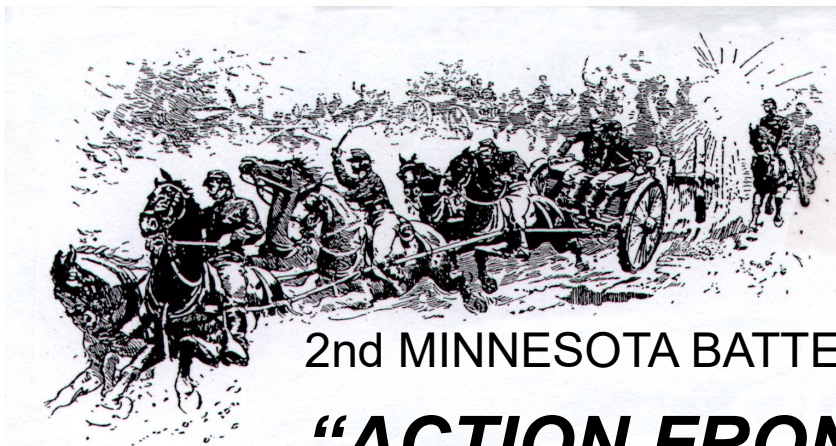




2nd MINNESOTA BATTERY

“ACTION FRONT”

Circular No. 341

July 2026

On This Date-165 Years Ago

July 21, 1861

Manassas, also known as Bull Run, was the first full-scale battle of the Civil War. The fierce fight there forced both the North and South to face the sobering reality that the war would be long and bloody. The battle ended as a Confederate victory. After this stinging defeat for the Union, Brig. Gen. [Irvin McDowell](#), the commander of the Union Army of Northeastern Virginia, was relieved and replaced by Maj. Gen. [George B. McClellan](#), who set about reorganizing and training what would become the Army of the Potomac.

Although the Civil War officially began when Confederate troops shelled [Fort Sumter](#) on April 12, 1861, the fighting didn't commence in earnest until the Battle of Bull Run, fought months later in Virginia, just 25 miles from Washington D.C. Under public pressure to end the war in 90 days, [President Lincoln](#) had pushed the cautious Gen. McDowell to embark on a campaign to capture the Confederate capital in Richmond, but McDowell's troops were stopped at Bull Run by Brig. Gen. [P.G.T. Beauregard](#)'s Rebel forces. The Federals retreated to Washington, where the Lincoln administration retooled for a war that would be waged at great human and financial cost.

As the battle ends, the Confederates are bolstered by the arrival from Richmond of President [Jefferson Davis](#), but the victorious forces are too disorganized to pursue the Federals. McDowell's fleeing forces, already hampered by narrow bridges and overturned wagons, are further impeded by hordes of fleeing civilian spectators, who had come down from Washington to enjoy the spectacle. By July 22, the remnants of the shattered Union army reach the safety of Washington, D.C. McDowell is later relieved of his command.

The only Minnesota troops involved in the battle were the First Minnesota Infantry.

(Extracted from the web pages of the American Battlefield Trust.)

Upcoming Events

Aug 1 Elba, MN, Whitewater River Fest
1200 S Main Street, Elba MN

This is the usual gun salute to honor veterans, so a gun crew is needed. Contact Daryl or John for more information.

Aug 15-16 Canton Civil War Days
North Bridge Street, Canton, SD

This is a reenactment, this year featuring the Battle of Shiloh. It is hosted by many of the same people who helped with the Pipestone event and those who attended in 2024 (this is an every-other-year event) had a great time. The battle field is beside a wooded creek and many of the camps were along the trails under the trees. The organizers to incredible care of reenactors with wood, water, straw and trash pickup.

Preregistration is required!

Battery members attending must each register on their own and pay the \$10 fee, but you will be reimbursed by the Battery at the event. To register: www.cantonicivilwardays.com

Aug 23-24 Morristown MN – Ahlman's Annual Shooters Roundup.

Our Battery firing demonstrations have historically been voted one of the most popular venues of the weekend. The event is **open from 9:00am – 5:00pm**. We will camp inside Fort Ahlman and provide cannon firing demonstrations at 10:00am 12:00pm 2:00pm 4:00pm both days. More details will be coming.

