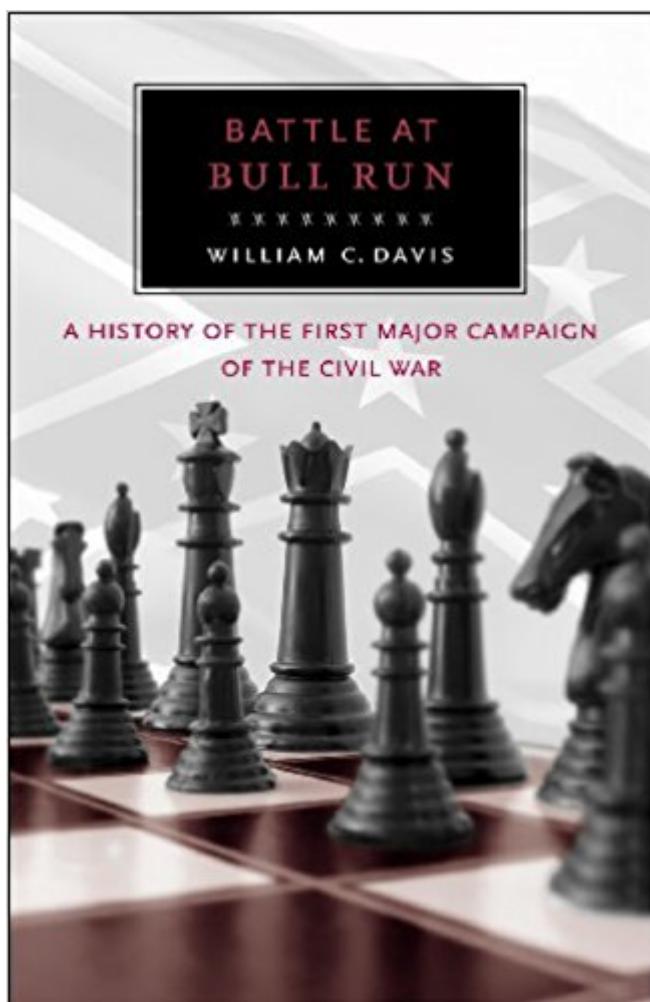


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Battle At Bull Run: A History Of The First Major Campaign Of The Civil War



Synopsis

The first major history ever written on the first battle of the Civil War, this narrative describes the chaotic fighting by courageous amateurs that nearly resulted in Confederate independence.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

From the very first pages of this book, it's clear that historian William C. Davis is ready to deliver a gripping account of the first battle of the Civil War. He describes a female spy traveling with stolen information from Washington, D.C., to Confederate headquarters in Fairfax Court House, Virginia: "The whole scene so reeked of penny romance that it bordered on the ludicrous." Maybe so, but it's also real history, and Davis understands what many academic historians do not: a good history book needs to tell good stories. Davis has written many outstanding books on the Civil War era, and *Battle at Bull Run* is one of his earliest. It's also one of his best, and is perhaps the finest book available on how the Union's haughty overconfidence crumbled against Southern determination in a single afternoon. Confederate General Thomas Jackson earned his immortal nickname, "Stonewall," on that day, and the soldiers who fought under him showed the North that its cry "On to Richmond!" was a hollow one. Much of the book focuses on events leading up to the actual battle--how the two armies were hastily assembled, how each side found its leaders, and so on. This is a familiar tale, but probably never has been told as well as it is on these pages. --John J. Miller --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

William C. Davis is the editor of Civil War Times Illustrated and the author of Breckinridge: Statesman, Soldier, Symbol; The Battle of New Market; Duel Between the First Ironclads; and The Orphan Brigade. He is one of the youngest and most talented experts writing today on the Civil War.

