

**A BGES Field University Program**  
**The 1864 Red River Campaign**  
Presented by Brig. Gen. James Parker Hills, Ret.  
May 24-28, 2022; from Alexandria, Louisiana

As 1864 came into view, the Lincoln Administration decided to commission Gen. U.S. Grant as lieutenant general and commander-in-chief of all the United States armies with the mission to align them and end the Civil War before the national presidential election. Grant understood the need to continue neutralizing large segments of the rebellious south, simultaneously engaging the remaining rebel armies while destroying the myth and capabilities of the primary Confederate forces under Robert E. Lee. In Grant's mind, that required him to close down the Shenandoah Valley, threaten Richmond, close the internal lines of communication from Tennessee through southwestern Virginia, slice through Georgia, and close the southern ports of Mobile and Wilmington.

Mobile was of a particular interest to Grant, who had, along with Adm. David G. Farragut, wanted to close the port in 1863. Opportunity did not present itself, and with Lincoln's focus on reconstructing one or more southern states to demonstrate the success of the war effort, Federal forces remained a robust presence in Louisiana. So while Grant preferred a move against Mobile in early 1864, Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Banks sought the opportunity to move inland in Louisiana and pacify the countryside while removing thousands of bails of cotton from that economically rich region. A successful expedition might give Lincoln the reconstructed state he needed to catapult his campaign to victory, so while Grant plotted a larger plan, Banks had an independent shot to hit his own lick for victory.

So now we return to Cajun country for a second serving of the actions and plans of General Banks. Along the way, we will see shimmering and wandering bayous, ancient live oaks bearded with Spanish moss, war-scarred antebellum mansions, and cypress swamps with snow-white egrets and dark, gnarly alligators. You really don't want to miss this one, even if you previously did our other Red River programs. This is a new tour.

**Tuesday, May 24, 2022**

6:30 PM. Check into the headquarters hotel in Alexandria. We will open the program with a working supper that includes another of Parker Hills' brand-new-for-BGES PowerPoint lectures, "The Red River Campaign."

**Wednesday, May 25, 2022**

8 AM: General Banks has been in command since December 1862, and he controls the region between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. After the opening of the Mississippi River, the political talents of the general became more important. Now eight months later, with the 1864 campaigning season opening, Banks in coordination with the commander of inland naval forces, Adm. David D. Porter, plotted a move up the Red River toward the Confederates far-western Louisiana capital in Shreveport.

We will depart Alexandria en route to the lovely city of Franklin, where Union forces would assemble at Fort Bisland and where we will pick up Banks XIII and XIX Corps and a division of Federal cavalry. Their March 1864 departures would stage the consolidated Federal forces at Alexandria some 160 miles away, where they would be joined on the Red River by a number of Federal naval gunboats and transports. As we return to Alexandria during this day, you will get an opportunity to examine a region that has not changed a great deal in the last 158 years. You will see and eat at Avery Island, a critical salt mine moving through near Bayou Teche through New Iberia, Lafayette, and Opelousas. You will also see the final resting places of Port Hudson commander Franklin Gardner and the much lamented Alfred Mouton, a Confederate officer of much consequence who is killed in this campaign. The photo ops are truly stunning.

Lunch is included.

### **Thursday, May 26, 2022**

8 AM. Today we move out early, with Banks' assembled forces. What makes this program unique is that we have finally found an effective way to present a campaign that covers the same territory going and coming. Most Red River programs skip back and forth across the river, leaving attendees confused as to the sequence of the campaign—we promise not to do that to you. You will follow the conduct of this campaign even if it means cross the same ground heading in opposite directions over these next three days.

Confederate forces under Richard Taylor were well aware that the Federal forces were coming and, while the bulk of their combat power was bled off to the east side of the Mississippi, Taylor was seasoned and capable, but Banks had an overwhelming superiority in numbers. This was shored up by his appropriation of two U.S. Corps under Maj. Gen. A.J. "Whiskey" Smith. Within the first few days, as the Banks' Federals approach Grand Ecore, one of Smith's divisions under Joseph Mower, a fine combat officer, captures the bulk of the 2nd Louisiana Cavalry and their four-gun battery. Ten days later, Banks arrives at Grand Ecore, and a day later, his naval support under Porter arrives. Porter has a formidable force of ironclads, monitors, tinclads, and timberclads, with a robust number of transports and tugs. It is a risky maneuver.