Next Meeting

July 25, 11:00, Goodhue County Historical Society 1166 Oak Street, Red Wing

Contact Neil Bruce with questions or agenda items.
Phone: (651) 301-9232 Email: nfbrkb@gmail.com



Battery Profile

This is a repeat of Franz' biography that has appeared in a previous newsletter—but with a great reason! A photograph of Franz—in uniform—has been turned up by his descendant (and Battery member) Bob Zahler. Permission has been obtained to publish the photo in our newsletter and it appears here with his bio as a refresher. If you remember, our Battery dedicated a military marker for Franz in 2006.

Franz Zahler

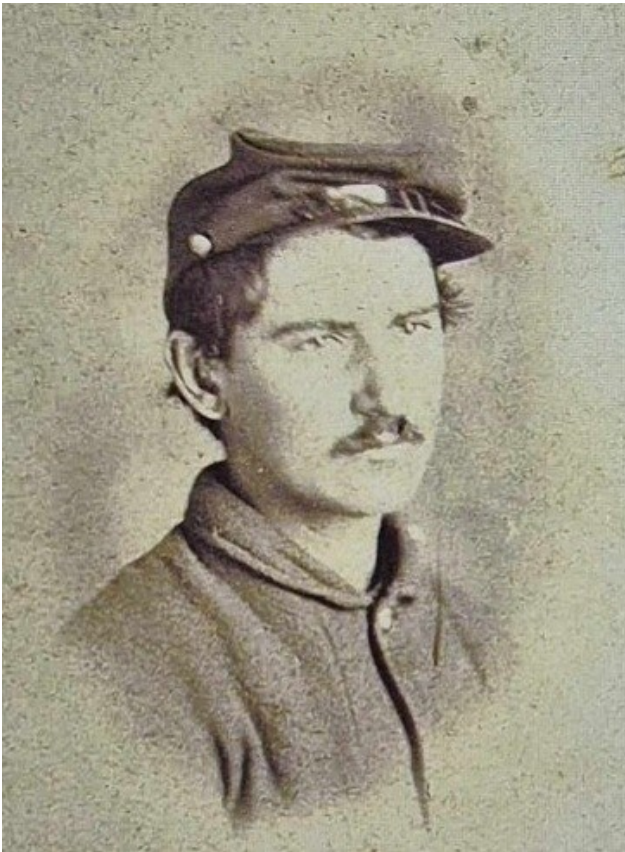
With a name like Franz Zahler, it is no surprise he was born in Ettenbeuren, Schwabia, on May 29, 1835. This was an area ruled by the of King Bavaria. Whether it was Franz or an official with an eye for simplicity, but some records state that Franz was born in Bavaria, other records say Germany. Franz's naturalization records report that he arrived in the United States on November 12, 1855, and that he applied for citizenship in Ramsey County, Minnesota, a year later.

Franz was on a mission to secure land for the family. He and two brothers, Anton and Joseph, had arrived in America ahead of the rest of the family. Franz sought land in Frankfort Township (known as St. Michael today) in Wright County with an application filed on January 1, 1857. By June, he had a cabin built. His parents and the rest of the children arrived in the fall of 1857.

In 1858, Franz took a job with a surveying company in the Sauk Valley of Minnesota. When he finished the job, he was paid \$84 in bank notes, a national currency was not yet in use in early Minnesota. Franz paid his hotel bill and stage fare to Anoka, Minnesota, where he decided to go shopping. He picked out some shoes and clothing and the proprietor added up the cost to a fairly good sized bill. The shop keeper asked if Frank (it appears Mr. Zahler used Franz and Frank interchangeably for his given name) had the money to pay his bill.

Frank assured the storekeeper the bill would be paid in full. The shopkeeper went on to ask what kind of bank notes Frank had as the economic crisis of 1857 was still holding firm and the value of bank notes fluctuated wildly from day to day.

Frank showed the man the notes only to be told his money was worth a mere 15 cents on the dollar that day. It was not the last in a line of hardships Frank faced in his life.



It appears Franz had a bit of a wanderer in him as records indicate he married Maria Talbut in Ramsey in 1862. He agreed to enlist while he was in the Township of Grow, very near to Ramsey in Anoka County that same year, but he still held the patent on the land in Frankfort Township in Wright County.

The Second Minnesota Battery of Light Artillery was recruiting for men to take the place of those injured or sick that summer. Franz signed the enlistment papers on August 11, 1862, in the town of Anoka, though he noted he had volunteered in the Township of Grow. He was given a bounty of \$25 for his promise to serve three years. The muster roll showed Franz to be 27 years old, with hazel eyes, light hair and a fair complexion. He stood 5' 5 3/4" tall and at the time he enlisted, he said his occupation was farming.

