



# Civil War Battles 1

## Fort Sumter

Fort Sumter was a federal fort in the harbor at Charleston, South Carolina, a state which had seceded from the Union and joined the Confederacy. President Lincoln informed Governor Francis Wilkinson Pickens of South Carolina of his intention to resupply the fort. Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, decided that the fort must not be resupplied and ordered its capture.

Confederate General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard ordered the bombardment of Fort Sumter early in the morning on April 12, 1861. The cannons fired for two days while Union forces held out. Major Robert Anderson, the Union commander of the fort, was short of ammunition, food, and men. Unable to prevent the fort's capture, he was forced to surrender the fort on April 14. The news of Fort Sumter's capture caused Lincoln to call for 75,000 volunteers to retake federal property. Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee promptly seceded and joined the Confederacy. The country was at war.

## The First Battle of Bull Run (Manassas)

Citizens in both the Union and Confederacy thought the war would be short and swift with few casualties. Young men on both sides were eager to volunteer to fight. They were afraid they would

miss the entire war if they did not enlist right away. The Confederates wanted another quick victory to boost Southern moral and convince the North to make peace. The Union commander, General Irvin McDowell, wanted to get his men into battle before their 90-day enlistment period was up.

On the morning of July 21, 1861, McDowell attacked the Southern fortifications at Manassas Junction in Virginia. Union troops were poorly trained and lightly equipped. They expected an easy victory. Ladies and gentlemen in buggies, children, Congressmen, reporters, and other civilians (often carrying picnic lunches) followed the army to watch the battle. The battle was a confusion of small fights and inexperienced combat on both sides. The Northern forces were routed and forced to retreat right through the ranks of the civilian spectators. It was a serious defeat for the North and an indication that this war would not be easy.

# Bull Run

Troops riding atop boxcars



TAKING THE TRAIN TO BATTLE

Troops led by Confederate General Joseph Johnston boarded railroad trains in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley and arrived at the Bull Run battlefield in time to reinforce Beauregard's forces. As the men were leaving the train station, some of the women who saw them off gave them gifts of treats for their journey.

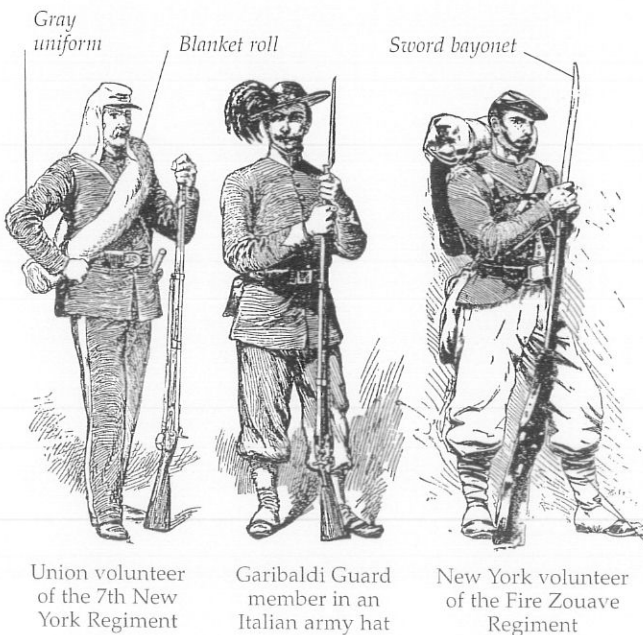
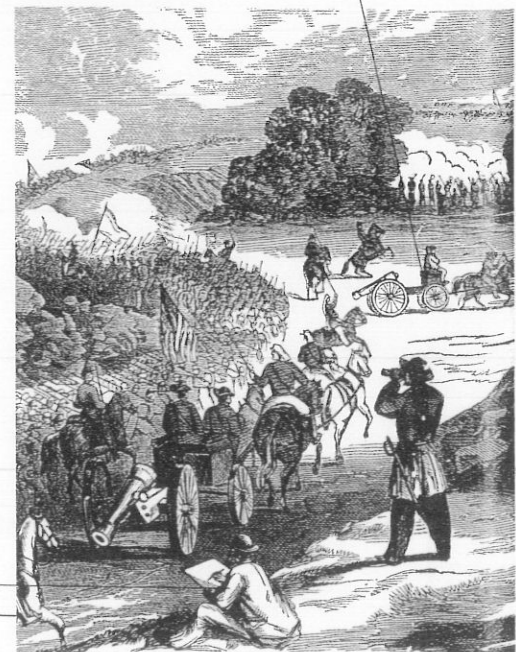
NEAR WASHINGTON, D.C., is Manassas, Virginia. A stream nearby is named Bull Run. The fields around the stream were the sites of two large Civil War fights. The First Battle of Bull Run took place on July 21, 1861. At that time, Confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard commanded a 20,000-man army around Manassas that threatened the Union capital. President Lincoln sent Brigadier General Irvin McDowell with more than 30,000 troops to fight this force. Many of these men were ninety-day volunteers who were scheduled to be discharged in late July. As the troops maneuvered, several discharge dates arrived, and some of the soldiers went home. Many Washington-area residents wanted to see how the Union troops performed in combat, so they packed picnic lunches and rode out to the fields where the battle was expected. The fight started at dawn on July 21 and lasted through midafternoon. Both sides' soldiers were poorly trained, and in repeated attacks could not best one another. But Beauregard's men received reinforcements, who helped drive the Union soldiers from the field. As they retreated, they were shelled. This frightened the civilians, and they clogged the roads as they fled. This, in turn, created a traffic jam that panicked the Northern troops. Many dropped their weapons and ran for the safety of the Washington defenses.

