

<https://www.civilwar.org/learn/civil-war/battles/bull-run>

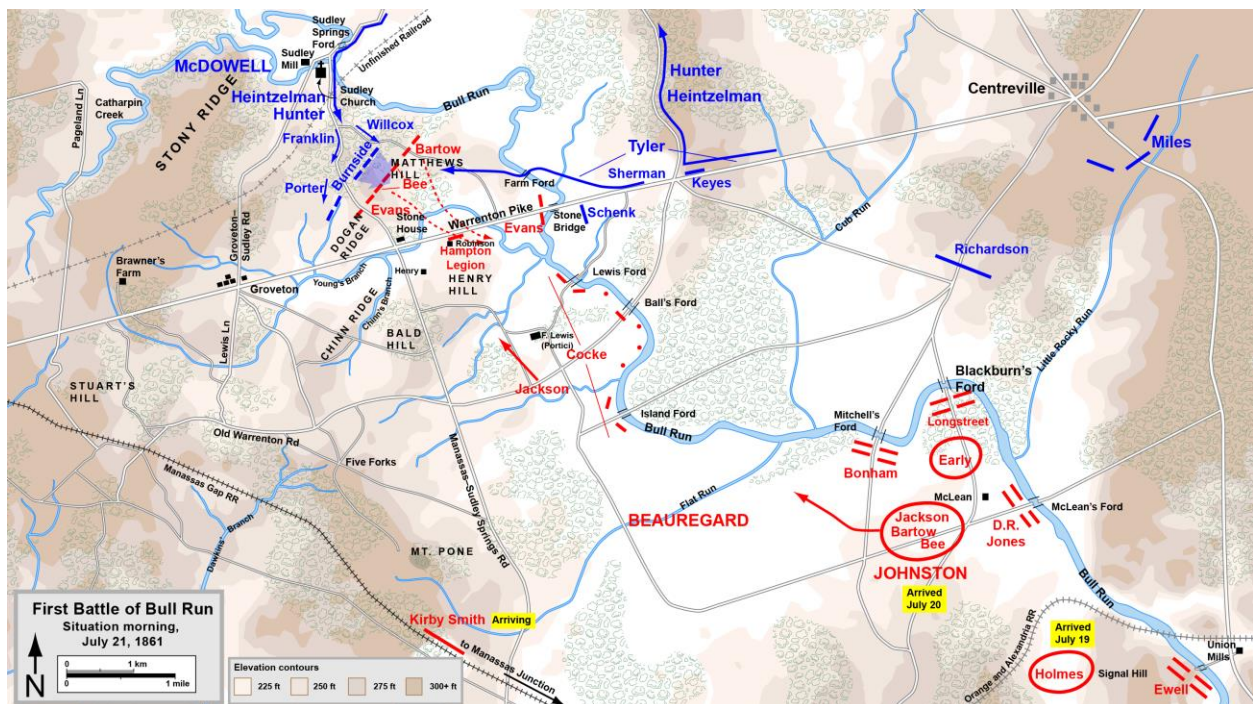
The below description of First Manassas is assembled from on-line articles from the Civil War Trust. (Ed.—SD)

July 21, 1861

## The Battle of Bull Run (First Manassas)

Though the Civil War began when Confederate troops shelled Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, the war didn't begin in earnest until the Battle of Bull Run, fought in Virginia just miles from Washington DC, on July 21, 1861. Popular fervor led President Lincoln to push a cautious Brigadier General Irvin McDowell, commander of the Union army in Northern Virginia, to attack the Confederate forces commanded by Brigadier General P.G.T. Beauregard, which held a relatively strong position along Bull Run, just northeast of Manassas Junction. The goal was to make quick work of the bulk of the Confederate army, open the way to Richmond, the Confederate capital, and end the war.

