

# “INDEED WE DID FIGHT”

## A Soldier's Letters Describe the First Minnesota Regiment Before and During the First Battle of Bull Run

Edited by Edward G. Longacre

IN THE SPRING and summer of 1861, when the North went to war at least in part to preserve the Union, the First Minnesota Volunteer Infantry went with it — and with the First Minnesota went Jasper N. Searles of Hastings. An intelligent and precocious twenty-year-old when the Civil War broke out, Searles parlayed some rudimentary medical training into a brief stint as a hospital steward. Before the war was a year old, however, he assumed the duties of a line officer and by the time he was mustered out in May, 1864, had advanced from a private to the rank of captain in the First.

He carried his military prominence into postwar private life, where he forged a prosperous law career, first at Hastings and then for some thirty-five years at Stillwater. Searles served one term (1881–1883) in the Minnesota house of representatives and seven years

(1917–1924) as a judge of the district court. He died in Stillwater on April 25, 1927, at the age of eighty-six.

A careful, observant recorder of the scenes that attended his military service, and blessed with a keen facility with a pen, young Searles left a graphic contemporary account of the early career of his regiment in the form of correspondence with his family and friends back in Dakota County. In three lengthy letters that follow, dated June 27, July 2, and July 27, 1861, he presents an especially vivid picture of the First Minnesota's formative days in military life — its long and arduous trip to the seat of war in the East, its training period in Washington, D.C., and its first exposure to warfare in northern Virginia which culminated in the battle of First Bull Run (or First Manassas) on Sunday, July 21, the first large-scale land engagement of the Civil War.

Though it brought defeat and gloom to the Union army as a whole, Bull Run covered the First Minnesota with great distinction. Not only had the regiment traveled farther to reach the fighting than any other unit, Federal or Confederate, but it saw the most extensive participation and suffered the greatest number of losses of all the Union outfits engaged. The regiment, too, was one of the last to leave the field and most of it retired in reasonably good order unlike other outfits. In spite of its losses, as Searles points up, the First's spirit of combativeness, which prompted the regiment to resist retreating despite thrice being ordered to do so, remained in-

*Mr. Longacre, who recently became a staff historian at the headquarters of the Strategic Air Command, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, after teaching American military history at Temple University, Philadelphia, has published numerous books and articles on Civil War subjects. In researching a book on the battle of First Bull Run, he accumulated over 300 collections of participants' letters, diaries, and memoirs. He considers the Jasper Searles letters at the Minnesota Historical Society "perhaps the most consistently interesting of the lot."*

tact at the battle's close. That spirit would carry the First through almost three more years of unparalleled carnage, which would climax on July 2, 1863, at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. On that date the regiment made a sacrificial charge which, according to the most widely accepted account of Judge William Lochren, saw it suffer 82 per cent losses — the greatest casualty rate, in proportion to numbers engaged, sustained by any outfit in American history.<sup>1</sup>

The three Searles letters published here for the first time are among twenty-five he wrote to his family during the Civil War. They were donated to the Minnesota Historical Society in 1930 by Searles's widow and are now in the division of archives and manuscripts. Subjects covered after Bull Run include troop movements, the "Monitor" and the "Merrimac," General George B. McClellan's last review of the troops following his dismissal as commander of the Army of the Potomac, criticism of President Lincoln's conduct of the war and of his removal of McClellan, and a long description of the execution of a Union deserter. Earlier, in 1920, a fragment of Searles's Civil War diary was presented to the society by Mrs. R. E. Morris of Dunkirk, New York.<sup>2</sup>

The three letters are reproduced substantially as written. A few eccentric forms of punctuation have been standardized (Searles himself lamented that he did not have time to make corrections), and extra paragraphing has been added. The first letter takes the regiment to Washington, D.C., by way of Chicago, Harrisburg, and Baltimore.

District [of] Columbia  
Capitol Hill June 27th 1861

Dear Friends at Home:

For the first time since we left Hastings have I had opportunity to write you, and I now undertake to fulfill my promise.