THE COMMANDER OF THE UNION FORCES

General Irvin McDowell is the tall, heavysset officer in this photograph. Bull Run was the only large-scale battle where McDowell commanded the Union forces. Later in 1861, George McClellan, the man standing to McDowell's left, would lead the Northern army.



A limber, a field artillery ammunition chest



AN ASSORTMENT OF UNIFORMS  
Clothing was a problem for both armies at Bull Run. Many volunteers showed up to fight dressed in uniforms that neither side recognized. Some Northerners wore gray uniforms. Some Southerners wore blue uniforms. Others, such as men who joined Zouave regiments, wore gaudy outfits. The Zouaves took their name and flamboyant clothing from French regiments that, in turn, had modeled their uniforms on the clothes of fighters of the Zouava tribe of Algeria in Africa. The lack of standard military dress created deadly confusion on the battlefield.

Newspaper artist



One of many who fought in shirtsleeves

Irish flag of the 69th New York

Havelock, a covering worn as protection from the sun

National flag of the Confederacy



**AMATEUR SOLDIERS CHARGE**

These are the men of the 69th New York, a group of volunteer soldiers. Many of them were Irish immigrants. They carried a green flag with an Irish harp symbol stitched on it. The 69th's colonel, Michael Corcoran (on the horse), was captured during this battle. He was later exchanged for Confederate prisoners and became a brigadier general.

Knapsack

Iron bayonet

**THE LEADER OF THE CONFEDERATE TROOPS**

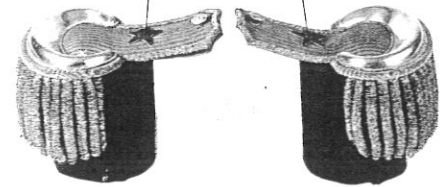
General P.G.T. Beauregard led the main Confederate army in the First Battle of Bull Run. Here he is wearing his old U.S. Army uniform.

Most of his prewar experience involved army engineering projects, not combat. However, his success in capturing Fort Sumter in April, 1861, led to Beauregard's being appointed one of the highest-ranking generals of the Confederacy.



**COMMANDER BEAUREGARD'S EPAULETS**

These brass epaulets were worn on the shoulders of General Beauregard's dress uniform. They were stored in a large hard leather case when not being worn.



General's stars

**UNION VOLUNTEERS MARCH TO BATTLE**

Brigadier General Irvin McDowell's men march to the sound of the guns. In this newspaper drawing done on-site, civilians are seen talking to and distracting some of the officers. The presence of townspeople at the battle caused problems and confusion for the soldiers.



**RACING AWAY FROM DEFEAT**

After the war, an artist made this painting of the panic that ensued during the Union army's retreat from Bull Run. The excitement began when a Confederate shell hit Union wagons on a narrow bridge and blocked the way. Union soldiers felt trapped. Instead of marching away from the battlefield in an orderly way, they threw down their equipment and ran desperately for their lives.

Civilian

**M**ANASSAS JUNCTION, JULY 21: The ladies had packed the picnic baskets with excitement and care. Hoping to witness a Union victory and to cheer on the federal soldiers, Washington sightseers decided to ride out to Manassas Junction. Instead, in the heat of battle, Yankee soldiers in blue were the first to abandon the field. The Union troops broke ranks and in haste and confusion beat a retreat. The scene was so jumbled that many civilians were swept away in the stampede of soldiers fleeing back toward Washington. Panic had spread among the Northern soldiers when they were overrun by the Southern enemy charging forward while bellowing their Rebel yells, a bloodcurdling sound that terrified those who heard it.

