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Lone Oak

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Young men think that war is high adventure. Martial music like George C. Cohan's "Over There" makes one want to go to war. Military parades, military music, admiring young girls makes one think only of the glory and adventure of war. Mundane things such as being killed or maimed are not uppermost in a young man's mind. The horrors of war are not in his experience; he is too young for such emotion.

The young men who comprised the ranks during the American civil war were no exception. Perhaps that generation of young men were more gung-ho than most because in that day the twin intangibles of honor and glory were of supreme importance. The act of dying in battle was of lessor importance than living a life of shame. The young Confederate looked upon secession by force as less than shameful and if he were killed in battle so be it, the honor of the Confederacy demanded no less. The young Confederate had a greater urgency to join up than his counterpart in the north. It was his country that was invaded - his home and family that must be protected. They enlisted by the thousands often supplying their own military needs.

The young men in both armies were rank amateurs in the art of war and did not realize that they were marked for slaughter. During the first year 1861, only one big battle occurred and that at Manassas, Va. During this one day fight 4900 men on both sides were killed, wounded, or reported missing in action. These numbers were frightful for the first battle of the war but relatively insignificant when compared against the results of future battles.

The battle of First Manassas, or Bull Run, took place because it was a strategic railway junction on the path to Richmond. The Yanks threatened Manassas so the Rebs sent in troops and in a short time 67,000 men were concentrated around that junction. In the Civil War whenever large armies faced each other one army would attack the other. The military logic of

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The two armies facing each other at Bull Run were two mobs of men.

Neither soldier knew much about marching or fighting or the necessity of

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taking orders. Neither soldier took the battle seriously - the battle to come would be great fun. Civilians were on the field. They too wanted to experience this high adventure. Union Gen. McDowell sent his troops to his right to attack the Rebel left flank. His undisciplined troops arrived at staggered intervals and were therefore less than efficient in the battle; yet the Rebs were forced to retreat. Confederate Gen. Beauregard sent up re-inforcements and before McDowell could bring order out of the chaos of victory Beauregard brought victory out of the chaos of defeat. The battle lines see-sawed all day; still the two mobs fought well for amateurs - each taking turns at running away from the shooting. The mob that ran away last was the loser.

There was no winner at Bull Run. In casualties the Feds lost 2900 men to the Rebels 2000. Neither army was destroyed nor dispersed. Washington was as unattainable to the Rebels as Richmond to the Yankees. Bull Run convinced the Washington people that the war would be long and costly. The fight won a nickname for a Confederate General. In one of the Rebel retreats the cry went out to "rally around the flag". And as an example, look at Jackson standing there like a stone wall. A non-believer said that Stonewall Jackson earned his name another way. He was told not to stand there like a stone wall but get up and charge.

The next battles of importance took place early on in 1862 at Forts Henry and Donaldson. The sound of battle at Dover, Tenn. could be heard plainly here in Hopkinsville. The result of these two Union victories set up the fight at Pittsburg Landing on the Tenn. River. and that battle has been immortalized ever since as "Shiloh, Bloody Shiloh". As at Bull Run two armies of amateurs faced each other with guns in their hands. The Union army should have been in fortified positions but were not. Novices did not cut down trees or dig trenches. The first Rebel charge should not have been such a surprise since the Confederate boys came up making noise like a herd of elephants. The Rebel battle line was three miles long and by the end of the

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the ground. In the center of the Union line, at the Peach Orchard and the Hornets nest, Gen. Prentice held out until early afternoon before surrendering to the Confederates. His stubborn defense saved the day for the Union forces by allowing Gen. Grant time to patch up a line of defense on the river bank which the Rebs could not penetrate. The next day with 25,000 fresh troops Grant attacked the Rebels and by early afternoon forced them from the field.

The wounded men of both armies knew no north or south. Their wounds made them brothers, and they drank together at the Bloody Pond and comforted each other at the Shiloh church house. Thousands died from loss of blood - novices knew nothing about tourniquets. More thousands died because of lack of the medical knowledge that could have saved their lives. Of the 103,000 soldiers who fought at Shiloh 24,000 ended up as casualties. Their average age was 22 years.

Twenty four thousand casualties was a horrendous indictment against the men who directed that battle. Charge and charge and charge again. This is the only way to win a battle. Forget the thousands of bullets around your head and charge again. Men of that day knew no other way to fight.

The Union victory at Shiloh won West Tenn. for the Federals and Memphis and Nashville were used as marshalling areas for excursions into southern territory. Nashville was the jumping off place for Union Gen. Rosecrans and his fight at Stone River. Rosy didn't win and he didn't lose but the Rebs found Murfreesboro an unpleasant place to live and retired to Chattanooga. The Confederate army was neither destroyed nor dispersed but it eventually took up residence in Atlanta. The Union army won the war in the west because the rebels eventually ran out of safe havens in the rear.

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In June 1862 Gen. McClellan landed his union army at Jamestown and proceeded up the Virginia peninsula to lay seige to Richmond. Gen. Lee pushed him back in what is known as the Seven Days, the last battle being fought at Malvern Hill. McClellan positioned thousands of troops on the slopes of the hill and behind them, in support, were over 100 cannon parked hub to hub. The battle started at 5 p.m. when Gen Lee sent 15,000 troops up the slopes. Shot and shell decimated the Rebel ranks and men fell in heaps. The hill was assaulted three times to no avail. By morning the Federal troops pulled out leaving 5500 Confederate soldiers littering the slopes. The

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Seven Days campaign cost the Feds 16,000 men; the Rebels lost 20,000.