After leaving Has[tings] we landed at Red Wing, Lake City, Wabashaw, and Winona, at which places great scenes were enacted: the shaking of hands, shedding of tears, the hearty "God Bless You's" were so intermingled as to render it necessary to remain but a few minutes at either [each] place. Yet the good steamer Northern Belle kept us upon the "Father of Waters" untill eleven o'clock that night, when we were transferred to a train of cars immediately, and started for Chicago direct, about one o'clock in the morning, arrived there about seven o'clock, on Sunday evening, June 23d. Was then transferred to another train, immediately, and was fortunate enough to obtain (as on the previous night) a sleeping car for the benefit of my patients — ergo — myself.

From Chicago we took the Chicago Ft Wayne and Pittsburgh R R, arrived at Ft Wayne, Indiana, seven



JASPER N. SEARLES of the First Minnesota is pictured in his Civil War uniform. He wrote his parents that he would send his ambrotype when paid.

o'clock in the morning of the 24th inst; passed through Ohio and [a] portion of Penn; during the day found the crops looking well, corn from twelve to eighteen inches high. Arrived in Pitts. about twelve o'clock P.M. 24th inst; changed cars immediately and started for Harrisburgh, passed the Allegahney [sic] Mountains about seven in the morning. There was a very perceptible change of temperature while crossing the mountains and splendid scenery — lofty cliffs; tall pines; deep ravines; heavy excavations, two Tunells and roaming streams.

We arrived at Harris. at about two o'clock P.M. 25th inst. We went into camp and had just posted our tents when it was rumored that we were ordered to Wash. We had Dress Parade in the evening, and an order was read ordering the Capt's to have their respective commands ready for marching at 3 o'clock the next morning [.] So in

<sup>1</sup>William Lochren, "Narrative of the First Regiment," in Board of Commissioners, *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:32 (St. Paul, 1890). The First's part in the Bull Run battle is treated on p. 8-13. See also William Watts Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 2:84-85, 310-311 (St. Paul, Reprint ed., 1961). For another account of Bull Run by the author of these letters, see Captain J. N. Searles, "The First Minnesota Volunteer Infantry," in *Glimpses of the Nation's Struggle*, second series, 84-87 (St. Paul, 1890).

<sup>2</sup>See *Minnesota History*, 11:95-96 (March, 1930), and *Minnesota History Bulletin*, 4:71 (Feb.-May, 1921).

accordance with that order we were routed out in the morning by the tattoo at two o'clock, struck our tents[,] packed [them] in boxes, loaded them into the cars, and settled ourselves as quietly as possible in our respective positions in the train and awaited the moment of our departure which came about five o'clock. We travelled all that day and till ten o'clock that night before we reached Was. — a distance of 118 miles. Arrived at Was. We found that Col. Aldrich<sup>3</sup> had prepared for us by securing the "Assembly Rooms" and the "First Cong[regational] Church" for our use during the night. The next day (to-day) we [are] occupied in running about town looking at the public buildings, and eating our salt pork and hard biscuits.

Taking it all together we got along very well considering the distance and time — over 2,000 miles in five day[s], a thing unparalleled [*sic*] in the whole history of war. Sunday the boys were entirely without food excepting a slice of raw salt pork[:]; indeed that was the rub and anything more [to eat was] the exception but through all that the boys kept up their spirits well so that when we marched into the depot at this place last night they looked and walked as sprightly as ever, and I heard it remarked among the bystanders that they were the best looking Regt. that had come to Was.

This morning it was rumored that we were to pass in review before the President and probably would be his *body guard*, the post of honor. I think we stand a good chance if not the best [chance], for our men are all (as a general thing) large[, ] energetic, well drilled men, just such men as is wanted in that place. At all events the 1st Min. will be placed in an important position; by the date of this letter you will discover that we are on capitol hill, about a half mile from the capitol building, right in the city — *the Capital of the Great Republic of America*.

All along the road through Wis. Ill. Ind. Ohio. Pa. Md. we were cheered from almost every house. The boys tired themselves more yelling, than from any thing they had to perform. In Pitts. we were treated to a supply of warm coffee and I succeeded with the officers in getting a supper, and a sleeping car to Harris. At

every station we found old men and women ready to greet us as we passed, and in one instance an old lady, gray headed and trembling, sat in her door[way] as we passed, and blessed us in words and actions so fervently that she resembled a *spiritual medium* passing through her gyrations.

