



# Red River Campaign of 1864 and the Loss by the Confederacy of the Civil War

*Michael J. Forsyth*

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The Union Army's Red River Campaign began on March 12, 1864, with a two-pronged attack aimed at gaining control of Shreveport, Louisiana. The Union's main effort came up from Berwick Bay via the Red River, while a supporting force moved south from Little Rock, Arkansas. It lasted until May 22, 1864, when, after suffering significant casualties, the Union army retreated back to Simmesport, Louisiana. The campaign was an attempt to prevent Confederate alliance with the French in Mexico, deny supplies to Confederate forces, and secure vast quantities of Louisiana and Texas cotton for Northern mills. With this examination of Confederate leadership and how it affected the Red River Campaign, the author argues against the standard assumption that the campaign had no major effect on the outcome of the war. In fact, the South had--and lost--an excellent opportunity to inflict a decisive defeat that might have changed the course of history. With this campaign as an ideal example, the politics of military decision-making in general are also analyzed.

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