***Confederate Triumph***

***The First Battle of Bull Run***

**Anaiah Cornejo**

**Junior Division**

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**“I yield to no man in sympathy for the gallant men under my command; but I am obliged to sweat them tonight, so that I may save their blood tomorrow.”**

***– General Thomas Stonewall Jackson[[1]](#footnote-0)***

The First Battle of Bull Run, as known by the Union army, or the Battle of Manassas, as known by the Confederate army, was a defining point in our history as the United States of America. It marked the beginning of the Civil War, the outcome of which would dictate whether our country would break into two countries divided by the Mason-Dixon line that had separated the free-soil states north of the line from the slave states south of the line prior to the Civil War, or survive as a unified nation and bring an end to human slavery.[[2]](#footnote-1) Bull Run was at an important railroad intersection in Manassas Junction, Virginia.[[3]](#footnote-2) The First Battle of Bull Run was the first major battle of the Civil War. The Civil War is a tragic yet triumphant event that almost every American is familiar with. The Union, the Northern states, and the Confederate, the Southern states, fought over the issue of slavery and states’ rights. Both sides were trying to quickly end the Civil War after a Confederate attack on the Union held Fort Sumter in South Carolina. The First Battle of Bull Run, while a Confederate victory, was the beginning of the end of slavery in the United States. The Union used the defeat as a lesson, learned from their mistakes, and ultimately turned this tragic defeat into a triumph for this country and a beginning of the process of providing equality to every American.

In July of 1861, about two months after Fort Sumter, a Union fort that the Confederates attacked,[[4]](#footnote-3) the press and public were eager for the Union to make their move. The Northern public wanted Union troops to advance on Richmond, Virginia, to bring an early end to the Civil War, which had been started when the Confederate attacked Fort Sumter.[[5]](#footnote-4) Many men volunteered, expecting a quick war.[[6]](#footnote-5) Very few people predicted a long and grueling war.[[7]](#footnote-6) The Union army and all of its supporters were not prepared for the outcome they faced at the First Battle of Bull Run.



Union General Irvin McDowell, who was appointed by President Abraham Lincoln, was being harassed by impatient citizens and politicians, but Gen. McDowell was more concerned about his troops’ capability.[[8]](#footnote-7) He asked for a postponement of the advancement so he could train his ill-prepared men.[[9]](#footnote-8) President Lincoln refused the request and ordered McDowell to continue on, assuring him that the Confederate army was also made up of green[[10]](#footnote-9) or untrained men.[[11]](#footnote-10) President Lincoln might have made that choice because he was also under pressure to stop the southern rebellion and reunite the country.[[12]](#footnote-11)

On July 16, 1861,[[13]](#footnote-12) untrained and unprepared, the Union troops marched to Bull Run, which was located in Prince William County, Virginia[[14]](#footnote-13). Gen. McDowell chose Bull Run because the Union could block the Confederate Army from getting food, ammunition, and soldiers. He also thought that they could use the railroad to ship in supplies and troops.[[15]](#footnote-14) Unfortunately for the Union, the Confederates were also aware of the railroad and Confederate General Pierre G. T. Beauregard already had troops stationed there.[[16]](#footnote-15)

Gen. McDowell had about 35,000 men in total,[[17]](#footnote-16) many of whom were farmers and merchants, and were highly untrained.[[18]](#footnote-17) McDowell’s plan was to advance in three columns, then attack the Confederate troops with two columns while the third column went around the Confederate’s right flank, cutting off the railroad and threatening the rear of the army.[[19]](#footnote-18) McDowell thought that the Confederates would choose to abandon Manassas Junction and retreat to Rappahannock River, which was the next defensible line in Virginia.[[20]](#footnote-19) Unfortunately, the battle didn’t go as McDowell had planned.