While stopping at Harris. I found my old friend and preceptor Proff. Allen a Lieut. in a Pen. Regt. and with him visited Camp Curtin.<sup>4</sup> He wished me to send his respects to his friends at H[astings], a duty which I hereby perform. In passing through Balt. we marched by Co., some with guns loaded, some not; with one or two exceptions there was no demonstration. Some one tried to give three cheers for Jeff Davis, but no one supported it, and he *dried up*. In a window three story high, a man was seen with a loaded pistol in his hand, but he was sensible enough to keep quiet. It was only the numbers, however, that kept down any disturbance. If a shot had been fired from any house, the Co's would have divided into squads, and riddled it, and all other of the same character, from top to bottom. We found the 12th Pen. Reg't stationed in squads all along the RR track from the Mary[land] border to Was. at the bridge. I noticed several bridge[s] that had been burnt.

Capt. [Alexander] Wilkin<sup>5</sup> and command arrived today (29th), passed through Balt. with loaded guns — no outbreak. The 71st Regt N.Y. captured 61 secessionists to-day, and brought them in prisoners. Four escaped, it was done close by our camp.

The 1st Minn. makes a very favorable impression in Was. The Col. [Willis A. Gorman] is very strict now. I attended the medical dept today with the Surgeon. I have recd. no appointment yet, although [I] have got a sure thing in one or the other. Expect to be paid in a few days. Shall then get my uniform, and shall then send you my ambrotype. I am writing on a camp chest and tattoo is sounding, so you will *excuse* me till next time, when I will give you a more systematic account of what I saw in Wash.

J.N.S.

*IN THE SECOND LETTER Searles tells of the First's leaving Washington to encamp on Arlington Heights near Alexandria, Virginia, and of association with the famed New York Fire Zouaves.*

Virginia

Arlington July 2nd 1861

Dear Friends at Home:

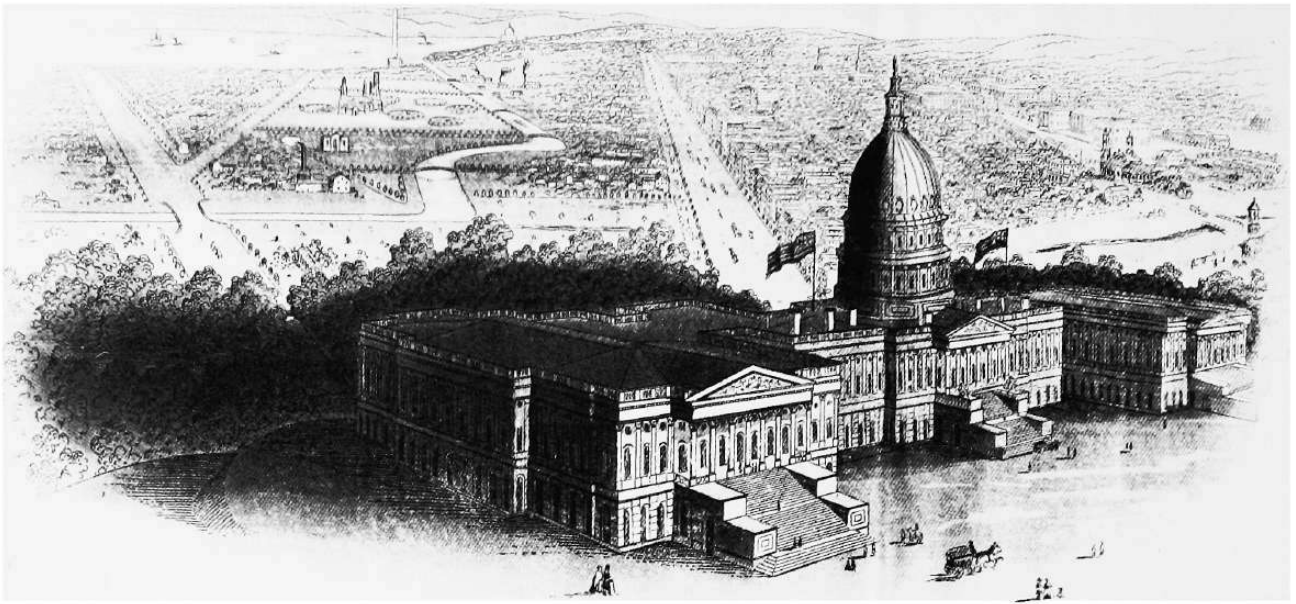
We are on the "sacred soil of the Old Dominion," as you will see by the date.

