

A Very Bad Week for Union Forces

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The week of April 20 through 26 was marked by a loss of Federal control of a crucial city in North Carolina. The Confederates successfully captured Plymouth, North Carolina, resulting in a devastating loss of 2800 men for Federal forces. In addition, Northern armies lost a large garrison of supplies. This loss at Plymouth would encourage Federal forces to evacuate other areas of North Carolina, such as Washington. By the end of this week, Washington would be occupied by the Confederates. At the beginning of the week, fighting along the Red River intensified at Natchitoches, Louisiana.

The Red River campaign was an ambitious Union plan designed by Major U.S. General Henry Halleck which aimed to use two pincer forces to destroy Confederate forces under the control of Lieutenant General Richard Taylor, as well as capture a significant amount of Confederate resources in the area. However, by this time the Red River campaign was turning out to be an absolute disaster. By April 21st, Union forces were retreating from Grand Ecore, Louisiana towards Alexandria. Federal forces under the command of Union Maj. Gen. Nathaniel T. Banks had fought a battle days before in which there were no victory for either side. Despite this, Banks retreated. Because of this retreat, Confederate Lieutenant General Richard Taylor failed to launch any major offensive against the retreating Federals.

The next day wasn't marked by any major developments in the Red River Campaign despite continued Confederate harassment of Union forces along the river.

On April 22nd, the motto that United States citizens see on the penny today, "In God We Trust", was printed onto coins under an act of the Union Congress. President Davis of the

Confederate States also wrote a letter to Confederate Lieutenant General Polk to ensure that any Black Union soldiers captured were returned to their previous owners if it were discovered that they were runaway slaves.

Fighting ensued northwards in Arkansas at Camden and Swan Lake. The Camden Campaign, under the command of Union Maj. General Frederick Steele, was the other part of the pincer of the Red River campaign. Steele's major objective was to capture Camden and then link up with Nathaniel Banks' forces and capture Shreveport, Louisiana. However, bad weather, as well as continued Confederate harassment, proved to be too costly for Steele's forces. On April 23, the same day that Confederate harassment strengthened around Camden, a significant battle at Monett's Ferry occurred.

This fighting continued with no significant development until April 25, when a battle at Marks' Mill in Arkansas resulted in the capture of 2,000 Union troops under the command of Frederick Steele. By this time most of the retreating forces and gunboats were still on their way. On April 26th Steele decided it would be prudent to retreat towards Little Rock and disengage the Camden Expedition proving to be disastrous. At the same time, Union forces began their evacuation of Washington, North Carolina following the fall of Plymouth. This retreat would be completed by April 30th. April 26 also saw another devastating moment for the Union, when the falling waters of the Red River trapped Banks' retreating Union gunboats above Alexandria, and forced them to engage with onshore Confederates. These gunboats suffered great damage. The Red River and Camden campaigns that had defined this week ended as dismal failures, with no serious objectives achieved for the Union forces.