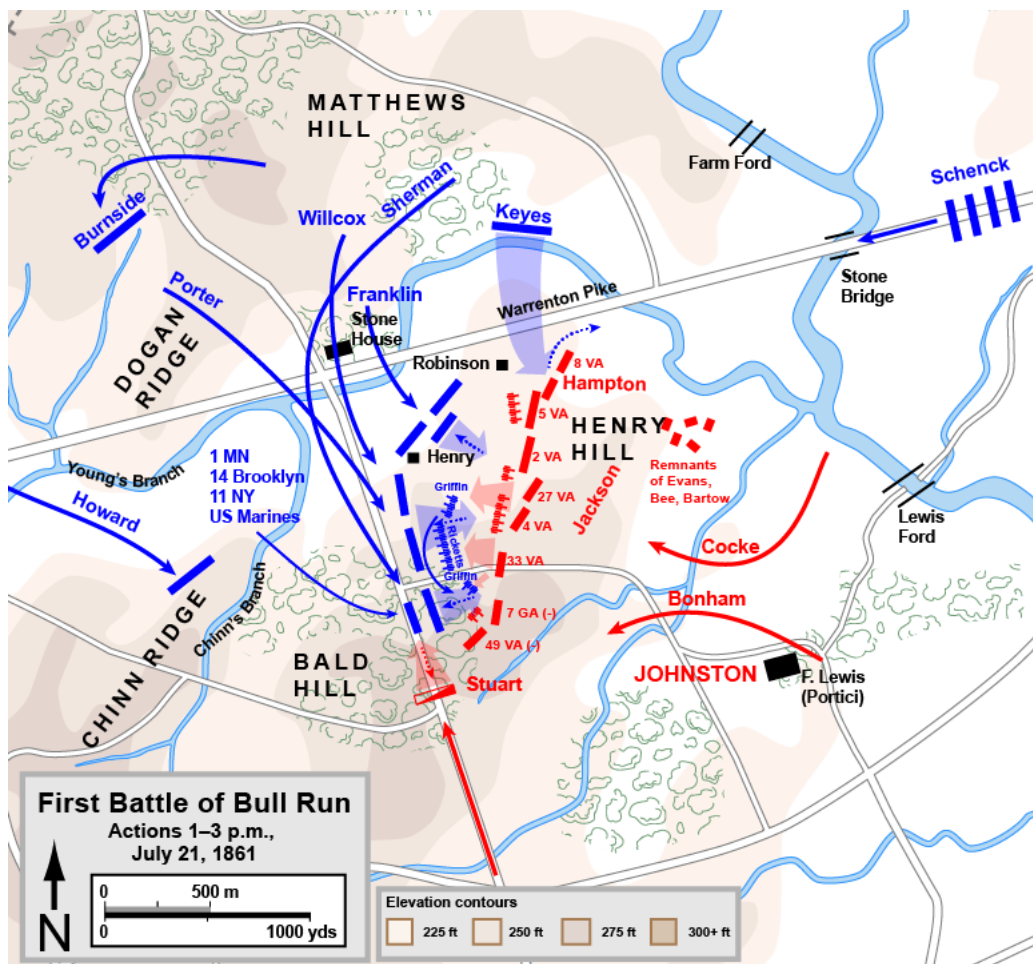
On July 16, 1861, the new Union volunteer army under Brig. Gen. Irvin McDowell marched from Washington DC toward the Confederate army under Gen. Pierre G. T. Beauregard, drawn up behind Bull Run creek west of Centreville. Beauregard's men defended the strategic railroad junction at Manassas, just west of the creek. On July 17th, McDowell sent a small force across Bull Run at Blackburn's Ford to test the Confederate defenses. A brief skirmish ensued, with light casualties and little result. McDowell made plans to attack the north or left end of Beauregard's line, while making a simultaneous demonstration where the Warrenton Turnpike crossed the creek at a stone bridge.



(Situation, morning, 21 July. Map from Wikipedia Commons)