Soon Banks departs Grand Ecore and, being unaware of a river road separating him from his naval escort, he mismanages his march, which strings his men out by the time they approach Shreveport. At Wilson's Farm, Banks' cavalry again makes contact with Confederate cavalry. Little does he suspect he will run into a full-throated rebel resistance at Mansfield, in which Taylor actually achieves a numerical superiority on the field.

Our afternoon will track the flow of that battle on April 8. Banks has not prepared for action, and by the afternoon Taylor seizes the initiative and sweeps aside two Federal lines, but he fails to achieve a complete route when the third line under the command of General Emory holds. That night the Federals fall back.

The next day, Taylor orders cavalry under the command of Gen. Tom Green forward, and they meet Banks in line of battle near Pleasant Hill. Taylor elects to hold for following infantry. The attack around 5 PM is bloody on both sides, but the Federals hold. Banks has had enough; he is not going farther. Shreveport is safe, and now he must withdraw. So, too, will we return to Alexandria and our hotel.

Lunch is included.

### **Friday, May 27, 2022**

8 AM. Banks' worst days are yet in front of him. We leave the hotel at 8 AM en route to Banks' retreat route. Our first stop will be at Blair's Landing, where an April 12 rearguard action results in the death of the gallant Confederate commander Tom Green near Coushatta, Louisiana. Green had run into a cache of damaged naval boats escorted by Kilby Smith's XVII Corps division. Smith is successful in his defense, and the Confederates are beaten back. We then slide over to Natchitoches (pronounced nack-a-dejz) to pick up Banks' retreat route along Cane River.

It is now lunchtime, and you will have the chance for a very local and famous meal: the Natchitoches meat pie, at Lasyone's Meat Pie Restaurant. Afterward, you can do some celebrity-star-watching while en route to Oakland Plantation. The house may seem familiar—it was featured in John Wayne's famous movie *The Horse Soldiers*. For us, it is Banks' headquarters for two nights, and we will then continue on Banks' retreat route, passing the site of Magnolia Plantation, which was burned during the retreat.

Monet's Ferry is the site of our next engagement on April 23. Here, Taylor's men not only missed a chance to attack and hurt Banks' force badly; they held a river crossing without securing their flanks and were flanked, attacked in their rear, and forced to withdraw. Banks' men then laid pontoons and crossed at leisure.

From here, it is a short ride back to Alexandria, but we have a treat after hours. Around 6 PM, we will gather again for dinner at the locally famous Cane River Commissary. You will be back in your hotel by 9 PM.

Lunch and dinner are included.

### **Saturday, May 28, 2022**

8 AM. We have been patient, and now we get the payoff. We start in Alexandria at 8 AM, where we will head to a site of local interest in Pineville before visiting the

Alexandria National Cemetery to honor war veterans that rarely get visitors. Our real reason, though, is to present the story of the brown water navy at Alexandria. Porter had carelessly allowed his fleet to head upriver, and the Confederates had controlled the river and took advantage of a dry period to lower the river and entrap the valuable Federal fleet above the town. The siege of Alexander might have been a disaster for Banks and Porter, but for the ingenuity of a Federal engineer—Bailey's Dams created a rise in the river, and a risky but feasible escape for Porter's endangered fleet. With the fleet freed, so, too, was Banks, and they continued back toward Baton Rouge. We will visit the Forts Bulow and Randolph sites and visitor center before heading to Kent Plantation and onward to a Louisiana BBQ lunch. After lunch, we will briefly discuss a Confederate attack on the Federals at Oakland Plantation.