To show you how it was done I will give you "verbatim et literatim" as I have it in my journal which was roughly taken as circumstances permitted.

<sup>3</sup>Cyrus Aldrich was a congressman from Minnesota and an officer in the militia.

<sup>4</sup>This camp at Harrisburg was organized in April, 1861, by Governor Andrew G. Curtin of Pennsylvania and was said to be the "first regular camp organized north of the Potomac in the loyal States." See George P. Donehoo, ed., *Pennsylvania — A History*, 3:1438-1439 (New York, 1926).

<sup>5</sup>Alexander Wilkin served as captain of the First Minnesota's Company A through the Bull Run battle, after which he was named major of the Second Minnesota and, later, colonel of the Ninth Minnesota. He was killed on July 14, 1864, at Tupelo, Mississippi, Minnesota's highest ranking casualty of the Civil War. See Ronald M. Hubbs, "The Civil War and Alexander Wilkin," in *Minnesota History*, 39:173-190 (Spring, 1965).



*THIS LITHOGRAPH* of Washington, D.C., from the vantage point of the United States Capitol was on the first page of the stationery Searles used for a letter to his

parents early in 1862 from Camp Stone, Maryland. Except for its public buildings, Washington disappointed young Searles.

Wash. D.C. July 1st 1861 —. Occupied this morning in several minor surgical operations — such as extracting teeth, operating for corns &c. I then went down town with Assist Surg Le Boutulier [Dr. Charles W. Le Boutillier], and returned with a bag full of lettuce, cabbage, and crabs — look like fury — are to have them for dinner, but none of us know how to cook them — awfull fix —. Visited the Wash. Navy Yard this afternoon. Well pleased with its appearance[;] found the [warships] Pawnee and Pensacola lying there at the dock, the former under sailing orders, the latter undergoing repairs.

Wash. July 2nd —. No drill today. Secret and confidential orders by Col. Gorman this morning, and we are ordered to hold ourselves in readiness to march at ten minutes notice, and strike tents at the sound of the Bugle.

July 3rd —. All packed and tents struck; leave camp to ship on board a boat for Alexandria; leave the N[avy] Yard at just twelve o'clock, and arrive at Alex at just one o'clock eight miles below Wash; detained three hours for transportation to carry us to camp — on Arlington Heights one mile from town. We are joined to B[rigadier] General [Irvin] McDowell's brigade, an old Mex[ican War] soldier and graduate of W[est] Point. Co "H" is detailed to advance in the morning and take[?] and guard a bridge. Arlington July 4th —. I awoke about three o'clock this morning, and heard firing somewhere

about a mile from camp and waited quietly supposing it to be a picket fight as usual, and in about half an hour the *long roll* (beat to arms) was sounded by the drum, and in a minute I was up and loading my gun, and getting the Ambulance in readiness for action; and no less than ten minutes from the call, the whole battalion had formed in line of battle, awaiting orders from [the] Brig Genr; but after an hour [of] constant marching the battalion was dismissed, and the companies repaired to their respective posts. After breakfast Co "H" proceeded to their post — when it was ascertained that the firing occurred — caused by the picket guards ushering in the *Glorious Fourth* with a salute.

Occupied all day in arranging Hos. Stew[ard's] supplies], &c. Four secessionists were brought into camp today by our guard; supposed to be spies, and sent to Alex. They were found outside the camp pitching quoits, and riding up and down the road alternately, directing most of their attention to us, so much so at least that the Lieut of the Guard considered them as suspicious persons, and arrested them. All were fine looking, smart young men. They denied the charge of being spies — of course — but will be tried, I understand; what will be done with them I do not know.