This is the oldest book I have read on the campaign and battle of First Manassas/Bull Run but in no way did I find it to be outdated, or not relevant, for an understanding of what happened in July, 1861 in Northern Virginia. In my humble opinion, William C. Davis is a fine author with a lively style that I had no trouble reading or understanding. I will be looking for more books written by the author. The reader is given a good description of the situation in 1861 for both sides in the Virginia Theater of the Civil War, introduced to the principal characters for both sides (Lincoln, Scott, McDowell, and Patterson for the Union, Davis, Lee, Beauregard, and Johnston for the Confederacy), and made to understand why the battle took place where it happened. The author goes on to describe the campaign/battle and its aftermath in an entertaining narrative style. All the lesser characters in the story and the parts they played in the events described are laid out in a way that for me, gave them personalities. This made reading the book more enjoyable. Unfortunately, the book has no Theater of Operations, or Campaign map to help the reader understand what was going on in the Shenandoah Valley, or how the armies got to the banks of Bull Run for the climactic battle on 21 July, 1861. No map is provided for the skirmish at Blackburn's Ford 18 July, 1861, so the reader has to learn about it through a combination of reading the description and looking at other maps that do show the area. The map showing the position of forces at dawn on 21 July is not bad, but like all the battle maps does not show the outlines of all the principal terrain features (Matthews Hill, Henry Hill, Chinn Ridge, etc.) that influenced the battle. Six maps show the unfolding situation at various times throughout the day. The maps only show infantry brigades for the most part, some regiments are shown, and Stuarts cavalry also, but no artillery batteries are shown! (Not so good for following the action in a battle that in its most desperate stage centered around the back and forth capture and loss of two Union batteries on Henry Hill!) One map shows the Union rout and retreat from the battle. The quality and small number of maps are one of the two negatives I found in this book. (For more in depth descriptions of the combat I recommend "The First Battle of Manassas" by John Hennessy, and for better and more abundant maps "The Maps of First Bull Run" by Bradley M. Gottfried) The book did not have an Order of Battle for the armies and I always find this a negative for a Civil War Campaign/Battle history book, but for most readers it shouldnt be a problem. The book also has a good Bibliography for when it was released (1977). A big plus for this book is the 46 illustrations and photos of participants, combat units, and locations that readers learn about while

reading the book. It always helps to have a face to go with a name when reading history, at least for me. The book goes into depth somewhat trying to figure out just what was said by Confederate General Bee about Thomas J. Jackson and his command on Henry Hill and the words meaning? (Compliment? Insult?) Interesting to see that there has always been some controversy surrounding Jackson's nickname since that day on Henry Hill among the participants, and in all the modern studies of the battle. Davis follows the traditional view that the biggest share of the blame for the Northern defeat can be laid at the feet of Union General Patterson and his failure in letting Joe Johnston and his Confederate Army of the Shenandoah give him the slip and unite with Beauregard's troops at Manassas. (Always found it interesting that Beauregard's army was the first one called the Army of the Potomac!) Loved the writing, found it to be a good description of the battle and campaign. The maps, not so good. But still a good read and source for information on the battle of First Manassas/Bull Run.

I had a fun time reading this book. The prose were smooth and ran like a novel. Professor Davis presents the battle from both sides, Confederate and Union, so one gets the feeling that he's been in both sides camps, acquainting himself with the central characters, (McDowell, Beauregard, Johnston, Shanks, and of course the Mighty Stonewall, to name a few) as well as the regiments and brigades, and both sides respective plans of strategy. The reader comes to realize how drastically different this first major battle of the Civil War was from those that followed. Civilians would come to watch with their picnic baskets as if it were a sporting event. And how annoying it must have been for the West Pointers to have to deal with undisciplined volunteers who would go berry picking on their way to battle. Again, how frustrating it must have been to have both sides wearing gray uniforms and blue uniforms and not knowing whether they were shooting at the enemy or their own side. The last chapter in the book sums up the fighting and presents a thoughtful analysis of the Battle at Bull Run. Professor Davis also acquaints the reader with the future careers of the officers who played a major part in this first major battle. I really enjoyed the book.

I would like to give this review 3.5 stars. The book is too well written for a 3, but it has some flaws that make me somewhat uncomfortable with the 4 I am giving it. Davis' book about New Market is a 5 star effort. Davis succeeds in most areas with Battle of Bull Run. He describes the campaign well, and he gives adequate background of most of the key participating officers. The maps are adequate. The battle itself and the aftermath are competently covered. Most importantly, Davis' writing style makes for comfortable reading. His retelling appears objective and balanced for the

most part, and it appears that he tries to treat the participants fairly with the information at hand all these years later. Although he does relish in retelling a few romanticized episodes (particularly in the opening), he is quick to point out the theater in these. So where is the book lacking? Overall, it is a bit shorter and more concise than what I expected of such a momentous battle (this will be a positive for some readers, less so for the more detail oriented.) Unlike his New Market book, there is no Order of Battle, detailed listing of unit strengths, or casualties. The maps could be larger, and zoomed in to particular zones. Davis' writing in this work is not quite as clear as it was in the New Market work (or at least as I remember it.) There are several points where sentences are not adequately phrased to give the reader a full view of the subject, without paging back through the book to find the original event 40 pages earlier. Other problems are some minor but annoying factual discrepancies (usually generalities, that are too general) or things that leave one wondering what the rest of the story was. One of the frustrating little things is the front cover Brady photo (paperback) that is also found later in the book. The text mentions this photo being used in reporting the Federal dead on Matthews Hill. The caption of the photo does not tell us that this is now known(?) to have been a staged photo of livemen playing dead, it just says that it is "often erroneously" identified. It is a good book and I will recommend it, but it is not a truly great book, so I feel necessary to express some reservations with my recommendation.

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