

Second Bull Run Timeline

(All dates are in 1862;
all locations are in Virginia)

Monday, June 2 – Robert E. Lee assumes command of Confederate troops defending Richmond against George McClellan's much heralded Peninsula campaign; Lee has replaced Joseph E. Johnston who was wounded during the battle of Seven Pines. Lee renames his new command Army of Northern Virginia.

Thursday, June 26 – Lee initiates the Seven Days Battles.

In Washington, to compensate for the lack of unity in command among Fremont, Banks, and McDowell, Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton create the Army of Virginia under the command of John Pope. Rather than serve under Pope, Fremont resigns. Pope's mission is threefold: to cover Washington; to protect the Shenandoah Valley; and to move east of the Blue Ridge Mountains toward Charlottesville to present a threat to assist McClellan.

Tuesday, July 1 – The last of the Seven Days battles occurs at Malvern Hill. Notwithstanding the Union's decisive repulse of Lee's army, the Federals continue their withdrawal to Harrison's Landing on the James River where they remain a threat to Richmond, only 14 miles to the north.

Monday, July 14 – With 50,000 men, Pope begins to move south toward Gordonsville. In response Lee sends Stonewall Jackson north initially with 12,000 men-plus Jeb Stuart's cavalry.

Thursday, July 24 – Henry Halleck, the new Federal General in Chief, visits McClelland at Harrison's Landing. McClellan agrees he should attack either Petersburg or Richmond provided, of course that he is reinforced with more troops, claiming the Confederates still have 200,000 men in the area

Sunday, July 27 – Lee decides to gamble by sending A.P. Hill with 12,000 men to join Jackson to attack Pope.

Friday, August 8 – Jackson advances from Orange and Gordonsville to cross the Rapidan toward Culpeper, 19 miles away, where several roads intersect. However, because of a series of mishaps, Jackson gets only eight miles up the road.

Saturday, August 9 – At Cedar Mountain, Jackson is positioned near Culpeper intending to strike the first of Pope's troops to arrive. Instead Banks attacks furiously; Jackson decides upon a double envelopment with Ewell moving to the right while Winder and Hill go around to the left, or west, of the Orange-Culpeper Road. Banks is driving Winder and Ewell back before A.P. Hill arrives to repulse Banks' forces. Federal reinforcements force Jackson back across the Rapidan. Lee and Jackson now clearly realize that McClellan will be arriving in the region to reinforce Pope.

Monday, August 11-- Hoping to induce Pope to chase behind and expose part of his army, Jackson withdraws to Gordonsville.

Wednesday August 13 – Lee orders James Longstreet to take ten brigades to Gordonsville to join Jackson. Lee decides to accompany Longstreet.

Saturday, August 16 – Following Halleck's orders, McClellan begins to withdraw from Harrison's Landing, proceeding northward by ship to meet Pope's Federals near Alexandria.

Sunday, August 17 – Lee intends to concentrate his forces to deliver a crushing blow to Pope's eastern flank. If successful, Lee would cut off McClellan's advance toward Pope while also cutting off Pope's retreat route to Washington. However poor staff work delays the attack, and when the Federals capture a copy of Lee's plans, Pope is able to withdraw in time to avoid the threats.

Monday, August 18 -- While waiting for McClellan's reinforcements, and in order to protect his troops from Lee's army advancing from the south, Pope starts retreating to the Rappahannock, 25 miles to the north.

Wednesday, August 20 – McClellan continues to advance toward Alexandria. After reuniting Jackson and Longstreet, Lee pursues

Pope to the Rappahannock. Pope encounters Jackson's men at various points between Culpeper and the Rappahannock, but gets his army intact across the Rappahannock.

Thursday, August 21 – Rebel troops crossing the Rappahannock at Freeman's Ford and Sulphur Springs meet strong resistance with over 700 killed and another 2,000 captured.

Friday, August 22 – A daring Rebel cavalry raid by Fitzhugh Lee, captures Pope's headquarters and equipment near Catlett's Station, 11 miles up the railroad toward Alexandria. Captured documents reveal Federals' plans to amass 130,000 troops under Pope's command.

Sunday, August 24 – The two armies face each other again across the Rappahannock.

Monday, August 25 – Lee, deciding to split his army again, sends Jackson, along with Stuart's cavalry, with three days rations, on a wide strategic envelopment to get astride the Federal line of communications. That night, after moving 26 miles around Pope's right, or west, the Rebel force bivouacs in Salem (present day Marshall). Pope observes Jackson but assumes Jackson is headed to the Valley, not imagining that Lee has split his army.