Our retreat continues to Fort DeRussy, which had seen a brief engagement during the earlier part of the campaign more than two months before. We continue to egress and witness the departure of Admiral Porter and his fleet at Marksville. Our program finishes with a flourish as we discuss the "Battle" of Mansura and the "Battle" of Yellow Bayou. Banks had escaped and crossed the Atchafalaya River. The tour ends at Banks' White Hall Plantation headquarters, where we will wrap the program and head back to our Alexandria hotel. You will be dismissed between 5:30 and 6 PM.

Lunch is included.

### **About the Faculty:**

**Parker Hills** is the nation's leading historian on the Vicksburg Campaign. He has a well-earned reputation for the highest standards of preparation on tours and the exceptional educational value of his content. Being with Hills is like taking a senior military service school course in which you surely will leave with far more knowledge than when you arrived. Parker is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College, and he is in high demand from businesses and military organizations that want his leadership training. Hills is the founder of BattleFocus and is a retired general officer who served on both active duty as a battery commander in Korea, and as an aide to General of the Army Omar Bradley. He was the Director of Public Affairs for the Mississippi National Guard, and he founded the Regional Counter Drug Training Academy in Meridian, Mississippi. Parker is the coauthor of *Receding Tide: Vicksburg and Gettysburg, The Campaigns that Changed the Civil War*. Parker also has published the *Vicksburg Campaign Driving Guide* and *The Art of Commemoration*—a book that reveals the symbolism and beauty of the commemorative memorialization at the Vicksburg NMP. He also is the driving force for Civil War preservation in the state of Mississippi, and largely through his efforts the Raymond Battlefield Park exists. Given this outstanding résumé, his programs cost a little more, but you quickly will see they are well worth it.

### **Hotel Information:**

Our headquarters hotel is the Courtyard by Marriott, 3830 Alexandria Mall Drive, Alexandria, LA 71301 (tel 318-445-2415). The rate is \$109 per night plus tax. Ask for

the Blue and Gray Education block. You may also use [this link](#) to make your reservations directly and online. The rate goes away on May 10, 2022.

**Transportation:**

The servicing airport is Alexandria (AEX), which is 8 miles from the hotel. All three major airlines service the area. There is no free airport shuttle. This is a program where driving is a great option.

**Recommended Reading:**

You will be provided with a reading book and maps upon arrival. The following books are suggested to enhance your readiness for the program. Amazon.com has a program to support non-profits IF YOU SIGN UP to support Blue and Gray Education Society (EIN 54-1720582) at AmazonSmile. When you sign up there rather than the normal Amazon site, one-half of one percent of your purchase price will be provided to BGES as a donation from Amazon. This will apply not only to this purchase but others you may make at other times. Thank you.

Thomas Ayers: [\*Dark and Bloody Ground: The Battle of Mansfield and the Forgotten Civil War in Louisiana\*](#)

James Hollandsworth: [\*Pretense of Glory: The Life of General Nathaniel P. Banks\*](#)

Ludwell H. Johnson: [\*Red River Campaign: Politics and Cotton in the Civil War\*](#)

Gary Joiner: [\*The Red River Campaign: The Union's Final Attempt to Invade Texas\*](#)

Richard Taylor: [\*Destruction and Reconstruction\*](#)

John D. Winters & T. Harry Williams: [\*The Civil War in Louisiana\*](#)

Registration Form  
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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Registration includes four lunches, a working dinner, a group dinner and a PowerPoint presentation, a map packet, the academic program, support of a professional historian, a tour director, park admission, and transportation. We will also provide snacks and bottled drinks.

\_\_\_\_\_ Registration \$900

\_\_\_\_\_ Current BGES member \$850

\_\_\_\_\_ I am not a member but would like to join so that I can get the member's rate; or I am a member who is past-due to renew.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please accept my donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_ (must be \$75 or more, which is tax-deductible).

\_\_\_\_\_ I am sending a deposit of \$300 per person, plus full payment for any books and or memberships. Total enclosed is \$ \_\_\_\_\_. I will pay the balance due before the event.

\_\_\_\_\_ Check enclosed.

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Mail to BGES Seminars, P.O. Box 1176, Chatham, VA 24531; or fax credit card registrations to 434-432-0596. You may also register online at [www.blueandgrayeducation.org](http://www.blueandgrayeducation.org).