On July 17, 1861,[[21]](#footnote-20) Gen. McDowell sent a small force to test the Confederate army.[[22]](#footnote-21) A brief battle occurred with few casualties.[[23]](#footnote-22) The next day, Gen. McDowell reduced his army from about 35,000 men to 30,000 men.[[24]](#footnote-23) He sent Union Brig. Gen. Theodore Runyon with 5,000 of the troops he cut to protect the rear of the army.[[25]](#footnote-24) Later that same day, McDowell tested another part of the Confederate line at Blackburn’s Ford.[[26]](#footnote-25) “Suddenly there comes a volley from beneath the green foliage along the winding stream, and the air is thick with leaden rain,” said Charles Coffin, a Boston newsman.[[27]](#footnote-26) William T. Sherman, a Union colonel, was pushing his brigade forward and was shocked by the scene.[[28]](#footnote-27) “For the first time in my life I saw cannonballs strike men and crash through the trees and saplings above and around us.” he reported.[[29]](#footnote-28) McDowell scouted the area for two more days before ultimately striking.[[30]](#footnote-29)

The actual battle began on July 21, 1861.[[31]](#footnote-30) Many people came to watch, from politicians and journalists to curiosity seekers and merchants.[[32]](#footnote-31) This was the most excitement the citizens had in eighty years.[[33]](#footnote-32) A Union army captain said, “They came in all manner of ways, some in stylish carriages, others in city hacks, and still others in buggies, on horseback and even on foot.”[[34]](#footnote-33) Many of them carried picnic baskets and spy glasses.[[35]](#footnote-34) The merchants there were selling pies and snacks.[[36]](#footnote-35) There were also members of the Congress who watched the battle, and at the end of it complained about poor Union leadership.[[37]](#footnote-36) The choice to go and watch the battle that day reflects how little regard the citizens had for human life. In doing so they made a spectacle of death, treating it as nothing more than a common sideshows for personal entertainment. These entertainment seekers saw much more than they had bargained for.

Unbeknownst to Gen. McDowell, Gen. Beauregard had learned about the Union plan from spies in Washington,[[38]](#footnote-37) allowing him to prepare for the Union attack. Gen. Beauregard later wrote about the beginning of the battle:

The political hostiles of a generation were now face to face with weapons instead of words. Defeat to either side would be a deep mortification, but defeat to the South must turn its claim of independence into an empty vaunt… Sunday, July 21st, bearing the fate of the newborn Confederacy, broke brightly over the fields and woods that held the hostile forces… We found the commanders resolutely stemming the further flight of the routed forces, but vainly endeavoring to restore order, and our own efforts were as futile. Every segment of line we succeeded in forming was again dissolved while another was being formed; more than two thousand men were shouting… their voices mingling with the noise of the shells hurtling through the trees overhead, and all word of command drowned in the confusion and uproar.[[39]](#footnote-38)

Early that morning McDowell’s forces attacked the Confederate Army.[[40]](#footnote-39) The fighting went on throughout the morning and the South[[41]](#footnote-40) was being driven back.[[42]](#footnote-41) One of the Confederate soldiers recalled the battle; “It was a whirlwind of bullets,” he said, “ Our men fell constantly. The deadly missives rained like hail among the boughs and trees.”[[43]](#footnote-42)

Confederate reinforcements had not yet arrived and it seemed like the North[[44]](#footnote-43) might win, even with all the delays[[45]](#footnote-44). Gen. McDowell could be heard shouting, “Victory! The day is ours!”[[46]](#footnote-45) However, the Union did not press their advantage, thus letting Confederate reinforcements arrive,[[47]](#footnote-46) and Gen. McDowell’s plans and troops began to falter and fail because of incomplete staffwork and an overall lack of experience.[[48]](#footnote-47)

