

(The following article was prepared for First Manassas Corporation by Lt. Col. Joseph B. Mitchell, West Point graduate, Civil War historian, and author of Decisive Battles of the Civil War.)

The Battle of First Manassas, or Bull Run as you please, was fought by green armies of the North and South on the sun-baked Sunday of July 21, 1861. Twenty-three angry States did the fighting in this first collision of heavy forces in the war. The battle proved an important thing: the war would be no three-month affair. Men saw through the smoke and across the strewn bodies that the contest would be long before one dream might be satisfied and another dissolve at a place they then scarcely knew of, the cross-roads of Appomattox.

But the battle proved a higher thing: Americans would respond--as they always had--to the demands of duty and principle. And this particular battle, no isolated episode but a part of the war's full current, demonstrated the courage and dedication which marked the war as a whole and shines in our American heritage. We know that from our Civil War--call it inevitable if you will--came our unbreakable Union. It was an experience for remembering, commemorating, and honoring, by all.

Reenactment of First Manassas on July 22-23, 1961, becomes the first large scale event in the Civil War Centennial commemoration. The spectacle, to be pitched on the battle site some 25 miles southwest of Washington, D. C., will be shared in by volunteer National Guardsmen from more than a score of States which fought there 100 years ago. The North-South Skirmish Association will form the hard core of the action, the vastest reenactment ever staged on this continent. Copies of contemporary uniforms will be worn by the 3,000 participants. Weapons will be authentic. The First Manassas Corporation, a non-profit organization sponsoring the event, is producing authentic artillery pieces, caissons, limbers and gun carriages for the display. The cannon fire will be the heaviest ever heard in a reenactment anywhere.

The anticipated audience of 50,000 on each day will hear Civil War period music by the Army and Marine Bands. The President of the United

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Stanton is expected to make an address. The spectacle will open with a grand review of the participating uniformed units, and flow, under professional narration, into the booming highlights of the battle on and about the Henry House Hill.

First Manassas grips the interest of historian and ordinary war student, alike. The war, itself, began at 4:30 A. M., Friday, April 12, 1861, at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. The exploding shells aroused both North and South to action. President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers for three months. Union troops were hurriedly rushed to Washington to protect the capital, some were attacked by a mob as they passed through Baltimore. Others came by water, landing at Annapolis. Then on May 24 Union troops crossed the Potomac River and seized Alexandria and Arlington Heights.

Meanwhile the Confederates were building up their forces around Manassas and at Harper's Ferry at the northern end of the Shenandoah Valley but shortly thereafter evacuated it. General Joseph E. Johnston, who had assumed command there, had decided the place was indefensible. On July 2 Union troops under Major General Patterson forded the Potomac and proceeded to Martinsburg. This put the opposing forces in their approximate positions for the opening of the campaign.

At this time there was a tremendous clamor in the northern press for action. The pressure on Congress and on President Lincoln could not be resisted. Almost three months had passed since President Lincoln had issued his first call for 75,000 volunteers. The terms of enlistment of these men were about to expire and most of them had not even seen a Confederate soldier. Daily the cry of "On To Richmond" thundered in the newspapers. Finally the President yielded and, overruling his generals who said the soldiers were not trained for combat, ordered the Union army to move.

The field commanders were two West Point classmates: Brigadier General Irwin McDowell of the Union army and General P.G.T. Beauregard, the Southern hero who had captured Fort Sumter. The Union plan of campaign was that McDowell would march to Manassas with 35,000 men and there attack Beauregard's smaller force consisting of only 20,000. About 3,000 more Confederates were stationed at Aquia Creek; there was a small detachment at Leesburg and there was also Johnston's army of 11,000 at Winchester. But, according to the Union plan, Patterson with 18,000 men was supposed



to keep Johnston so busy that he couldn't get away to help at Manassas.

On July 16 General McDowell started his march for Manassas; Beauregard immediately called for help. It took the untrained Union army two and a half days to march the twenty miles to Centreville. There was a small skirmish on July 18 when McDowell sent a force forward toward Manassas, but with orders not to bring on an engagement. A Confederate brigade from Virginia commanded by Brigadier General James Longstreet drove this unit back in confusion. Then the Union forces spent the next two days reconnoitering the Confederate position. This gave the Confederates time to reinforce Beauregard's troops; Johnston did manage to slip away from Winchester and move toward Manassas with 9,000 men. Even a few reached the battlefield from Richmond.

