

In the Beginning . . .

By ELEANOR LEE TEMPLEMAN

With the approach of the Civil War Centennial, our thoughts turn to the beginnings of that tragic episode. Between the firing of the first gun at Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, and the first major encounter at Bull Run on July 21, there were a number of "firsts," most of which took place in this general area.

The initial casualties resulted from mob violence in Baltimore on April 18. There was then no complete north-south rail connection in that city, but the cars were drawn by horses between its two railway stations. Although Maryland had not seceded, a large portion of the population was pro-Confederate. As the Sixth Massachusetts Regiment was crossing the city en route to Washington, they were attacked by a mob, which resulted in four fatalities and thirty-one wounded, aside from twelve citizens who were killed. Two of the young Massachusetts volunteers were from Lexington, and died on the 86th anniversary of the Revolutionary Battle of Lexington-Concord.

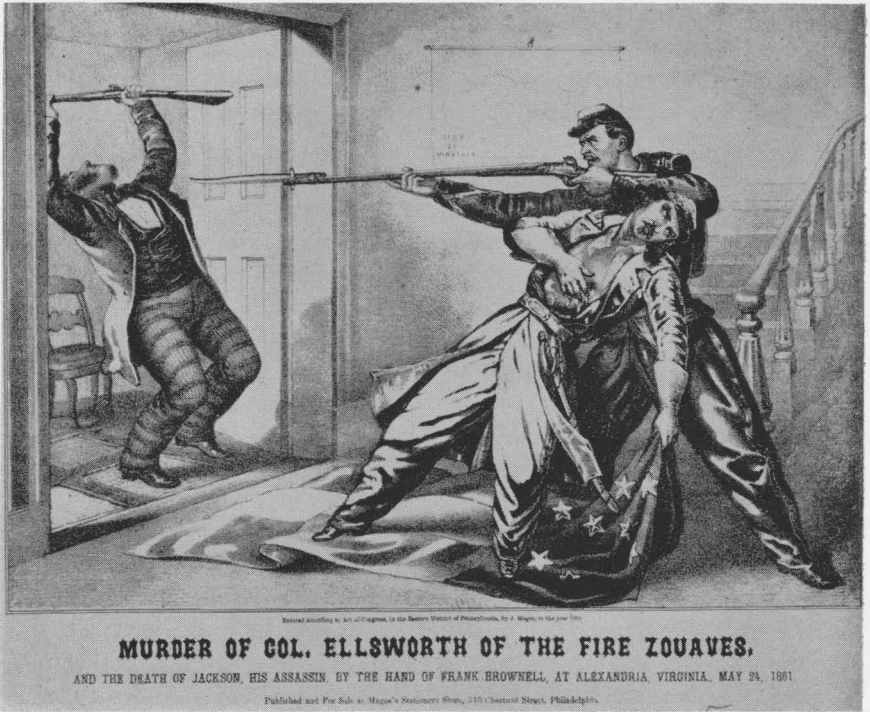
During the following month, war clouds grew more ominous, but the only activity was the assembling and drilling of troops. It was not until the Union regiments crossed the Potomac during the night of May 23 that casualties began, on a minor scale. However, the first fatality, which occurred in Alexandria the following morning, took the life of one of the most popular and respected young officers, Col. Elmer E. Ellsworth of the New York Fire Zouaves. His age was but 24 years, a month, and a day. He is said to have been a kinsman of the Lockwood family which had settled on North Glebe Road of present Arlington County a few years before the war.

Ellsworth had arrived in Washington the previous August, in command of the Chicago Zouaves who had completed a country-wide tour. Their gaudy and colorful Algerian uniforms and eccentric drills had awakened enthusiasm in other areas for the formation of Zouave companies. President Buchanan and his hostess-niece, Miss Harriet Lane, invited them to perform on the White House lawn.

The following February, young Ellsworth was given the responsibility of escorting the entourage of President Lincoln, his wife, and three sons, besides the retinue of politicians, friends, and members of the press, to Washington. Officials were particularly apprehensive of the rail change in Baltimore, coupled with threats to assassinate the president-elect. Mr. Lincoln finally yielded to the secret plan of his advisers to pass through Baltimore incognito on an earlier train. He was already ensconced at the Hotel Willard when the Presidential special train reached Washington with the rest of his party.

