

Three Important Events in the Confederacy

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During the week of April 6 through April 12, 1864, three major historical events took place in the American South. A new state constitution was drafted in Louisiana which abolished slavery, the battle of Sabine Crossroads was fought and Fort Pillow, in Tennessee, was captured.

For the first time, the Louisiana Convention of 1865 assured freedom of slaves – only being implemented to the 13 parishes which the Union controlled during the war. Black men who fought for the Union, who were literate or owned property, were given voting rights by the state legislature. Ultimately, the legislature implemented the system for whites only, but the new constitution declared a free public school system for all children ages six to eighteen years old. Sessions came to a close on July 23, 1864.

Near Mansfield Louisiana, Confederate General Richard Taylor formed a defensive line at De Soto Parish to halt Union General Nathaniel Banks' movement towards Shreveport. Low water levels stopped Union gunboats at Grand Ecore from assisting Banks in any enemy contact he would encounter. In the late afternoon, Taylor's troops made contact with Banks and his men at Sabine Crossroads. Several small skirmishes broke out. Shortly a full-scale shooting match was on. Banks' men were forced back suffering heavy casualties. Outflanked on both sides, the Federals moved to Pleasant Grove where they stood hard until the rebel attack worn out. Sabine Crossroads was a decisive Confederate victory. Suffering 113 dead and 2,122 wounded, captured or missing, Banks' campaign along the Red River was stopped.

Fort Pillow, on the Mississippi, was held by 557 Federal troops, including 262 Negro soldiers. Gen. Forrest, on his active raid against important Federal communications and posts in

West Kentucky and Tennessee, sent 1500 men against Fort Pillow. Forrest demanded surrender of the fort but Maj. William F. Bradford refused and Forrest's Confederates attacked. With little difficulty they poured into the large earthwork on the bluff. According to Forrest and other Southern sources, the Federal casualties of about 231 killed, 100 wounded, and 226 captured or missing resulted from fighting before surrender. According to extensive testimony taken afterward by the Federals, the Union troops surrendered almost at once and the soldiers were shot down afterward in what amounted to a "massacre," especially of the Negroes. Confederate losses were put at 14 killed and 86 wounded. Later the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War heard purported evidence of numerous atrocities including the killing of many of the garrison after the surrender. Confederate military and civil authorities hotly denied these charges and called them hysterical propaganda. Perhaps a reasonable conclusion is that much confusion existed during the attack and that there were some unnecessary acts of violence by the Confederates, but that the majority of the casualties were the result of legitimate, though hardly humane, warfare. Nevertheless, "Fort Pillow" echoed infamously throughout the war and long remained an emotional issue.