

**BALL'S BLUFF: AN EPISODE  
AND ITS  
CONSEQUENCES TO SOME  
OF US: A MONOGRAPH**

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Ball's Bluff: An Episode and Its Consequences to Some of Us: a monograph by Charles Lawrence Peirson

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**CHARLES LAWRENCE PEIRSON**

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A Monograph.

# BALL'S BLUFF

AN EPISODE AND ITS  
CONSEQUENCES TO  
SOME OF US.

*A paper written for the  
Military Historical Society of Massachusetts*

BY CHARLES LAWRENCE PEIRSON  
*Colonel and Brevet Brigadier General.*

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M D C C C X I I I

THE EPISODE OF BALL'S BLUFF:  
AND ITS CONSEQUENCES  
TO SOME OF US.

This subject, like many of the periods of the Civil War, has been often described, and is familiar to the passing generation, but has, I believe, never before been placed upon your records, nor by an eye witness. Therefore, I venture to present it here.

The Twentieth Massachusetts Regiment of Volunteer Infantry, in which I had the honor to be a First Lieutenant and Adjutant, left Boston in the Autumn of 1861, for active service with the army. It was commanded by William Raymond

Lee, as Colonel,—a West Point graduate. Paul J. Revere was the Major. It had been, before the date of the Ball's Bluff engagement, but a few weeks in the service, and was stationed first at Washington, where I remember calling with Colonel Lee, who knew them, upon General Scott, then commanding the Armies of the United States, and upon General McClellan, then Commander of the Army of the Potomac.

The men of the Regiment, like all of the troops in the East at that time, were untrained by battle, never having heard the sound of a hostile bullet, and were of no more value as soldiers than were the Militia Regiments. Soldiers are not soldiers until they have been long enough together to have acquaintance with and respect for their officers, and have learned obedience

with a belief in discipline, with a willingness to abide by it. The earlier Battle of Bull Run, which became a rout for want of discipline, proved nothing and taught nothing except the after-thought of the necessity of discipline.

Up to this time (1861), the important arms of Cavalry and Artillery had been almost entirely neglected, most of the Cavalry not yet being armed or equipped.

General McClellan, who was in command when we joined the Army of the Potomac, was a thoroughly educated soldier. Soon after his graduation from West Point, he was employed in the construction of the first Pacific Railway. Later he was selected as one of a Commission to study the Art of War in Europe. For a time he was with the Allied Armies in the Crimean War, with every possi-



bility of instructing himself in siege operations, construction of military bridges and use of pontoons, and the accepted order of battle for the different arms of the service. Always occupied with matters of large importance, and with all these military experiences, he became the best equipped man for the command of the Union Army. General McClellan was the most popular Commander that the Army ever had. The men thoroughly believed in him. Certainly the country owed much to him for the thorough organization of the Army, which enabled less qualified Commanders, (before the time of Meade and Grant), to accomplish something with it.

The Twentieth Massachusetts Regiment was attached to General Stone's Corps of Observation, and was encamped

near Edward's Ferry on the Potomac River, some three miles from Ball's Bluff. General Stone was an accomplished soldier and we all respected him as such.

We were part of the Brigade of General F. W. Lander. I had known him well in Salem, where our families resided. He had had a most adventurous life as an explorer, having once crossed the continent from San Francisco to the East, alone, his companion having died on the journey. His courage was unquestioned, and he had military ability.

General Evans, who was the Confederate Commander of the enemy's forces near Leesburg, expected General Stone to attack him from Edward's Ferry, and was slow in moving troops to the vicinity of Ball's Bluff in consequence. On October 20th, General McClellan received



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**FIELD AND STAFF OF TWENTIETH MASSACHUSETTS VOLUNTEER INFANTRY 1861.**