

Ball's Bluff National Cemetery
Route 7
Leesburg, Virginia 22075

Description

The Ball's Bluff National Cemetery, established in 1865, is situated among the rugged and precipitous river hills of Loudon County. The cemetery is enclosed by a 4-foot-high red sandstone rubble wall, 48 feet square. A concrete walk, 2 feet, 11 inches by 10 feet, leads to a wrought iron gate in the center of the wall, the only entrance to the cemetery. Affixed to this gate is a bronze plaque inscribed as follows:

UNITED STATES
NATIONAL MILITARY CEMETERY
BALL'S BLUFF
ESTABLISHED 1865
INTERMENTS 54
KNOWN 1
UNKNOWN 53



On the rear of the shield is a plaque indicating that the original bronze plaque was replaced and the gate was restored in 1996 by the Clinton Hatcher Camp No. 21 of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, Leesburg, Virginia.

Within the enclosed area, there are 25 graves which contain the remains of 53 unknown and one known soldier (James Allen, 15th Massachusetts Infantry). The graves, marked with upright headstones, are arranged in a semicircle within the wall.

The Ball's Bluff National Cemetery does not fly an American flag. Because of vandalism, the flagstaff was removed. There are no buildings located on the site.

Significant Monuments/Memorials

Outside the cemetery wall, 103 feet from the northwest corner of the cemetery enclosure, is a granite marker inscribed as follows:



CLINTON HATCHER
1840-1861
CO. F, 8TH VA. REGT.
C. S. A.
FELL BRAVELY
DEFENDING HIS
NATIVE STATE

There is no available information as to when or by whom this marker was erected.

Also outside the cemetery wall is a standard marble headstone marking the site where Colonel Edward D. Baker received his mortal wound during the Battle of Ball's Bluff. The marker is inscribed as follows:

EDWARD D. BAKER
COL.
71ST PA. INF.
KILLED HERE IN THE
BATTLE OF BALL'S BLUFF, VA.
OCT. 21, 1861



This stone was erected by Congress in the early 1890's. Baker was a close personal friend of President Abraham Lincoln, who introduced him at the inauguration ceremonies and had him ride in his carriage as his chosen companion. His body was carried from the field of battle by his comrades, and services were held in the Senate chamber where he held office at the time of his death. His remains were then transported to California, and he was buried in the San Francisco National Cemetery, San Francisco, California, which he had dedicated seven years earlier.

Civil War Activity in Area

The Battle of Ball's Bluff stands as the largest single engagement to take place in Loudon County, Virginia, during the Civil War. In terms of the number of soldiers involved, the battle was small in comparison to others in the war. The battle, however, had significant results. A large number of casualties were incurred by the North, including the death of a commanding officer. The creation of a Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War also occurred as a result of the Battle of Ball's Bluff. What took place on this small battlefield on Monday, October 21, 1861, sparked the South's hopes for a strong Confederacy, and dashed the Union's hope for a quick resolution to the war.

When Union General George B. McClellan stationed troops along the Potomac, he placed General George A. McCall at Dranesville, about 14 miles from Leesburg. General Charles P. Stone was located at Poolesville, Maryland, about five miles across the river from Ball's Bluff. On October 20, 1861, Stone received the following communication from General McClellan:

".....General McCall occupied Dranesville yesterday, and is still here. Will send out heavy reconnaissance today in all directions from that point.

.....Keep a lookout upon Leesburg to see if this movement has the effect to drive them away. Perhaps a slight demonstration on your part would have the effect to move them."

General Stone, acting on the orders of McClellan, sent four companies of the 1st Massachusetts regiment under Colonel Charles Devens to reinforce the picket of Harrison's Island, in the Potomac at Ball's Bluff. Other forces were positioned to help him. On the night of October 20, Captain Charles Philbrick and twenty men crossed the Potomac to patrol the area. Deceived by the moonlight and haze, they saw what appeared to be an enemy encampment and

returned to Harrison's Island. Devens was ordered to cross to Virginia and break up this Confederate camp. He completed this crossing by 4 a.m. after considerable trouble, as there were few boats available. Reaching the Virginia side, he found no enemy and waited for further orders.

Meanwhile, Brigadier General Willis O. Gorman was ordered to Edward's Ferry, about three miles down river from Ball's Bluff, and Colonel Edward D. Baker received orders to take command at Harrison's Island.

While Union troops stationed themselves along the Potomac near Ball's Bluff, Confederate Colonel Nathan B. "Shanks" Evans, who was stationed in nearby Leesburg, prepared for battle. Having already sent forces to Goose Creek to engage McCall, Evans pulled these back after McCall withdrew from Dranesville.

Anticipating that Gorman's brigade at Edward's Ferry was a diversion, Evans held some of his brigade there, but sent most on to Ball's Bluff. While these movements ensued, Captain William L. Duff of the 17th Mississippi dropped back towards Leesburg from Conrad's Ferry (today's White's Ferry) which is about two miles upstream from Ball's Bluff. The first fighting occurred at Conrad's Ferry when Duff's 17th Mississippi encountered Devens's Union forces about 7 a.m.

The skirmish at Conrad's Ferry between Devens and Duff was brief. Colonel Evans sent cavalry and infantry to support Duff, while Devens received reinforcements also. The South had the advantage, as Evans's regiments were arriving as fast as they could march. Baker's regiments, on the other hand, were slow in crossing the Potomac, because there were so few available boats.

The Confederates took strategic command with a position in the woods surrounding the field, a position of which Baker failed to take advantage when he had the opportunity. With the arrival of the 8th Virginia formed locally at the war's outbreak, under Colonel Eppa Hunton, the Confederates attacked and forced Devens to fall back close to the perilous bluff. Colonel Baker's appearance shortly after 2 p.m. brought additional Union troops, but the Mississippi regiment strengthened the Southern forces at the same time. Forming a semi-circle around the Northern forces, the Confederate forces attacked hard at 3 p.m. and decimated the Union forces. Colonel Baker was killed around 4:30 p.m., and Colonel Milton Cogswell of the 42nd New York took command. After an unsuccessful attempt to break through the Confederate left, the Union was forced to retreat.



After having suffered many casualties during the battle, Northern forces suffered even more during the retreat. With no time to take the path down to the river, Union soldiers desperately jumped to safety over the high, steep bluff. Confederate soldiers hastened the retreat by firing on their enemy as they ran. Men tried to swim to safety, bogged down with their heavy armaments, and drowned in the confusion. Others remained huddled on the narrow beach below Ball's Bluff and were taken prisoner later in the evening.

The statistics were as follows:

	CONFEDERATE	FEDERAL
Killed	33	49
Wounded	115	158
Missing	1	714
TOTAL	149	921

Although low in actual numbers, the proportion of losses so early in the war was devastating for the North.