Tuesday, August 26 – After marching another 36 miles, this time to the east, Jackson's troops seize the supply depot at Manassas Junction as well as the railroad line at Bristol Station. Jackson begins to divide his forces and to encircle Pope's position. While Pope does little Jackson's men move into position near Sudley Mountain, on Stony Ridge. Many of Pope's telegraph lines are cut.

Longstreet leaves to join Jackson.
McClellan himself arrives in Alexandria.

Wednesday, August 27 -- Heavy skirmishing occurs at Kettle Run where Joe Hooker's Federals are able to rout the Rebels. But in the fighting at other locations, the Confederates are able to interrupt Pope's communications with Lincoln. Somewhat confused -- thinking that Jackson has been marching toward the Shenandoah Valley --,

Pope pulls back northward from his positions along the Rappahannock.

Pope now deploys Sigel and McDowell toward Gainesville, Porter and Banks at Warrenton Junction, and Reno and Heintzelman in between at Greenwich and Bristoe Station. This places a Federal force of 75,000 in an enviable position between Jackson's 24,000 troops somewhere around Manassas and Longstreet's 30,000 troops still west of the Bull Run Mountains about 20 miles distant. If Pope merely concentrates his army at Gainesville he will be able to keep Lee's two wings apart from each other.

Upon arriving at Warrenton Junction, Pope issues an order intended to drive the Rebels from Manassas early the next day. However infantry troop movement is impeded by army trains along Warrenton Turnpike.

Thursday, August 28 – Pope arrives at Manassas Junction around noon to find the Confederates gone and his stores destroyed or missing. Jackson had sent Taliaferro's division along with the supply train to Sudley Spring while the rest of Jackson's forces proceed to Groveton, aka Brawners Farm, where at 5:30 pm they engage Federals commanded by Rufus King. This battle pits two of the most storied brigades of the Civil War: The Stonewall Brigade and the Black Hats (later "Iron"). Fierce, stand-up, ill-directed fighting ensues. (Ewell loses a leg.) This fight involves the 75th OVI, featured in another article on this website. (It might be useful to start referring to the Civil War Trust maps at this point.)

When learning of the fight at Groveton, and still under the mistaken assumption that Jackson is retreating to the Shenandoah Valley, and while ignoring Longstreet's advance to Thoroughfare Gap – where they arrive at about 3:00 pm --, Pope directs his troops to Groveton and to Centreville in order to rout the remaining Confederates. Finding his way blocked at Thoroughfare Gap, Longstreet moves around to Hopewell.

Porter arrived at Bristoe Station early in the morning and remains there most of the day under orders from McDowell, his superior officer. By 5:30 pm Porter is at Bristoe Station followed by Banks;

Banks will remain at Bristoe Station covering the Union rear and guarding trains until the night of August 30-31.

McClellan retains his two corps, respectively commanded by Franklin and Sumner, at Alexandria.

Friday, August 29 – Pope had issued orders for an attack at dawn, intending to attack Jackson from the east and the west. Pope has assumed Longstreet could not be at Gainesville until the 30th when actually Longstreet has already passed through Gainesville by 9:00 am.

Even though there are only 20,000 Confederates vs 62,000 Federals, Jackson has no intention to retreat, knowing that Lee with Longstreet with 25,000 more troops is about to arrive, which he does at about 11:00 am. Pope seems oblivious to the arrival Longstreet who delays his attack.

Making another strategic error, Pope stumbles into Jackson's hiding place behind the railroad cut before allowing his men to attack Jackson in a piecemeal manner. Jackson's new-model defense in depth always assures that he outnumbers Pope at any particular point of attack. Pope is further disadvantaged by reluctance of other generals, including McClellan, to give timely assistance. Fitz-John Porter will be charged, court-martialed, and cashiered for willful disobedience of an order received while at Dawkins Branch – about 3 ½ miles from Gainesville -- at 6:30 pm to attack Jackson's unassailable flank while keeping contact with Reynolds two miles away.

Previously Porter had been ordered to advance to Centreville but along the way he received another order that he and McDowell should move their joint command toward Gainesville. After McDowell and Porter confer McDowell rides away without giving any specific directions to Porter who moves to a position to Longstreet's right.