The handsome, boyish Ellsworth became an intimate friend of the Lincoln family and the young men of the President's office. Although much sought

after by the young ladies, he was a moralist and a Spartan, and left most of the party-going to young Bob Lincoln and the President's secretary, John Hay. However, he did not escape catching the measles from the Lincoln boys.



Meanwhile, he had worked out a plan to bring the State militias under Federal control and hoped to become Chief Clerk of the War Department. Jealousy of senior officers prevented this, and he was sent to New York to bring back and train a regiment of the volunteer fire departments. Armed with rifles and huge bowie knives, this gayly costumed gang of toughs were a wild and bawdy group. They were installed in the new Hall of the House of Representatives. They amused themselves by such antics as swinging by ropes from the cornice of the rotunda, and hanging like monkeys from the edge of the dome. They sounded false fire alarms and galloped about town with borrowed engines and hose reels. Some of their antics thoroughly frightened the Washingtonians, especially maiden ladies, and it was only through their great respect for their little colonel, Ellsworth, that serious trouble was averted.

However, all was forgiven when a fire broke out in a tailor shop next to the Willard early one morning, and they became heroes for a day. The District firemen were notoriously slow, and when the local fire chief sent a call

for the New York Volunteers, the eager Zouaves dashed down the Avenue and broke open the locked doors of the Franklin Fire House to get equipment. They formed human ladders against the burning building, and one member hung headfirst from the roof to reach the hose line. Willard's was saved! The rest of the day was spent trotting about the city amid applause. Nevertheless, the Washingtonians felt relieved when the regiment was moved to a site thought appropriately chosen near the Government Insane Asylum across the Anacostia River.

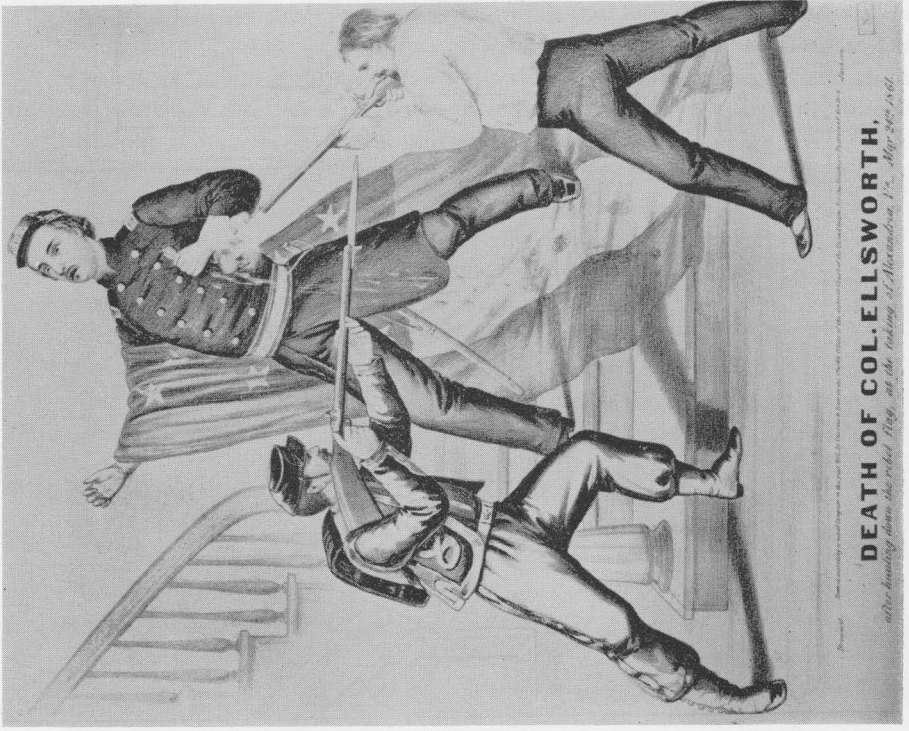
When the Federal troops crossed the Potomac into Virginia the night of May 23, Ellsworth's regiment crossed in two steamers from Giesboro' Point to a landing just above Alexandria. Early the following morning, a rider dashed through camp en route to Washington, carrying the tragic news that Colonel Ellsworth had just been killed in Alexandria! He had gone to the roof of the Marshall House (a popular tavern) and had torn down the Confederate flag. The enraged innkeeper shot him as he came down the stairs. Private Brownell, who had accompanied Ellsworth, fired a fatal bullet at the assassin.