It was in the afternoon when Confederate reinforcements finally arrived with Confederate Gen. Thomas Jackson.[[49]](#footnote-48) When Jackson got there, he organized a defense on Henry Hill[[50]](#footnote-49), where the Confederates had retreated to.[[51]](#footnote-50) He played a different strategy and told his men to wait and let the Union come to them.[[52]](#footnote-51) The fiercest fighting was at Henry Hill.[[53]](#footnote-52) The Confederates broke through the Union flank while Jackson stood his ground earning his famous nickname “Stonewall Jackson.”[[54]](#footnote-53) The Confederate counter attack caused the Union troops to withdraw, but they continued to fight.[[55]](#footnote-54) Unfortunately, the Union Army had spent their strength executing inadequate assaults on a Confederate Army that was more prepared than the Union had anticipated.[[56]](#footnote-55)

As the battle continued, both sides repeated attacks and counter attacks and shot artillery from close range.[[57]](#footnote-56) However, both the Confederate and the Union troops were disorganized, and they wore the same color uniforms, so the men got confused and started firing at one another not knowing if it was their neighbor or enemy.[[58]](#footnote-57) One man described himself as “stepping over dead men and horses and in direct range of those belching cannons.”[[59]](#footnote-58)

Even in their disorganization, the Confederates made good use of the railroad,[[60]](#footnote-59) and at around four in the afternoon more Confederate reinforcements arrived. They moved to the left of the established Confederate line and a rebel cry rose from them while they charged their enemy.[[61]](#footnote-60) Their advance forced the Union’s retreat across Bull Run.[[62]](#footnote-61) When the Union retreated, civilians ran with them.[[63]](#footnote-62) Fear was amidst them all.[[64]](#footnote-63) Later, Corporal Samuel J. English, a Union fighter, described the retreat in his diary:

A perfect hail storm of bullets, round shot and shell was poured upon us tearing through our ranks and scattering death and confusion everywhere… As I emerged from the woods I saw a bombshell strike a man in the breast and literally tear him to pieces… As we had nothing but infantry to fight against their batteries, the command was given to retreat… As we gained the cover of the woods the stampede became even more frightful, for the baggage wagons and ambulances became entangled with the artillery and rendered the scene even more dreadful than the battle, while the plunging of the horses broke the lines of our infantry, and prevented any successful formation… As we neared the bridge the rebels opened a very destructive fire upon us, mowing down our men like grass, and caused even greater confusion than before…[[65]](#footnote-64)

It was a great Confederate triumph, winning the the first major battle of the Civil War, but their inexperience did not serve them well. The Southern[[66]](#footnote-65) troops did not invade Washington D.C. when they had the chance because they were too tired.[[67]](#footnote-66) This inaction ultimately led to their downfall. The North was able to regroup, better prepare, and better plan, which ultimately allowed them to win the Civil War .

Aside from the Union losing the battle, the First Battle of Bull Run had a devastatingly high number of human casualties. The Union had 480 men killed, 1,000 wounded, and 1,200 missing.[[68]](#footnote-67) This resulted in about 2,680 casualties.[[69]](#footnote-68) The Confederates had 390 soldiers killed, 1,600 wounded, and around a dozen missing.[[70]](#footnote-69) This resulted in about 2,000 casualties. This battle also took the first civilian life. Judith Henry was 84 years old and bedridden. She had refused to leave her home during the battle. Confederate soldiers were using this house as cover and, not realizing that people were inside, Confederate soldier James Ricketts opened fire on it. Also in the house were Judith’s children, Ellen and John, and her slave Lucy. They were all injured, but Judith was the only one killed.[[71]](#footnote-70) In the midst of this tragedy though, was the spark of triumph the Union needed to win the war and bring an end to slavery and the southern states’ succession.

Unfortunately, this battle was needed to make people truly appreciate the value of human rights.[[72]](#footnote-71) The First Battle of Bull Run was the beginning of the end of slavery. The Confederate may have won this battle, but the lessons learned would give the Union the tools they needed to go on and win the war. The Union didn’t give up, even though they lost the battle, because the Union believed the war was worth fighting for. This ultimate triumph, winning the Civil War, put our country on the track to recognizing human rights and equality, which is a battle always worth fighting for.

**Annotated Bibliography**

**Primary Sources**

Andrews, Evan. “Remembering the First Battle of Bull Run.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 21 July 2016, www.history.com/news/remembering-the-first-battle-of-bull-run.

