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The Battle of Baton Rouge

Thomas H. Richey

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Driving south down I-110 from the Baton Rouge airport you won't know it but you will be passing the field of a battle fought long ago, August 5th, 1862. As you near the North 22nd Street Exit get ready for a trip through history. At the curve at Memorial Stadium look carefully and you may see the foggy outlines of Lieutenant Fountleroy barking orders as he unlimbers his Confederate cannon. In the curve on the left the white triangles you see are the tents of the 14th Maine Infantry Regiment. You are now headed straight toward the capitol building. See fresh earthworks thrown up around the Indian mound. Look! In front of the Governor's Mansion are two Howitzers and nervous infantry of the 4th Wisconsin and the 9th Connecticut. They are waiting for battle and listening carefully for the sound of the long roll. At your speed you are now at North Street. In the far distance to your left are nine cannon lined up wheel to wheel at the old Orphanage. Out of the corner of your right eye you can see something rising over the levee and heading over your head. These are huge eleven-inch cannon balls from the ironclad ram U.S.S. Essex. They are exploding around North 22nd Street. Stay off the bridge. Keep straight. Slow down. Look to your right. You may be able to see flags waving off the masts of Union gunboats on the river. One mile to your left, in a deteriorating neighborhood, a battle is raging. Let down your window and listen to the rumble of Yankee cannon. Hear the sharp barking of Rebel cannon. The sound is different because they are pointed at you! At 60 mph history will fly by you. Look left down Government Street and see retreating Yankees running toward you. When you get to City Park Lakes look to your left and you may see Colonel H. W. Allen shot off his horse by a blast of canister. Near Perkins road there are wagons filled with wounded Rebels headed you way! In the last three minutes you have passed a long ago battleground. Slow down, take a deep breath, and read about the Battle of Baton Rouge.

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