Surrender terms were negotiated, and on July 9, 1863, after forty-eight days and thousands of casualties, the Union army entered Port Hudson.

The surrender of the garrison was the final blow in a week of catastrophe for the Confederacy. On July 3 General Robert E. Lee's second invasion of the North was turned back at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The following day Vicksburg surrendered, and the Confederate drive through Arkansas was halted at Helena. Five days later came the surrender of Port Hudson, It was a week of crushing defeat, one from which the Confederacy would never recover.

### 48—DAY SIEGE

The importance of the siege of Port Hudson must not be overlooked. In Civil War history its significance lies in the fact that it was the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River, the control of which was one of the primary goals on both sides. Port Hudson was the longest siege in American military history. The garrison withstood the hardships for 48 consecutive days without relief from the

outside. Port Hudson is significant for another reason too, for it was here that black soldiers in the regular United States Army first participated in an assault.

### FORT DESPERATE

Determination and heroism aided by the natural terrain of Fort Desperate helped the Confederates maintain a strong defensive against Union troops. Official reports indicate that the area "Fort Desperate" was named by Confederate soldiers who fought from within this stronghold. The name was probably coined to reflect the dire and hopeless situation in which these men found themselves.

Some 292 officers and men under the command of Confederate Colonel Benjamin W. Johnson worked night and day under artillery and rifle fire to construct earthworks and secure Fort Desperate's three-quarter-mile long front in preparation for the first general assault. A tower view from above the fort today shows the problems Union soldiers encountered during the siege. Due to the layout of the works, which formed a large "U" with its base facing toward the northeast, there was rarely a time when the Confederate soldiers were able to concentrate on danger areas within a short time and assure that attacking troops received a maximum of small arms fire at virtually any point along the line.

The courage, determination and extraordinary heroism on the part of Fort Desperate soldiers will long be remembered as a classic episode in Civil War history.



**Living History Programs**—Port Hudson State Historic Site hosts several living history events each year. Visitors can watch authentically costumed personnel demonstrate reproduction Civil War weapons and equipment.