This website is saying how many people came to watch 1st Bull Run. It is also saying how many people brought picnic baskets. It also says how the battle went It also says details about what happened before the battle.

Fay, Gail. *Battles of the Civil War*. Heinemann Library, 2011.

This book was helpful because it gave me detailed information about each of the armies. It also gave me primary pictures and it would say if the picture was primary or not. The book had pictures of Confederate generals. This book has really good details about who did what.

“First Battle of Bull Run.” *World History Project*, worldhistoryproject.org/1861/7/21/first-battle-of-bull-run.

This website is giving facts about what happened at Bull Run. It also gives a lot of background. It provides information about Gen. McDowell’s plan. It also gave a quote.

“General Thomas Stonewall Jackson Quotes.” *Logistics Quotes*, www.military-quotes.com/stonewall-jackson.htm

This website would count as a primary source because it is saying all the quotes “Stonewall” Jackson said. I found the quote I used in my thesis statement on this website. It also gives other nicknames for Jackson.

The history of Mason and Dixon's Line. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.loc.gov/item/91898509/

This website counts as a primary source because it shows pictures from the actual document about the Mason- Dixon line. This resource was helpful because it gave me a summary about the Mason- Dixon line. From that summary, I was able to find the information that I needed.

Kent, Zachary. *The Civil War: from Fort Sumter to Appomattox*. Enslow, 2011.

This book is explaining all the battles in the Civil War from beginning to end. The section I used gave small facts about Bull Run along with some quotes. This book also gave primary pictures. It had a lot of primary and secondary resources.

Ollhoff, Jim. *The Civil War: Early Battles*. ABDO Pub. Co., 2012.

This book was helpful because it was saying the early battles including Bull Run. It also went into detail about how the men were recruited. Another thing the book goes into detail with is how the Union retreated. It also explains why the Confederate didn’t chase the Union at the end.

*The Civil War: a Visual History*. DK Pub., 2015

This book is telling about the entire Civil War. The section I was looking at gave Bull Run in a lot of detail. It even had pictures of the generals hats. It also gave a lot of quotes and a lot of information.

“War Watchers at Bull Run During America's Civil War.” *HistoryNet*, 20 Oct. 2016, www.historynet.com/war-watchers-at-bull-run-during-americas-civil-war.htm.

This website is saying how people hadn’t had a lot of excitement so when Bull Run came everyone was excited. It is also saying that as the battle went on more and more people came to watch. The website is mostly saying how the citizens reacted to Bull Run and how they watched the horror of this battle.

**Secondary Sources**

Andrews, Evan. “Remembering the First Battle of Bull Run.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 21 July 2016,

www.history.com/news/remembering-the-first-battle-of-bull-run.

This website is saying how many people came to watch 1st Bull Run. It is also saying how many people brought picnic baskets. It also says how the battle went It also says details about what happened before the battle.

“Battle of Bull Run Facts & Summary.” *American Battlefield Trust*, 16 July 2018, www.battlefields.org/learn/civil-war/battles/bull-run.

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“Bull Run Casualties.” *HistoryNet*,

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This website is stating how many casualties there were in each army. It also says the percentage of the casualties in the army. At the end of the website it is saying who lost the most in each category.

Editors, History.com. “First Battle of Bull Run.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 1 Apr. 2011,

www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/first-battle-of-bull-run.

This website is explaining what happened before Bull Run. It also gives small facts. Also, it gives facts on what happened during Bull Run. It is also is explaining the turning point of Bull Run.

Editors, History.com. “Fort Sumter.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 9 Nov. 2009, www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/fort-sumter.

This website is telling what happened in Fort Sumter. It gives the date when it happened. There is also a video. It gave me information about Fort Sumter.

Fay, Gail. *Battles of the Civil War*. Heinemann Library, 2011.

This book was useful because it explained all the battles of the Civil War. It explained each battle in depth. Visuals on each battle were included and that was very helpful.

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