There were many "firsts" in warfare in the Civil War. When Johnston brought his troops eastward by way of the Manassas Gap Railroad that connected with the Orange & Alexandria at Manassas, it constituted history's first great military movement by steam-propelled locomotive.

McDowell's plan for the battle of the 21st was to swing wide to his right and envelop the Confederate left flank. The main attack was to be made with two divisions which would cross Bull Run at Sudley Church. By an odd coincidence, Beauregard also planned the same sort of attack against the Union left flank but his orders were confused, so the southern troops never really got started. The battle developed as a result of the Union attack; the Confederate attack was cancelled.

The action opened at 5:15 a.m. with a demonstration at the Stone Bridge by the Union 1st Division. It was soon obvious to Colonel Evans commanding the Confederates there, that this was not the main attack because the Union 1st Division made no real effort to cross. The only result was that the Confederate brigades of Bee and Bartow were ordered to march to the scene.

About 9:00 a.m. the Confederates were warned of the forces crossing near Sudley Church. The warning message sent by flag signal "wigwag," was probably the first use of this type of signaling in any war. Leaving a small guard at the bridge Evans promptly moved north to meet the onslaught of the leading brigade of the Union 2nd Division led by Colonel A.E. Burnside.

The other brigade of the Union 2nd Division entered the fray, then part of the 3rd Division but so did some of the Confederate troops including

the brigades of Bee and Bartow. Heavily outnumbered, the defenders clung desperately to their position. Finally another Union brigade came on the field. Colonel W.T. Sherman had found a ford to cross by north of the Stone Bridge and hit the Confederates on their right flank, driving them south across the road. They fled up the slopes of the Robinson House and Henry House Hills to discover a long steady line of Confederate infantry waiting resolutely.

General T. J. Jackson had marched his command to the sound of the firing and formed his brigade in the best possible location to halt the attack. Dashing up to Jackson, Bee exclaimed: "General, they are driving us back!"

"Then, sir," said Jackson, "we will give them the bayonet."

Bee, pointing to this brigade, shouted, "Look! There is Jackson standing like a stone wall! Rally behind the Virginians!" Though Bee died that day, his words lived on; "Stonewall" Jackson and the "Stonewall Brigade" will always live in the history of our country.

We now enter the second phase of the battle when the main assault forces of the Union army faced a stubborn defense, formed this time around the strong core of Jackson's brigade. The crux of it was an artillery duel in which 11 Union guns engaged 13 Confederate guns at a distance of approximately 330 yards. The front lines surged back and forth over the Henry House Hill. All of this will actually be done at the reenactment pageant.

Though both sides received reinforcements the greater Union strength began to tell. At this critical moment the last of Johnston's brigades from Winchester, led by Brigadier General E. Kirby Smith, arrived, but even it was not enough. More troops were needed. In the distance Beauregard saw a column of marching men.

Was it Union or Confederate? None could tell. A breeze struck the colors, spread the flag--it was Confederate! Colonel Jubal Early's brigade had come in the nick of time. For the first occasion on any battlefield rose the rebel yell as the Confederates charged forward.

The Union line staggered backward, then collapsed. A few units retreated in good order. Many more simply walked away. The Confederates followed for a short distance, fired a few round of artillery at the road, upsetting a wagon and blocking the way. This was what caused the panic, the



oft-told hysterical flight of visiting Congressmen and their ladies, the society leaders who had come from Washington to see the battle.

The Union troops suffered about 2,900 casualties from their overall strength of 35,000, and the Confederates lost about 2,000 casualties. Numerous guns, rifles and other equipment were abandoned by the Federal units in the flight to Washington.

Few men could fail to be spiritually moved by viewing or participating in a reenactment of the nature planned at Manassas. All should, of course, be volunteers. It can be done by joining the North-South Skirmish Association; the Adjutant of the Association is James F. Harding, 604 Truman Circle, S.W., Vienna, Virginia. Members of the National Guard who want to take part should ask for "training duty without pay status." It is hoped that volunteers from the more distant states can be flown to Washington by National Guard or Air Force planes. Each individual who participates will receive an impressive testimonial scroll as a lasting tribute to the services performed and a Centennial medal of permanent value.

As a by-product of this commemorative effort, the First Manassas Corporation plans to erect a national shrine on this battlefield, dedicated to those Americans who built from sacrifice and suffering an enduring Nation and a lasting peace. The building plans for a multi-million dollar Civil War Hall of Fame have been approved by the National Park Commission.

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