Franz went south with more than 20 other new recruits for the Second Battery. They met up with the Battery just in time to take part in the battle at Perryville, Kentucky. It was the first major battle the Battery had seen and their position put them in some hot fighting. Franz came through the fight without harm or distinction coming his way. It was to be his normal status in the Second Battery.

The time Franz spent in the army was unremarkable according to Battery records. Franz was never reported sick, never noted for special praise or singled out for criticism. In fact, his name appears on the muster rolls, but never in the morning reports except for when he reported in and when he reenlisted for a second three year term of service in March of 1864. When the war was over, Franz and the Battery returned to Minnesota where he was mustered out on August 16, 1865.

Franz returned to Frankfort and in 1867, was contracting for business in the area. By this time, another brother was setting up a brewery in Waconia, in Carver County, so Franz moved to Waconia. He sold the land he owned in Frankfort to his mother.

Records are not clear, but it would seem Frank's first wife must have died as he married Mary Stenger in 1868 in Waconia. Together, they had five children. They ran a small store in a tiny community called Helvetia and possibly did some farming as well.

In 1873, Franz was living in St. Paul and working as a maltster at the North Star Brewery. He had a room on Commercial Street near Hudson in Ward five. Two of his brothers were also working at other breweries in the area. Church records indicate Mary and the children remained in Waconia.

Frank seemed prone to trouble and heartache. He and Mary lost a child to illness and Frank's shifts in occupation and place of residence seem to indicate a restlessness. Perhaps in more modern times, Franz might have been diagnosed with something like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or depression, but in 1876, there was little help. On December 13, 1876, Franz was found slumped over the dashboard of the sleigh he was riding in near Lake Calhoun in Minneapolis. In the sleigh were some stock items for the store he and Mary ran in Helvetia. When a passerby stopped the horse to see what was wrong, he found to his horror that Franz had shot himself in the head with a revolver. The coroner was called and he ruled Franz's death a suicide. Franz was 41 years old when he took his own life. A newspaper report said Frank had bought the revolver while he was in Minneapolis, suggesting the act was premeditated.

Three days later, a second of Frank and Mary's children, Anthony, died from diphtheria at the age of 22 months.

It is believed that Frank's brother, Anton, handled the arrangements for burial of Frank in the Layman's Cemetery in Minneapolis. Anton was likely the only person to attend the burial since his family was a days' ride away and the baby so very ill. The stigma and shame attached to a Catholic suicide only compounded tragedy.

It is also believed that it was Anton's wife who had, not only Frank's body moved, but the bodies of seven other Zahler family members all moved to Lake Crystal Cemetery in December of 1922. She and her second husband are buried in an adjacent grave plot. Frank's wife, Mary, eventually remarried and moved to Otter Tail County, Minnesota, where she spent the rest of her days.

