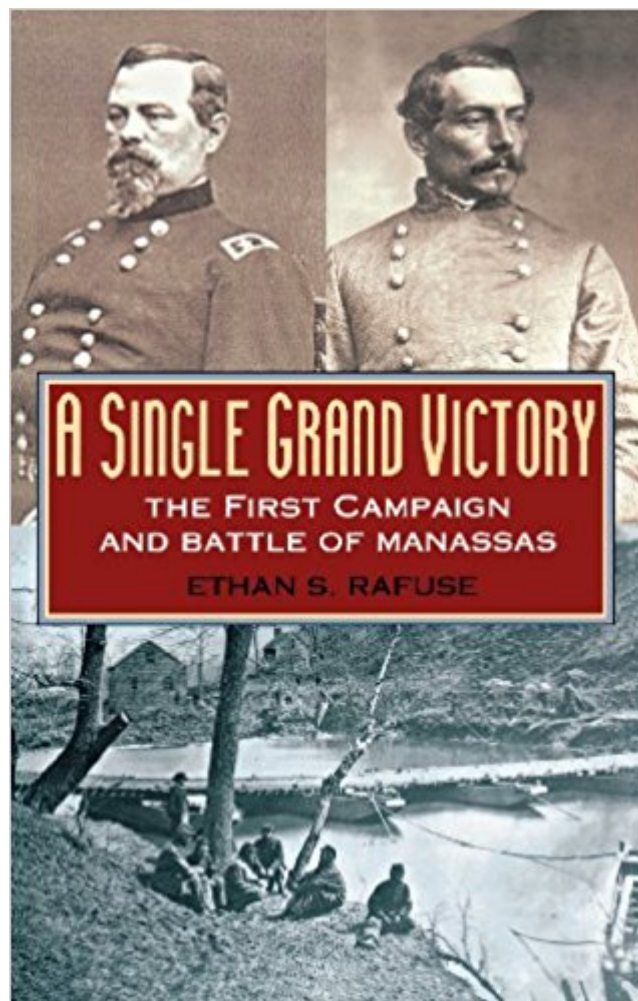




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# **A Single Grand Victory: The First Campaign And Battle Of Manassas (The American Crisis Series: Books On The Civil War Era)**



## Synopsis

More than 800 men lost their lives and 2,700 were wounded. Confederate General Thomas J. Jackson earned his legendary nickname "Stonewall" here as fellow Confederate General Barnard Bee, later fatally wounded in the battle, shouted, "Yonder stands Jackson like a stone wall!" Both the North and the South believed that a single victory in this first major battle would decide the war before it barely started. Yet the first battle of Manassas, or Bull Run, has not received nearly the same attention as the other major clashes of the Civil War. *A Single Grand Victory* is a highly readable, concise, comprehensive narrative by Ethan S. Rafuse, professor of history at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Rafuse worked as a park ranger at Bull Run, where he gained great familiarity with the site and the literature on this battle. His new book incorporates insights offered in recent scholarship on Civil War military, political, and cultural history. The author describes the factors that led President Abraham Lincoln to order an offensive against Confederates at Manassas Junction at a time when his most prominent military men advised against it. The war policies of both the Union and Confederate sides are explained. Rafuse offers descriptions and analysis of the individuals involved and the circumstances that influenced the manner in which the campaign was conducted. He covers the critical events and operational and tactical decisions that shaped the campaign's course and outcome. In addition, *A Single Grand Victory* provides insights into American life in the nineteenth century by examining what motivated men to fight in 1861 and describing what led both North and South to expect the war would be a short one. Southerners had anticipated that one victory like Bull Run would persuade the North to abandon the effort to restore the Union by force. Northerners believed support for the Confederate rebellion was so shallow that one battle would end the war. Civil War buffs will enjoy this

