The First Battle Of Bull Run Essay, Research Paper

THE FIRST BATTLE OF BULL RUN

BY COLLINS MCKAY

On July 21, 1861, two armies, one confederate and the other Union, prepared for the first major land battle of the Civil War. In 1861 Abraham Lincoln was sworn in as President.

The Southern states had seceded and the South had fired on and captured Fort Sumter on April 12 1861.

After the Fort Sumter battle, both the North and the South began preparing for war by raising armies. This was done quickly and neither side spent much time training the troops. Both sides also did not know what a long and terrible war was ahead.

The first Battle of Bull Run took place near Manassas Junction, Virginia, an important railroad junction twenty five miles west of Washington, D.C. Bull Run Creek twisted and turned through Manassas Junction. The Shenandoah Valley, a Southern stronghold was thirty miles to the northwest of Manassas Junction. Both the Bull Run Creek and the nearby Shenandoah Valley gave the South two advantages in this battle.

In July 1861, tow armies faced each other in Northern Virginia. General Irvin McDowell, commander of the Union Army of the Potomac had 31,000 men in Washington. General Beauergard of the Confederate Army had 20,000 troops camped around Manassas Junction.

To the north, near Harriers Ferry, Confederate General Joseph Johnston with 9,000 soldiers faced off with Union General Patterson who was dug in with 18,000 troops. These are forces that would be involved in the First Battle of Bull Run.

On July 18, 1861, General McDowell?s Army of the Potomac marched from Washington toward Manassas Junction for battle. The Confederates at Manassas knew far ahead of this action due to many Southern spies in Washington. The Southern troops spread in lines along eight miles of Bull Run Creek. The heaviest Southern troops were on a ridge around Henry House. After a few skirmishes, the Union Army arrived at Bull Run on July 21, 1861.

As the Union Army approached Bull Run, General Johnston?s army faked an attack at Harpers Ferry. As the 18,000 Union troops dug in for assault, the Southern forces jumped on rail cars and headed for Bull Run to reinforce the Confederate Army.

General McDonnell attempted to flank the Confederates by moving north and west, and began several attacks on the Confederates right flank and the center of the Confederate line at Henry House.

As the battle wore on, the superior numbers of the Union Army began to wear down the Confederate lines. At a critical point, as the Confederates began to fall back, an officer pointed out a line of rebels who were still strong. He said, ?look at Jackson?s men standing like a stone wall?. He was talking about General T. J. Jackson?s men. Jackson would from then on be known as ?Stonewall Jackson?, one of the most famous of all Confederate generals. This seemed to inspire the Southern troops at Henry House who held their ground and began to beat back the Union forces.

On the west flank the Union troops who had been moving slowly were pushed back by General Johnston?s troops who arrived in the afternoon by railroad. Civilian spectators had come out from Washington to watch the battle. They thought it would be like a sporting event. As the battle turned against the North, they panicked and the one road back to Washington became clogged with overturned carriages and wagons. The Union retreat had turned into panic by early evening.

In the end, the North had suffered 2,896 men killed wounded or missing; the South had lost 1,982. The South had won the big victory in the first major battle of the civil war. Many have said that the South could have followed the Union troops to Washington and seized the Union Capitol. Why this action was not taken is not clear. After this battle the North knew that the war would be long and cost many men. The South knew that the North had large armies and that the war would continue.

A little more that one year later another important battle was fought in the same place. On August 29, 1862 the Second Battle of Bull Run was fought and resulted in another Southern victory. General Robert E. Lee defeated Union General McClellan.

REFERENCES

Civil War.com, 1999

New American History of the Civil War, Bruce Celtan, 19996

World Book Encyclopedia