This brilliant young officer had won not only the respect of the Washington populace during the months he had been stationed there, but also the admiration and affection of the roughnecks whom he commanded. His men were so enraged by the tragedy that it was thought expedient to confine them on a steamer anchored in mid-Potomac, lest they carry out their threat of revenge by burning Alexandria to the ground.

Ellsworth's body was first carried on a litter of muskets to a boat which took it across the river to the neat little engine house at the Navy Yard. The Lincolns immediately arranged to have the funeral services held in the East Room of the White House. Mrs. Lincoln placed upon the casket a laurel wreath framing his picture. There was city-wide mourning. The President was in the cortege which accompanied the hearse to the depot. Among the military escort was Private Brownell, carrying the blood-splashed Confederate flag which had cost Ellsworth his life. Only the tolling of bells was heard as the solemn crowds lined the crepe-draped Avenue. Up to this time, Washington had experienced only the excitement of war, the flashing uniforms and military parades. Now, the needless sacrifice of young manhood smote them with horrible reality . . . an omen of the coming slaughter! It was said that a golden medal which Ellsworth wore, inscribed "Non nobilis, sed pro patria," was driven into his heart by the fatal shot.

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On the grounds of Fairfax Court House is a large rough granite monument upon which is inscribed, "This stone marks the scene of the opening conflict of the War of 1861-1865, when John Q. Marr, Captain of the Warrenton Rifles who was the first soldier killed in action, fell 800 Ft. S. 46° W. (Mag.) of this spot, June 1st, 1861." To be correct, this statement should be further qualified, perhaps as the first recorded Confederate fatality, or the



NOTE EXAGGERATED SIZE OF COLONEL ELLSWORTH IN THIS CONTEMPORARY SKETCH.



first fatality of definite military action, because of the Baltimore episode and Colonel Ellsworth's death.

Furthermore, there has been an unofficial rumor that another Confederate lad lost his life on Minor Hill in Arlington County during the first week of Federal occupation of the Virginia shore. The tradition has come down in the Vanderwerken-Saegmuller clan that older members of the family, living on what later became known as Reserve Hill on Little Falls Road, witnessed the fatal sniping. The story goes that a Confederate soldier was seen hiding behind a large oak, around the edge of which he would peek and take a hasty shot at two Federal men who were digging an entrenchment near Little Falls Road. The two decided to trick him into exposing himself to their rifle fire, so as to get a return shot at him before he could dart behind the oak trunk. One placed his cap on the end of his rifle and lifted it barely above the edge of the embankment to draw the sniper's fire, while his companion aimed at the side of the tree and fired as he appeared to shoot. There was no further activity on Minor Hill, until some time later when two Confederate comrades were seen carrying away an apparently lifeless body.