We are in camp with the Ells[worth] Zouaves [Eleventh New York Volunteer Infantry], 4th Mass. [actually, the Fifth Massachusetts Volunteers], 4th Penn., 10th Mich. [actually the First Michigan



Volunteers, later brigaded elsewhere], all forming a brigade under Brig. Gen. McDowell.<sup>6</sup>

I was greatly disappointed in the looks of the city of Washington. With the exception of the Public Buildings it is a second or third class city. The building[s] all present a dirty, dilapidated, and common appearance. The city is full of soldiers; it was estimated that just before we left, there were about 100,000 soldiers in and about it. The 1st Min. produced a very favorable impression with the Pres. and all. The Col. tells us that "Old Abe" has confidence in us; and *we shall not betray it*.

As we passed through Alex. the town looked deserted almost, not a man to be seen scarcely, and but few women, and they (the women) whom we did see look[ed] daggers at us. But it was of no use. They know they are in a trap that the more they pull the tighter it draws, untill it will choke them finally. Alex is under the guard of a Mass. Reg. and the Zouaves. I saw the building in which Ells[worth] was shot. It is almost in ruins, the soldiers chipping it off as relics.<sup>7</sup>

To show you how the Zouaves operate on picket guard at night I will tell you a little incident. One night the picket[,] instead of remaining upon dry land as usual, where they would [be] sought by their enemies, they (or one especially) waded out into a swamp, where a man *could not be coaxed* to go (?), and waited and watched [the Rebel lines]. Very soon he heard some approaching and listened attentively, when soon a lighted turpentine bull[s-eye lantern] was thrown into the air for the purpose of discovering his position. He remained quiet however and soon they lighted a fire, when he very quietly dropped his man, and proceeded to give chase to the fugitives who took good care to get out of the way as soon as possible. [B]ut unfortunately for three of them, they ran to the railroad where the[y] met some more pickets who dropped them also.

The Zouaves are regarded with a great deal of

<sup>6</sup>More specifically, the First Minnesota was part of Colonel William B. Franklin's First Brigade of Colonel Samuel P. Heintzelman's Third Division of the Union Army of Northeastern Virginia. Brigaded with the First at Bull Run were the Fifth and Eleventh Massachusetts regiments and Company I of the First U.S. Artillery (Ricketts' battery). See United States War Department, *War of the Rebellion: Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (hereafter cited as *Official Records*), series 1, vol. 2, p. 405.

<sup>7</sup>Ephraim Elmer Ellsworth, organizer and head of the New York Fire Zouaves (Eleventh New York) and a special friend of Abraham Lincoln's, was killed by the proprietor of the Marshall House Tavern in Alexandria on May 24, 1861, after he removed a Confederate flag from the roof of the building. This aroused war sentiment in the North. The Zouaves, who modeled themselves after the original ones of the French colonial armies, wore gaudy uniforms and could fire and reload muskets from a prone position. See Mark M. Boatner III, *The Civil War Dictionary*, 263, 954 (New York, 1959).

confidence. All agree that they will fight like devils if they get a chance. The reports that they loose [*sic*] two or three picket guards every night is false; only one I understand has yet been killed.

A report is rife in camp to night (brought by an officer) that Co "H" killed ten secessionists and took four horses. I think it is true. It is also reported that we move as the advance column of the brigade for Fairfax C[ourt] House tomorrow night. The order has not yet come, but the Col. expects it. While I write the camp is all alive with fun, mock Indian dances, bonfires, music, and everything that can contribute to noise and happiness.

The whole Reg. is in very good health. I have been well all the time.

It is late, and you must excuse me for I have yet to post up the Hos[pital] Register.

Please write and direct to the "1st Reg Minn. Vols" Give my respects to all, and tell my friends that I shall write to them as soon as I can get a chance, and time.

Yours

J.N. Searles

[P.S.] I do not discover but a very little difference in the temperatures here, the nights are cool. If you can read this you will do well. J.N.S.