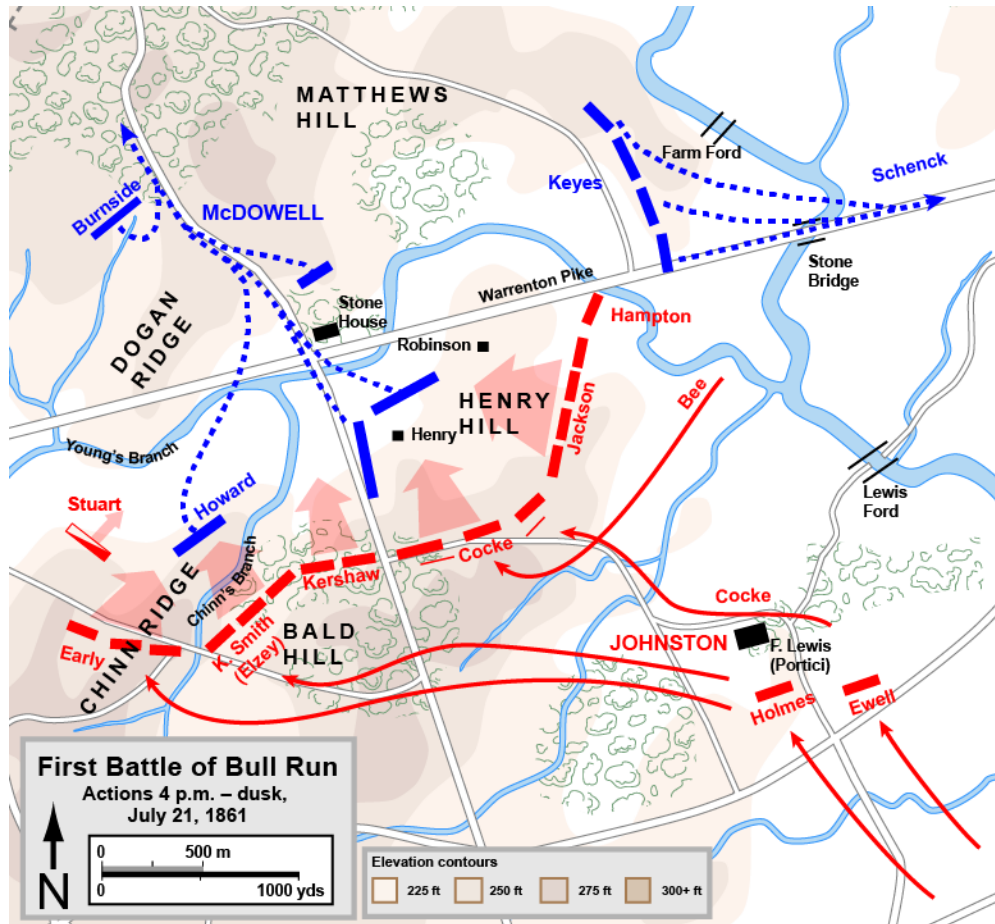
The morning of July 21st dawned on two generals planning to outflank their opponent's left. Hindering the success of the Confederate plan were several communication failures and general lack of coordination between units. McDowell's forces, on the other hand, were hampered by an overly complicated plan that required complex synchronization. Constant and repeated delays on the march and effective scouting by the Confederates gave his movements away, and, worst of all Patterson failed to occupy Johnston's Confederate forces attention in the west. McDowell's forces began by shelling the Confederates across Bull Run. Others crossed at Sudley Ford and slowly made their way to attack the Confederate left flank. At the same time as Beauregard sent small detachments to handle what he thought was only a distraction, he also sent a larger contingent to execute flanking a flanking movement of his own on the Union left.

Early on the 21st, two of McDowell's divisions crossed at Sudley Ford and attacked the Confederate left flank on Matthews Hill. Fighting raged throughout the morning as Confederate forces were driven back to Henry Hill and more Union brigades crossed Bull Run. Confederate reinforcements arrived via railroad from Gen. Joseph Johnston's army in the Shenandoah Valley, among them a brigade of Virginians under Gen. Thomas J. Jackson. Jackson organized a defense of Henry Hill bolstered by artillery. McDowell also ordered more infantry and artillery to Henry Hill, where the fiercest fighting of the new war occurred. Jackson held his ground on Henry Hill "like a stone wall."



(Map from Wikipedia Commons)

Late in the afternoon, Confederate reinforcements extended the Confederate line and succeeded in breaking the Union right flank. At the battle's climax Virginia cavalry under Colonel James Ewell Brown "Jeb" Stuart arrived on the field and charged into a confused mass of New Yorkers, sending them fleetly to the rear. Under counterattack and with no reinforcements, the Federals retreated, and, when pressed hard by the Confederates, rapidly deteriorated into a complete rout.



(Map from Wikipedia Commons)

The Federal retreat rapidly deteriorated as narrow bridges, overturned wagons, and heavy artillery fire added to the confusion. The calamitous retreat was further impeded by the hordes of fleeing onlookers who had come down from Washington to enjoy the spectacle. Although victorious, Confederate forces were too disorganized to pursue. By July 22, the shattered Union army reached the safety of Washington. The Battle of Bull Run convinced the Lincoln administration and the North that the Civil War would be a long and costly affair. McDowell was relieved of command of the Union army and replaced by Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, who set about reorganizing and training the troops. The emboldened Confederates would fight on for nearly four more years.