Colonel Robert E. Lee, a U.S. Army veteran but also a loyal Virginian, had refused Lincoln's offer to command the Union army and instead became Davis's chief military advisor. Lee knew that this first encounter with the Yankees near a stream known as Bull Run, just 25 miles southwest of Washington, would be important. But even Lee did not realize how crucial this battle would become until after the two forces locked horns outside the tiny railroad junction on a muggy July morning.

The hero of Fort Sumter, Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard, commanded twenty thousand men. The general learned from spies that the Union commander General Irvin McDowell, a West Point classmate of Beauregard's, planned to strike with his force of thirty-seven thousand. Beauregard requested help, and Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston, who was camped in the Shenandoah Valley, responded at once. Johnston came to the rescue by shipping ten thousand troops by train—the first time in history the railroad was used to deliver soldiers to a battlefield. After Johnston's men arrived, the Yankees were soundly beaten.

During the battle Confederate Brigadier General Thomas J. Jackson and his brigade of volunteers, some of them cadets from the Virginia Military Institute in their pressed gray uniforms, remained calm. Jackson's soldiers stood so steadfast while bullets swirled around them that the general earned the nickname "Stonewall."



Young volunteers from the First Virginia Militia, known as the "Richmond Grays," enlisted as soon as they could convince the recruiting agents they were eighteen—the age limit for soldiers—or secure a parent's signature. Over 60 percent of the soldiers in both armies were under the age of twenty-five.

Troops of the Union commander McDowell staggered back to Washington, in disgrace and defeat. Realizing that he must find a better military leader, Lincoln eventually selected the young Mexican War hero General George McClellan to head the newly organized Army of the Potomac.

### BATTLE IN MISSOURI

**WILSON'S CREEK, AUGUST 10:** The struggle for the West (which today we call the Midwest) was very important, especially during the early months of battle, when Lincoln needed to hold the sprawling Union together. Missouri, which contained several major river systems and rich natural resources, was a key state. When the pro-Confederate governor tried to seize the St. Louis arsenal after the fall of Fort Sumter, a loyal army officer, Captain Nathaniel Lyon, smuggled federal guns and ammunition to safety, carrying them to a fort in Illinois.

Promoted to the rank of general, Lyon led six thousand Yankee troops to southwestern Missouri to try to scare away Rebel units in the area. Even when he discovered that he faced a force more than twice the size of his, he refused to back down. This plucky Union general launched a sneak attack and smoke filled the air as ferocious fighting erupted. Lyon was shot twice before a third bullet killed him. His men were driven away shortly after. The battle lasted less than six hours and cost the lives of 15 percent of all participants. This was a very high mortality rate (the number who died compared with those who survived).

Lyon's defeat would have been even worse for the Union if the Confederates had captured retreating Yankees. But luckily the Rebels collapsed after the day's victory and did not give chase, a costly mistake. Most of Missouri remained in Union control for the rest of the war.

### BATTLES AT-A-GLANCE

#### FIRST BATTLE OF BULL RUN Manassas Junction, Virginia, July 21

Union troops: 37,000  
Confederate troops: 35,000

Union casualties: 2,896  
Confederate casualties: 1,982  
CONFEDERATE VICTORY

#### BATTLE OF WILSON'S CREEK Missouri, August 10

Union troops: 5,400  
Confederate troops: 11,000

Union casualties: 1,131  
Confederate casualties: 1,130  
CONFEDERATE VICTORY

## Mary Chesnut's Diary



[JULY 22, 1861] *"Mrs. Davis came in so softly that I did not know she was here until she leaned over me and said: 'A great battle has been fought. Joe Johnston led the right wing, and Beauregard the left wing of the army. Your husband is all right. Wade Hampton is wounded.' . . . We had been such anxious wretches."*

**M**ary Boykin Chesnut was the wife of South Carolina Senator James Chesnut, Jr., the first federal legislator to resign after secession. She recorded her thoughts and feelings about the war in her diary. She was in Charleston during the bombardment of Fort Sumter, in Alabama for the Confederate inauguration, and often in Richmond as a frequent guest at the Confederate White

House, the home of her good friends President Jefferson Davis and his wife, Varina. Chesnut's journal took on a melancholy tone following the Battle of Bull Run, when the war became real for women as the funerals began. Her writing reflected Confederate hopes and defeat. She hoped to publish the diary herself, but the manuscript was published only after her death and remains one of the most important records of life in the Confederacy.