No pay yet; make out our pay rolls this week.  
J.N. Searles

*THE THIRD LETTER is a full account of the First Minnesota's heavy involvement in the battle of First Bull Run.*

Washington DC July 25th 1861

Friends at Home

I received a letter from Julius today, after a very tiresome march.

On the 16th inst. our division started on its forward movement towards Manassas, and encamped that evening at a point twelve miles distant. In the morning started forward, and encamped that night on the R R at Sengers [Sangster's] station; we calculated to intercept the retreating forces from Fairfax but was one hour too late.

The next day at about three o'clock in the afternoon we took up our line of march for Centreville; arrived about nine o'clock that night in a rain storm, but went into camp with other Regt's making in all about 33,000 men; with Rikers [Captain James B. Ricketts'] & [Colonel William T.] Sherman's Artillery, and two companies of Cavalry. Next morning killed some beef for rations, and made ourselves as comfortable as possible during the day. Next day we were ordered to pack up and be ready for a start at an hours notice — waited all

day, and retired with the expectation of being routed [out of bed] during the night.

Bugles sounded about one o'clock in the morning [of Sunday, July 21], and at two we took up our line of march to fight the enemy. By a circuitous route we gained the enemy about eleven o'clock, tired, hungry, thirsty, and worn down with marching; but no time was given them to recruit [their energy] but they were marched at "double quick" time up a long ravine to an open field where they were halted a few moments to await orders; here we could hear the discharge of the batteries, and anxiously awaited the command to *move forward*, and in the mean time I was assisting Surgeon Le Boutillier to dress two wounded men who had been brought from the field.

Soon the order came!! The battalion moved forward on the *double quick* and were again halted before reaching the field. In the mean time Le B. and I were going ahead, into the field, witnessing the battle.

What a sight!! About a mile and a quarter on our left, as we emerged from the woods, were the enemy in their entrenchments, playing upon us with their artillery, but their shots all went to[o] far over us. Within about a mile of the enemys batteries I saw a [Union] battalion lying down flat on their faces, firing with their muskets on the foe who had not yet all retreated into their fortifications. Soon, Shermans battery opened on them, and his shots *seemed to tell!!* Then the 1st Minn. came onto the field, and passed down in front to the left of their batteries and with the F[ire] Zouaves advanced to attack them on their left. We advanced rapidly, they turning their batteries on us all the time but doing nothing until we had reached the bottom of a hill [Henry House Hill] close on their left

flank — when all of a sudden a new masked battery opened on us in the distance. But that also did no good, for we gave them no time to play, but moved rapidly up to the enemy fortifications which were on a hill, on the opposite side of which they had dug down about four feet so that they could fire at us kneeling and could stoop to load, and thus be out of sight, while we were directly before them within about thirty feet.

Well we moved up into position and beheld directly in front a large body of men who were dressed very nearly like some of our men — gray clothes<sup>8</sup> — and as we halted and brought ourselves into line they waved their hands in token of friendship, and exclaimed "Don't fire! We are friends." And we did not fire, although the men all knew they were our enemies, and the Adjutant, Lieut Col., Maj & Serg. Maj all exclaimed to the Col. that they were our enemies.

