



Army Heritage Center
Foundation
*Telling the Army Story...
one Soldier at a time*

Voices of the Past

CIVIL WAR

Highlights:

- Over 60,000 Union and Confederate troops fought at Bull Run, the first major battle in the Civil War.
- Before the battle many people believed the war would be short.
- After the battle the Union Army withdrew in disorder, but the Confederates were too battered to follow. Both sides realized that the war would be long and difficult.

Note: *In the North the two battles fought in the vicinity of Bull Run were known as the 1st and 2nd Battles of Bull Run. In the South they were called the 1st and 2nd Battles of Manassas. Officially the US Army designates the actions that occurred in the vicinity of Bull Run on 16 - 22 July, 1861 as the Bull Run Campaign, whereas the actions that occurred in the same vicinity on 7 August - 2 September 1862 are designated as the Manassas Campaign.*

Read more at
www.armyheritage.org

Questions or
comments please
contact:
info@armyheritage.org

Part of the Army Heritage Center Foundation's Educational Series

Setting the Stage: The Battle of Bull Run

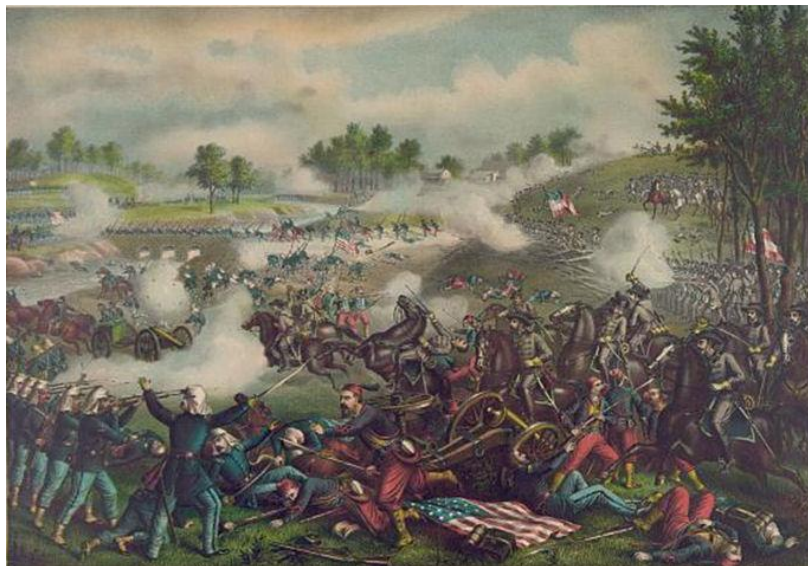
(Virginia, 1861) Cheers rang out in the streets of Washington on July 16, 1861 as Gen. Irvin McDowell's army, 35,000 strong, marched out to begin the long-awaited campaign to capture Richmond and end the war. It was an army of green recruits, few of whom had the faintest idea of the magnitude of the task facing them. But their swaggering gait showed that none doubted the outcome. As excitement spread, many citizens and congressman with wine and picnic baskets followed the army into the field to watch what all expected would be a colorful show.

These troops were 90-day volunteers summoned by President Abraham Lincoln after the startling news of Fort Sumter burst over the nation in April 1861. Called from shops and farms, they had little knowledge of what war would mean. The first day's march covered only five miles, as many

straggled to pick blackberries or fill canteens.

McDowell's lumbering columns were headed for the vital railroad junction at Manassas. Here the Orange and Alexandria Railroad met the Manassas Gap Railroad, which led west to the Shenandoah Valley. If McDowell could seize this junction, he would stand astride the best overland approach to the Confederate capital.

On July 18 McDowell's army reached Centreville. Five miles ahead a small meandering stream named Bull Run crossed the route of the Union advance, and there guarding the fords from Union Mills to the Stone Bridge waited 22,000 Southern troops under the command of Gen. Pierre G.T. Beauregard. McDowell first attempted to move toward the Confederate right flank, but his troops were checked at Blackburn's Ford. He then spent the



Battle of Bull Run. Photo Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Brigadier General P.G.T. Beauregard, C.S.A. Photo Courtesy of USAHEC, MASS-MOLLUS Collection.



Maj. General Irvin McDowell held rank of Brigadier General during battle. Photo Courtesy of USAHEC, MASS-MOLLUS Collection.

next two days scouting the Southern left flank. In the meantime, Beauregard asked the Confederate government at Richmond for help. Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, stationed in the Shenandoah Valley with 10,000 Confederate troops, was ordered to support Beauregard if possible. Johnston gave an opposing Union army the slip and, employing the Manassas Gap Railroad, started his brigades toward Manassas Junction. Most of Johnston's troops arrived at the junction on July 20 and 21, some marching directly into battle.

On the morning of July 21, McDowell sent his attack columns in a long march north towards Sudley Springs Ford. This route took the Federals around the Confederate left. To distract the Southerners, McDowell ordered a diversionary attack where the Warrenton Turnpike crossed Bull Run at the Stone Bridge. At 5:30a.m. the deep-throated roar of a 30-pounder Parrott rifle shattered the morning calm, and signaled the start of the battle.

McDowell's new plan depended on speed and surprise, both difficult with inexperienced troops. Valuable time was lost as the men stumbled through the darkness along narrow roads. Confederate Col. Nathan Evans,

commanding at the Stone Bridge, soon realized that the attack on his front was only a diversion. Leaving a small force to hold the bridge, Evans rushed the remainder of his command to Matthews Hill in time to check McDowell's lead unit. But Evans' force was too small to hold back the Federals for long.

Soon brigades under Barnard Bee and Francis Bartow marched to Evans' assistance. But even with these reinforcements, the thin gray line collapsed and Southerners fled in disorder toward Henry Hill. Attempting to rally his men, Bee used Gen. Thomas J. Jackson's newly arrived brigade as an anchor. Pointing to Jackson, Bee shouted, "There stands Jackson like a stone wall! Rally behind the Virginians!" Generals Johnston and Beauregard then arrived on Henry Hill, where they assisted in rallying shattered brigades and redeploying fresh units that were marching to the point of danger.

About noon, the Federals stopped their advance to reorganize for a new attack. The lull lasted for about an hour, giving the Confederates enough time to reform their lines. Then the fighting resumed, each side trying to force the other off Henry Hill. The battle continued until just after 4 p.m.,



Stone Bridge in ruins. Photo Courtesy of USAHEC, MASS-MOLLUS Collection.

Setting the Stage: The Battle of Bull Run

when fresh Southern units crashed into the Union right flank on Chinn Ridge, causing McDowell's tired and discouraged soldiers to withdraw.

At first the withdrawal was orderly. Screened by the regulars, the three-month volunteers retired across Bull Run, where they found the road to Washington jammed with the carriages of congressmen and others who had driven out to Centreville to watch the fight. Panic now seized many of the soldiers and the retreat became a rout. The Confederates, though bolstered by the arrival of President Jefferson Davis on the field just as the battle was ending, were too disorganized to follow up on their success. Daybreak on July 22 found the defeated Union army back behind the bristling defenses of Washington.

Source

Article Courtesy of the National Park Service

<http://www.nps.gov/mana/historyculture/first-manassas.htm>.

"Capt. Chamberlain challenged them three times "what troops are those" then he said if you don't answer I shall fire then we made Ready aim + fired then laid down on ground + the enemy fired + bullets whizzed over our heads..."

- Charles Perkins describing Bull Run on July 21st, 1861



The carnage of battle is apparent at this railroad bridge near Blackburn's Ford. Photo Courtesy of the USAHEC, MASS-MOLLUS Collection.

WWW.ARMYHERITAGE.ORG