

The Battle of Ball's Bluff

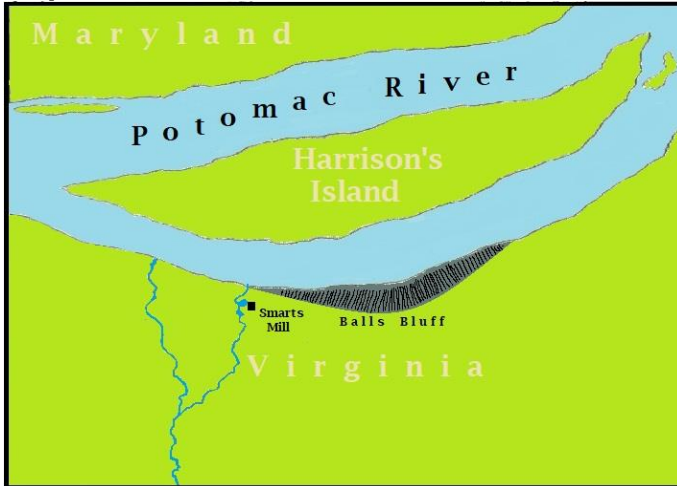
21st October 1861

Loudoun County, Virginia

The engagement is also known as the Battle of Harrison's Island or the Battle of Leesburg.

The battle itself was little more than a skirmish, but it was one of the first significant land actions of the American Civil War, it was fought on 21st October 1861. The location was in Virginia on the Potomac some thirty-five miles upriver from Washington, near Leesburg, Virginia.

Map of area:



What happened on the Day:

On the morning of October 21, Colonel Devens' raiding party discovered there was no camp to raid. Instead of re-crossing the river to Harrison's Island, Devens deployed his men in a tree line and sends a messenger back to report to Stone for new orders.

After speaking to the messenger, Stone sent him back to Devens with orders to stay put and the remainder of the 15th Massachusetts (another 350 men) would cross the river and join him turning his raiding party back into a reconnaissance force and he was then to recon towards Leesburg.

As the Messenger was leaving Stone's camp, Colonel and U.S. Senator Edward Dickinson Baker showed up to find out what's happening. Baker had not been involved in any action at this point. Stone told him he had sent new orders to reinforce Devens for reconnaissance purposes.

He then instructed Baker to go to the crossing point, evaluate the situation, and either withdraw Devens troops from Virginia or re-enforce him at his discretion.

On the way to Balls Bluff, Baker met a messenger on his way to report to Stone that Devens and his men had come under fire and have engaged the enemy. Baker immediately ordered everyone to cross the river, not

knowing how many boats were available to do execute his order. With few boats the Union troops could only cross slowly and in small numbers, causing a bottleneck and making the crossing last throughout the day.

Meanwhile, above Balls Bluff Devens's men (now about 650 strong) remained in its advanced position and engaged in larger and larger skirmishes as the Confederates force grew in size, the Union troops crossing from Harrison's Island deployed near the bluff, but did not advance to join Devens troops.

Devens finally withdrew from the Bluff around 2:00 p.m. and met Baker leading the men heading the other way, after he finally crossed the river. Beginning around 3:00 p.m. the fighting escalated and was almost continuous until just after dark.

Col. Baker was killed around 4:30 p.m. and to this day is the only United States Senator to be killed in battle. By 5:00 p.m. Union forces realised they were on their back foot and attempted a break out of their constricted position around the bluff, the Union forces fell back and began to re-cross the river in some disarray. Shortly before dark, a fresh regiment (the 17th Mississippi) arrived and joined the rest of the Confederate forces for the climactic assault that finally broke and routed the Union troops.

The Union soldiers broke and were driven down the steep slope at the southern end of Ball's Bluff and into the river. The few small boats that were available attempted to cross back to Harrison Island but were soon swamped and capsized, by the number of troops trying to use them. Many Union troops included some of the wounded went into the river and drowned.

In the days following the battle bodies floated downriver to Washington and even as far as Mount Vernon. From the bodies recovered a total of 223 Union were killed, 226 were wounded, and 553 were captured later that night on the banks of the Potomac unable to cross.

Scenario Overview:

This is based on the battle from midday through to dusk, when the union forces try to breakout from Balls Bluff and the confederates are trying push the union forces off the Buff and back across the Potomac River.

Order of Battle:

| Forces Involved | |
|--|---|
| Union | Confederate |
| Commander: Col Edward D. Baker (kia) Ld7 | Commander: <u>Nathan Evans</u> Ld7 |
| 15th Massachusetts Infantry: Col Charles Devens (wia) Reserve 1 1st California Infantry 2nd California Infantry Reserve 2 Baker 3rd California Infantry 5th California Infantry | 8th Virginia Infantry: 13th Mississippi Infantry: 18th Mississippi Infantry: Reserve 17th Mississippi Infantry: |
| Total Strength 1700 men | Total Strength 1500 men |

Scenario Map.



Deployment:

The Confederate forces set-up in the tree line, in the red rectangle. Infantry may deploy in any formation. The confederate forces have no artillery. Confederate reserves 17th Mississippi arrive in the red rectangle turn 3

The Union forces set-up with their backs to Balls Buff within the blue rectangle and may deploy in any formation. The Union forces have one artillery battery. Union reserves Col Baker and the 3rd & 5th California arrive turn 4 at the point marked by the green square.

Objective:

The Union is trying to breakout from Balls Buff; the confederates must try to stop them and drive the Union back to the river.

Wining the scenario

The game ends when one side is broken, or the game reached dusk turn 6. if no side is broken the winner is the side with the most unbroken units on the battlefield.