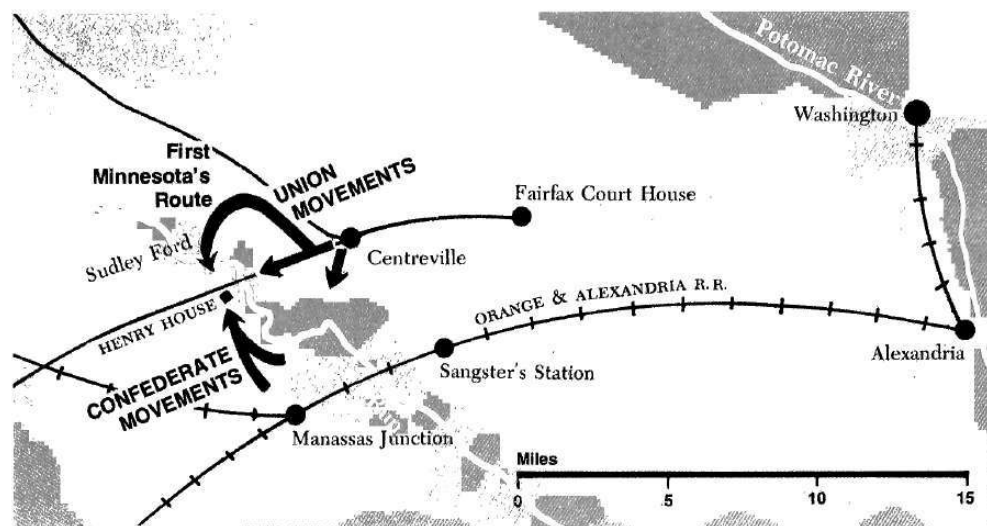
But he was soon undeceived for they suddenly gave us such a volley that had they not fired to[o] high, would have brought down two thirds of the Regt. But the boys dropped immediately, and when their volley had ceased the boys arose & returned it with a good will, and immediately dropped to reload. But soon there was such a force charged upon us that we were compelled to retire a few rods and then we rallied and charged in return driv-

<sup>8</sup> Adding to the confusion at First Bull Run was the fact that the First Minnesota, among other units, was not yet wearing regular army uniforms. Company K had been presented neat gray outfits by the citizens of Winona, and the state had furnished the rest of the regiment with black felt hats, black pantaloons, and red flannel shirts. See Lochren, in *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:4.



*THE CONTEST for Henry House Hill, depicted in this artist's drawing, brought some of the hottest action in the First Bull Run battle. The First Minnesota was in this part of the fighting.*

THIS IS THE AREA of the First Bull Run campaign. The First Minnesota was part of the flanking movement (curved line) by which General McDowell hoped to surprise the Confederates. It failed.



ing our enemies before us to their batteries, and taking a Lieut Col prisoner.<sup>9</sup>

After firing five volleys and being broken up by our own cavalry[,] we were compelled to retreat down the hill and collect our forces. We did not again storm the batteries for it was absolutely impossible to accomplish any thing, and it would only be murdering the men. During the action I was directly behind the men dressing their wounds and sending them off the field, and when they retreated I allowed them to pass and then followed slowly behind to pick up any wounded. During the action I lost Doct Le Boutillier and the other steward; and have not seen them since.<sup>10</sup>

The 1st Minn. and N Y Zouaves were placed in the most dangerous position on the field and stood the fire better than any of the other Regts. We were commanded to retreat *three times* before we obeyed and then Gen'l

McDowell's aid[e] was compelled to drive us off by such expressions as "Retreat!!" "God damn you!" "Retreat!" "What do you stand there for!!" "I never saw such men to fight!!" AND INDEED WE DID FIGHT!!<sup>11</sup> The regulars even retreated before we did.

The battery which we attacked was commanded by Gen. [Pierre Gustave Toutant] Beaur[e]gard — the battery in front by Jeff Davis & the battery on the right by Gen [Joseph E.] Johns[t]on. There were about one hundred and fifteen thousand rebels. They were retreating when we marched upon them, and they immediately occupied their masked batteries, and ordered reinforcements from Manassas Junction (5 miles distant) per R R. We had only about 17,000 men engaged during the engagement — some Reg'ts did not fire a gun. We were allowed no reserve to support us but were marched up like sheep to the slaughter — one two three — as it were.<sup>12</sup>

The whole conduct of the General I understand was against the orders of Gen [-in-Chief Winfield] Scott. Instead of attacking them when we did it was intended to wait till the next day when [General George B.] Mc[C]lellan would have arrived with another division and attacked them in the rear — when we should undoubtedly have defeated them. I understand that it was the plan of Gen Scott to halt the division this side of the enemy batteries and stretch out a line of battle, plant our batteries and open on them, and under cover of the guns advance to another position, throw up reinforcements, and plant more batteries and thus draw the fire of the enemy and thus discover their position. But as it is the advance has been defeated, and has returned to its former position.