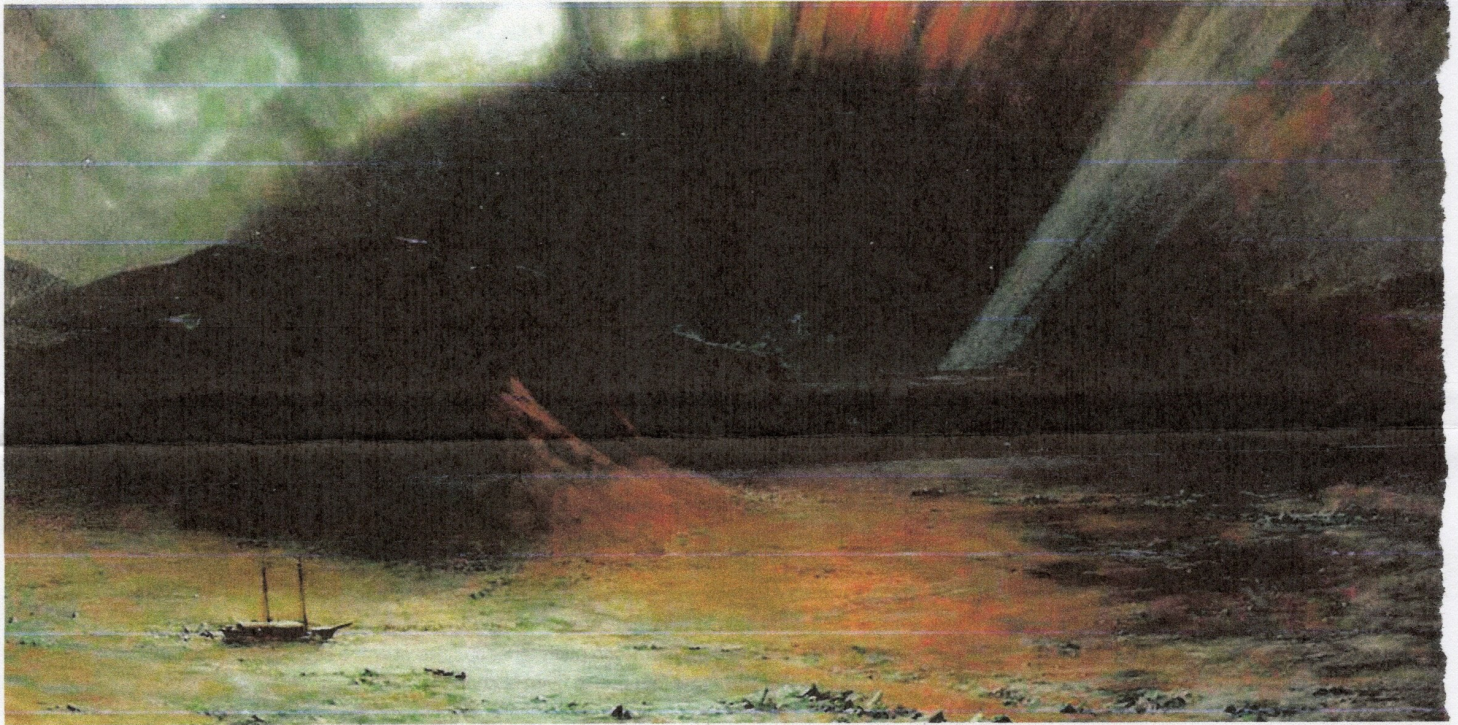
In 2004, members of the Second Minnesota Battery of Light Artillery Reenactors found Frank's grave and worked to get a veteran's marker placed on it to preserve his memory. The stone setting was paid for by the St. Michael American Legion and dedicated on June 17, 2006.



We often read about the Civil War being the first “modern” war in terms of tactics, equipment and new inventions such as iron clad ships. It led to new ways of thinking and, as this article submitted by Miss Katie discusses, even new branches of science!

OUT THERE

BY DAVID J. EICHER



A Dark War and a Bright Sky

FROM GREAT LEADERS TO GREAT COMETS, ASTRONOMY PLAYED A CRUCIAL ROLE IN THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR.

In the summer of 1863, the U.S. was in the middle of its greatest-ever crisis. A bloody civil war between the Southern Confederacy and the federal government had created hundreds of thousands of casualties, and to many, no end appeared to be in sight. By July of that year, however, things finally seemed to be brightening slightly for the hopes of a united country. Decisive victories for the Union at Gettysburg and Vicksburg gave the first glimmers of foresight that the war would eventually cease and that healing would begin.

Seven weeks after the Battle of Gettysburg, the nation's leader, Abraham Lincoln, accompanied by his young private secretary John Hay, made an unannounced journey to the U.S. Naval Observatory to indulge the president's interest in astronomy and to seek a brief reprieve from the war. In those days, the observatory was located at 23rd and E streets, about three blocks north of what is now the Lincoln Memorial site. (This area, called Foggy Bottom due to the frequent haze and fog that rolled off the Potomac, wasn't the best site for a

FREDERIC CHURCH'S painting of an aurora is reminiscent of the descriptions of an auroral show noted after the Battle of Fredericksburg in Virginia in 1862.