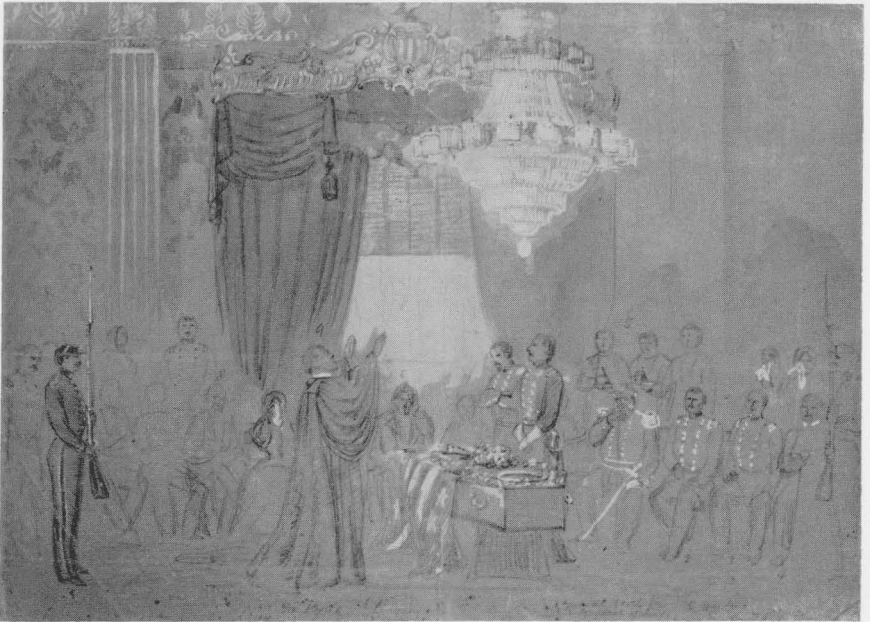
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Another nearby area which featured in a number of "firsts" is the little Fairfax County town of Vienna, which was first settled in the late 1700's and called Ayr Hill. Its population was greatly increased during the mid-1800's by the influx of a group of New York farming families which had been attracted to the area by the milder climate and the ready access to the Washington markets for their produce. They changed the name, at the suggestion of Dr. William Hendricks, to "Vienna," a town of their native state, which, ironically, has had its name changed since they left there. When the Civil War came, the sympathies of the residents of Vienna (Virginia) were so mixed that some local prisoners of war were taken by both the Federals and Confederates.

Vienna was situated on the strategic Alexandria, Loudoun & Hampshire Railway. On June 16, a Connecticut regiment had been sent from Alexandria to check the condition of the line and its bridges. When passing through Vienna toward Dunn Loring on their return trip, they were fired upon by two local farmers, McMills and Walker; the latter's bullet wounding Private George Busbee. The snipers were caught and taken to the Provost Marshal in Alexandria.

General McDowell, the Federal Field Army Commander, decided that a show of strength at Vienna was advisable, so he dispatched the First Ohio Infantry to that town the following day. The regiment was composed of 668 men riding a train of five flat cars and two coaches pushed by a locomotive. Stops were made at strategic road crossings and bridges, to drop off companies of men to guard them, so that by the time Vienna was reached, the ranks had thinned to 271 men; the Dayton Light Guards and the Cleveland Grays.

Unknown to the Federals, Colonel Maxcy Gregg of the First South Carolina Infantry, reinforced with a troop of Virginia Cavalry and an Alexandria battery of two six-pounders under Capt. Dell Kemper, totaling 680 men, had arrived in Vienna from a reconnaissance toward Dranesville. After destroying the water tank at the railroad station, they marched on, in late afternoon, down the road toward Fairfax Court House when they heard the distant whistle of the locomotive. The column wheeled and returned to Vienna where it lay in wait for the train at the end of a curve in a deep cut a quarter mile south of town. Many men were cut down by the first diagonal cross fire which strafed the train before it could come to a stop.



COLONEL ELLSWORTH'S BIER IN THE EAST ROOM OF THE WHITE HOUSE.

The men scurried from the train to seek cover in the thicket to the right of the track. The engineer frantically tried to reverse the train, but the brakes were locked on the cars and coaches. In the confusion, while releasing the brakes someone uncoupled the engine and one coach from the rest of the train, and the terrified engineer, instead of withdrawing the train a short distance out of range, to wait at a rallying point, opened the throttle and headed for Alexandria!

The Confederates pursued the fleeing Federals through the woods until dark, and returned to the tracks to loot and burn the remaining cars. The Confederates suffered no casualties, but the Ohioans numbered eight fatalities and four severely wounded.

Among the "firsts" which Vienna can claim are:

The first engagement between INFANTRY in northern Virginia.

The first tactical use of the railroad.

The first Union soldier from the State of Ohio to fall during the war.

The first time after the bombardment of Fort Sumter that the flag of South Carolina was unfurled in battle. There were many other interesting things which happened in Vienna during the war, but they form another story.

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In reviewing these pages, we realize that most of the "firsts" of that tragic conflict took place upon the soil of northern Virginia. We likewise feel that the people of this region were among the first to join hands after the conflict, and in mutual sympathy and understanding, face into the future of America without bitterness.

Contributions to a Bibliography of Arlington County

(Continued from page 42)

diags., tables. (Report, largely statistical, on population, employment, housing, income level and retail trade, with estimates to 1968 for the first two.)

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