The conduct of McDowell brands him as either a fool or a traitor, so much so that he has been suspended and Gen Mc[C]lellan placed in his position. Col Gorman is no longer popular with the boys. His conduct on the field

<sup>9</sup> In his report of the battle, Colonel Gorman identified the prisoner as Lieutenant Colonel Boone (no first name given) of the Second Mississippi regiment. See Board of Commissioners, *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 2:23.

<sup>10</sup> Both Dr. Jacob H. Stewart and Dr. Charles W. Le Boutillier, surgeon and assistant surgeon respectively, were captured at Bull Run (Le Boutillier was at first listed as killed) and taken to Richmond, Virginia. For a discussion of their replacements and the difficulties caused by the later refusal of both Stewart and Le Boutillier to resign their commissions when paroled, see John Q. Imholte, *The First Volunteers: History of the First Minnesota Volunteer Regiment, 1861-1865*, 43-46 (Minneapolis, 1963).

<sup>11</sup> Capital letters are the editor's.

<sup>12</sup> Searles's 115,000 figure for Confederate strength is a gross exaggeration. The figures often given are slightly more than 32,000 for the Confederates and 35,000 for the Federals at First Bull Run. Searles's figure of 17,000 Northerners actually engaged, however, may not be far off. See Francis F. Wilshin, *Manassas (Bull Run) National Battlefield Park, Virginia*, 17 (Washington, D.C., 1955) — No. 15 in the National Park Service Historical Handbook Series.

did not characterize him as a *very* brave man — not *his* conduct, but that of his horse which he could not keep on the field; not even by sinking his spurs into his sides & pulling with a will (!) Well it is a young horse (!) but it is to be regretted very much. There is a good deal of feeling against him (Gorman) all through the camp.<sup>13</sup>

Both Surgeons & the assist[ant] Steward is gone — the Surgeon . . . is probably taken prisoner; but the others I think are dead. Co H had 9 killed, 10 wounded & 3 missing, I transmit a list. The [regiment] suffered more than any other, about 196 killed & missing.<sup>14</sup>

We shall be paid soon & then I will transmit my ambrotype. I came off unscathed although I was in the thickest of the fight. I went in conscious of perfect safety, and the sequel proved my expectation to be correct.

On the whole I consider & so do old Mexican [War] soldiers, that it was *the* hardest battle ever fought in America. Capt Wilkin, an old Mexican soldier, says he never saw or rather heard bullets whistle so in his life, and his testimony is corroborated by all other experienced men.

I do not know that we can consider it in a discouraging light, because *now* all ideas of having a short & easy

conflict is past, and the people must prepare to meet the issue of events as they occur.

I cannot write any more at present, and I have occupied a portion of two days in accomplishing this much. You may be assured that I shall take good care of myself at all times, both with regard to diet & bullets. The surgeons and Chapl[a]in mess with us, and as a natural consequence we have a little better fare than soldiers' rations.

I am in good spirits and have been all the while, and am anxious to follow the Minn 1st through this war, — and I am almost conscious that I shall succeed. I should have written before but was not allowed. Give my respects to all Friends and tell them to not wait for me to write for I am more engaged than ever; but [to] write if they want to hear from me.

Yours as ever  
Jasper

[P.S.] Excuse penmanship & punctuation for I cannot stop to correct it.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of Gorman's unpopularity, see Imholte, *The First Volunteers*, 56–62.

<sup>14</sup> While it is true that the First Minnesota suffered more losses than any other Union regiment, the figures usually given are somewhat less than Searles's. The *Official Records* (series 1, vol. 51, part 1, p. 22), for example, list the First's losses as 46 killed, 109 wounded, and 30 missing — a total of 185. Both Heintzelman and Franklin, the First's division and brigade commanders, praised the regiment's conduct at Bull Run.

THE ARTIST'S DRAWINGS on p. 68 and p. 70 are from *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 1:190, 208 (New York, 1884–1887); the Searles photograph (p. 64) is in the MHS audio-visual library; the Washington lithograph (p. 66) is among the Searles letters in the MHS department of archives and manuscripts; the map on p. 69 is by Alan Ominsky.

ARTIST'S VIEW of Confederates rallying at First Bull Run







Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).