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## Customer Reviews

This is the first book I have read in the American Crisis Series, but it won't be my last. The same goes for author Ethan S. Rafuse, I will definitely check out more Civil War titles by him. The story is woven together in a short, well written, factual account that proves the book's title "A Single Grand Victory" was all that both sides believed they needed to win the American Civil War. The author weaves "traditional" and "new" military history together seamlessly to give the reader a really good general understanding of the campaign and battle of First Manassas/Bull Run. The Theater of Operations and Campaign maps were sufficient to get the reader to the banks of Bull Run without too much confusion. One map shows the initial Confederate positions along Bull Run on 18 July, 1861. This map, like all the battle maps is ok, but does not show the contours of the principal terrain features (Matthews Hill, Henry Hill, Chinn Ridge, etc.) that is always a great aid in allowing the reader to figure out why the troops and guns were positioned, and fought, where they did. Only four maps show the actual battle of 21 July, 1861, and this is not enough to show all the complicated movements, attacks, retreats, and counterattacks that make up this smaller, yet complicated, early Civil War battle. What saves this book is good writing that does not bog the reader down in too much detail. That way the reader can follow the events as they unfold during the battle with the small number of maps provided. But only an overview of the combat is given. (For more detailed combat descriptions I recommend "The First Battle of Manassas" by John Hennessy, and for more and better maps "The Maps of First Bull Run" by Bradley M. Gottfried) The author does not delve too much into the origins of Confederate General Jackson's nickname (an interesting story/controversy in its own right), and follows the traditional view giving the most blame for Union failure to Northern General Patterson and his inability to pin Joe Johnston's Confederate forces in the Shenandoah Valley (same as the reviewer). The book does not have an Order of Battle for the forces engaged that made up the Union and Confederate armies. For me this is always a negative for a book on

Civil War campaign/battle histories but for a lot of readers this will not be a problem. One thing the author did include in laying out this book that I have always been a big fan of when reading history is "NOTES" at the end of each chapter that significantly cuts down on flipping pages as I read the book. The book does not have any photos or illustrations, but I found the "Bibliographical Essay and Recommended Readings" section helpful. Overall, a really solid overview, check it out.

Good solid overview; nice maps. Clear prose, and the author rightly focuses on the initial stages of the battle down at Blackburn's Ford, rather than concentrating only on Henry House Hill.

This is a very good short survey of the Battle of Bull Run. The author challenges several assertions typically made by previous historians, most of them relating to how the two sides viewed one another prior to the war. For example the author outlines Northern sentiment regarding the toughness and valor of Southerners, revealing that Northerners felt them effete and weakened by slavery. This is often not recounted, or at least not emphasized by other historians. He details the maneuvers that led to the battle pretty thoroughly, but spends less time on the battle than say Davis' book does. At most the fighting itself gets 2 chapters, with the rest being the lead-in and the aftermath. There's a lot of good material here, but the account of the fighting itself doesn't break any new ground that I could see. Still, it's a worthwhile account, and very good in that it's concise.

This is an excellent book for the novice Civil War reader and for the well versed. Rafuse is an excellent writer, one not take with the flower and fuss of many others. He presents a well-structured overview of the battle and its complexities, and points clearly to the successes and failures of individual commanders who decided the winner and the loser. His writing moves the story smoothly from event-to-event and results in a book that is both easy to read and extremely informative. His portrayal of McDowell is rather sympathetic, pointing out that the Union loss was a product of the lack of thoroughness, understanding, and, yes, courage of some of his subordinate officers. He also suggests that the Union loss at First Bull Run, as bloody and brutal as it was far less of a physical disaster than it was a psychological disaster for the Union army. Rafuse is good at orienting the reader on the battlefield and in describing the advantages and deficiencies of the placement of forces. If one is just getting started in reading about the Bull Runs, this book provides a solid overview for moving on to the more detailed presentations of other Civil War scholars.

I am becoming a fan of this author after reading only two of his books. My reasons are simple; he is

an excellent writer and makes a good case for each of his points. Rafuse takes the time to tell the reader what he hopes to accomplish and attains his objectives. Along the way, I am informed and each point is supported with references. His books on the 61-62 war years highlight the growing realization that this is not going to be a short glorious adventure. In bringing this point home, he keeps the reader within the attitudes of the time and increases our understanding of the events as they happened. "A Single Grand Victory" was part of the mythology of the Civil War and weighed heavily on the generals of both sides. The title is both their hope and fear. This caused some actions that seem stupid but are logical within this context. In this short but well written book, we get a good campaign overview with an operational battle study. Well balanced we understand the problems both commanders face and how close the battle came to being a Union victory. The myth of taking Washington, pursuit of a defeated army is well covered with very logical reasons why they did/could not happen. My only objection is that the book lacks enough maps to keep the reader fully informed. This is a common problem, many publishers seem to think military history books do not need maps.

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