Lee asks Longstreet three times whether he is ready to attack; Longstreet remains in place. As a result the bulk of the Confederate army remains idle while Jackson absorbs blow after blow.

Saturday, August 30 – Pope is still convinced Jackson is withdrawing. However, the Rebels establish artillery positions enfilading the open fields in front of Jackson's position over which the Federals must traverse in their direct assaults. Jackson withdraws back to his original positions in the unfinished railroad cut to permit Pope to resume direct assaults against Jackson's massed rifles and cannons on Jackson's center and right flank, resulting in battles of unbelievable fury. Lee finally employs his favorite hammer and anvil defense, with Longstreet providing the hammer this time and Jackson the anvil. Longstreet crushes a portion of Pope's left flank. Longstreet continues to sweep along Chinn Ridge towards Henry House Hill. At 5-6 pm Pope pieces together a makeshift defense at Chinn Ridge. Defending against Longstreet's sweep south and west of Chinn, one NY regiment suffers the highest rate of casualties of any unit during the Civil War. For the first time during 2nd Bull Run Pope pays attention to something other than Jackson's corps, and send reinforcements to help defend Chinn Ridge, where along with other units, the 75th Ohio is deployed. Although a tactical defeat for the Union, by retaining Henry House Hill, the bulk of the Federal troops is able to retreat across Bull Run via the Stone Bridge and neighboring fords.

Sunday, August 31-- Pope consolidates his forces near Centreville.

Monday, September 1 – Amid a torrential thunderstorm a day-long struggle at Chantilly, aka Ox Hill, is the final battle of 2nd Bull Run. Lee executes another wide envelopment around the west flank of the Federal position at Centreville. In addition to being defeated on the field, the Northerners lose generals J.J. Stevens and Philip Kearney. Even though reinforcements are in the vicinity Pope finally retreats toward Washington.

Tuesday, September 2 – Without the full support of his cabinet, most notably from Stanton, -- McClellan's former patron -- Lincoln orders McClellan to take command of the forces defending Washington, D.C.

Wednesday, September 3 – Pope submits a report to Halleck charging McClellan with a lack of support at 2nd Bull Run. Pope notes the need for reinforcements when Jackson was attacking and alleges McClellan's men were tardy.

Thursday, September 4 – McClellan assumes command of an Union army consisting of units from three different commands, including Pope's former Army of Virginia; initial news of Rebel movements in Maryland reach Washington D.C. Pope is sent west to fight Indians.

Comparisons with First Bull Run

1st Bull Run was fought with 30,000 mostly "green" troops on each side. During 2nd Bull Run the Union had 76,000 engaged while the CSA had 49,000 engaged. Both sides were using veterans of several battles, including the 1862 Shenandoah Campaign and Seven Days, among others.

The CSA co-commanders at 1st Bull Run were Joe Johnston and Pierre Beauregard in charge of 17 brigades. By 2nd Bull Run the CSA was commanded by R. E. Lee in charge of only two wings, one commanded by Stonewall Jackson and the other by Pete Longstreet.

The Union at 1st Bull Run was commanded by the previously obscure Irvin McDowell also in charge of 17 brigades. By 2nd Bull Run the Union army was commanded by John Pope with four corps at his disposal.

McDowell and Beauregard were old army friends from their West Point days. On the other hand, Lee despised Pope, as did a number of other officers on both sides.

1st Bull Run lasted one day while 2nd Bull Run lasted two days - three days if you count Groveton. Further more the latter battle was preceded by other actions, including Cedar Mountain (08/09/62) and was followed by Chantilly (01/09/62)

During Bull Run, the CSA defended generally facing the northwest while during 2nd Bull Run the CSA defended generally facing the southeast. In both battles Henry House Hill was a critical piece of terrain if only because it covered Stone Bridge, the main route of retreat for the Union after both battles.

Union casualties in 1st Bull Run amounted to 2,645 while CSA suffered 1,981 losses. On the other hand, Union casualties in 2nd Bull Run were 16,054 while CSA losses were 9,197.

Surprisingly, Longstreet's corps suffered more casualties in a couple hours of fighting than did Jackson's during three days of battle.

After 1st Bull Run essentially the armies went back to where they had started where they took stock and realized that the war would not be won by a quick one-punch victory. After 2nd Bull Run the Army of Virginia was absorbed into the newly reinvigorated Army of the Potomac under McClellan; Pope was dispatched to Minnesota to fight Indians. On the other hand, Lee used 2nd Bull Run as a springboard to invade Maryland.