At Malvern Hill a young man made his first appearance upon the scroll of history. He was inspired with enthusiasm for "God and Country" and left Harvard University to enlist as a private in the Union Army. His name was William Francis Bartlett and he lost a leg in his first fight at Malvern Hill. Private Bartlett disappears from the pages of history for two years emerging again at the Battle of the Wilderness in 1864.

Malvern Hill is a perfect example of the out-moded military tactics used by both sides through out the war. Two hundred years back men fought with bows and arrows, lance, and sword. One army could assault another in perfect safety until with-in range of arrows; and then shields carried by the soldiers would deflect many of the arrows. Within 10 yards the defending army would have time to throw a lance and then the two forces would join in hand to hand combat. This method of assault was used by both sides during the Civil War but the weapons were different and this difference caused most of the 600,000 casualties sustained during the four years of conflict. Thousands of men would make an assault. They would come out of the woods shoulder to shoulder, rank after rank. Immediately they would be in range of cannon fire. Depending upon the number of cannon the air would be saturated with iron and steel with every piece falling upon the dense mass of men below. Men would actually fall by the hundreds. Three hundred yards away from the opposition the assaulting force would come with-in range of thousands of muskets and more hundreds would fall. Hand to hand combat became almost a relic of the past. This method of assault caused 7500 casualties in one hour when Picket assaulted Cemetery Ridge at Gettysburg; 9000 at Fredericksburg, in one day, when Burnside assaulted Mayres hill; 7000 at Cold Harbor within 30 minutes and in a clearing five acres in size. The young man's yearning for honor and glory was being drowned in a sea of blood.

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The USS Monitor was built to counter a similiar ship built by the Confederates. Both ships were clad in iron and unsinkable by cannon fire. No wooden ship could survive against the iron clad and when the Rebs launched the Merrimac the Feds were forced to launch the Monitor. The only reason for the Monitors existance was to fight the Merrimac. The Merrimac could sink every wooden ship in a harbor and thus lift the Union blockade of the Confederate ports. The Monitor was a boat with no free-way - waves would

break over its deck. Life below was was not romantic and if the boat was operated improperly she stood a good chance of sinking. The young men below were forced to sacrifice honor and glory for the unrecognized art of sailing a ship which would rather sink. In battle solid shot bouncing off the iron deck would create a deafning noise. The roar of its two guns was eqally deafning. Both ships fought a stand-off fight one day and then disappeared from the pages of history.

Gen. Grant was appointed commander of all the Union armies and as the boss he resolved to take Richmond. The battle of the Wilderness kicked off the final campaign which was to end with Lees surrender at Appomattox CH. In this battle our young Harvard student William Francis Bartlett appears again. He is now a captain but that title did not impress the minnie ball that lodged in his body.

After the Wilderness came the bloody fighting at Spotsylvania CH which lasted for 12 days. One memorable day in that fight saw 12,000 men fall in an area of one sq. mile. Grants soldiers assaulted and broke through Lees lines at a spot called the Mule Shoe Salient. Confederate Brig. Gen. John B. Gordan counter attacked the union troops and drove them back until they made a stand at the original rebel line of defense. For 18 hours desperate fighting took place with the Rebs being attacked on three sides of their position. Hand to hand combat took place. Cannon fired at point blank range. There was a never ending ocean of targets for musket fire. Lee finally pulled back to straighten his lines and left 12,000 dead and dying men behind.

A part of Gen. Grants strategy was to destroy the Shennadoah Valley as a source of food for the Army of Northern Virginia. Serving this purpose he sent Gen. Phil Sheridan into the valley to destroy crops, live-stock, buildings and anything he could get his hands on. Like Sherman in Georgia,

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Grants strategy was not bearing fruit. In spite of his best and bloodiest efforts, Gen. Lee remained between Grants army and Richmond. Taking Washington as the starting point and Richmond as the hub, Grants army was moving in an east to south arc around Richmond. Stand up fights took place in the Wilderness, Spotsylvania CH, and Cold Harbor. Smaller fights occurred daily. Grant lost 60,000 men - Lee didn't have that many men in his entire army. Lee was a brilliant military tactican. He won every battle yet he lost the war.

Grant finally reached Petersburg, 30 miles south of Richmond, only to find that Lee got there first. Tired of maneuvering Grant dug in and Lee followed suit. Nine months of trench warfare ensued. Was trench warfare the young mans vehicle for fame and glory? Probably not but after three years of bloody fighting the young men still living were more interested in survival. At this late date the young men knew that war only meant death and destruction and a life without arms and legs.

The battle of the Crater took place during this period of trench warfare. Coal miners in the Union army dug a tunnel that terminated under a Confederate strong point. Four tons of powder was detonated and a huge hole in the ground took the place of the strong point. The road was open to Petersburg. Burnside's Corps was assigned the task of making this assault but the assault failed. Grant called it a stupendous failure but history does not clearly explain the failure. Our intrepid young man, William Francis Bartlett, now a Brig. Gen. appears again in this fight. How he can fight a war with only one leg is a credit to his determination to win. Bartlett was captured at the Crater, imprisoned at Libby prison, released a few months later at the end of the war. He died ten years later a respected member of that generation known as the "lost generation".

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Lee was outmanned and outgunned and Grant took advantage of this weakness. He extended his entrenchments in a north westerly direction forcing Lee to spread-out his limited strength. At the end Lee was too weak to withstand a determined assault at any point on his line. He concentrated his remaining strength, abandoned Richmond, and fought his way to the west. Grant followed and forced his surrender at Appotomax CH.

So ended the national trauma that ensured the continued existence of the union of the United States.

*W. F. Bartlett*  
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