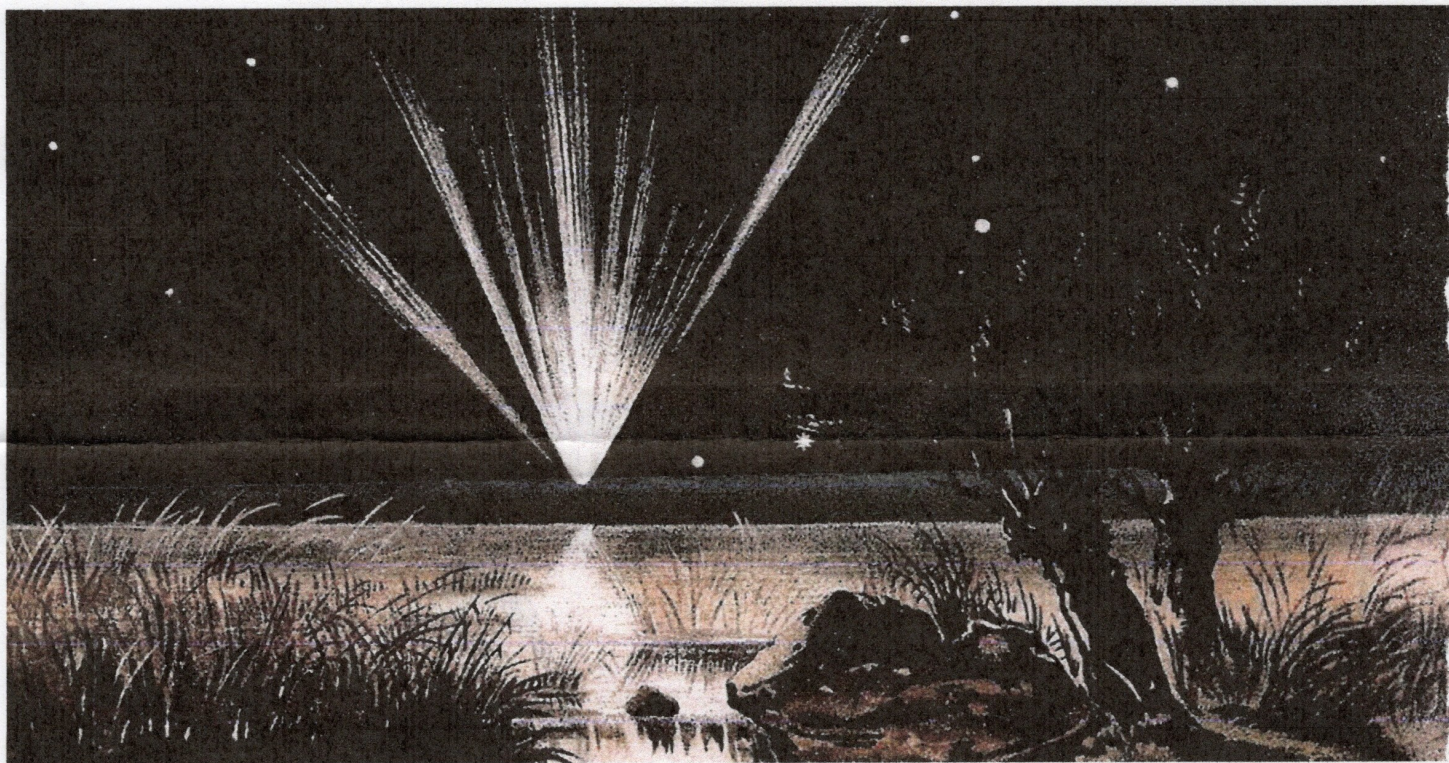
As the cries of wounded men filled the icy air, an aurora filled the sky, visible to many thousands of soldiers on both sides.

telescope, and eventually the observatory would move.)

On that night of Aug. 22, 1863, the observatory was manned by a young astronomer, Asaph Hall. Fourteen years later, Hall would discover the two moons of Mars, but on that evening, he was an unknown 33-year-old researcher. The group climbed up a wooden ladder to the dome where the observatory's 9.6-inch refractor was located. There they observed the Moon and the star Arcturus.

In the 1980s, I was privileged to visit the historic site of the Old Naval Observatory, courtesy of Jan Herman, the observatory's former historian. Climbing up the same wooden steps Lincoln had used to enter the dome gave me an ethereal feeling of the past, the present, and the universe, all meeting at one point.

NOT ALL participants of the Civil War sought to contemplate the meaning of the cosmos as Abraham Lincoln did, but some viewed certain events as a beacon of hope — or demise.



A DRAWING of the Great Comet of 1861, also known as C/1861 J1 or Comet Tebbutt, appeared in the 1888 book *Picture Atlas of the Star World*.

On May 13, 1861, an observer in New South Wales, Australia, found what came to be called the Great Comet of 1861. By midsummer, the comet had moved so that it was visible in the Northern Hemisphere sky and, according to astronomer Horace Tuttle, sported a tail 106° long.

The comet caused a press sensation. The evening spectacle came to be called The War Comet, and the editors of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* posed a question to their readers: "What means this visit — peace or war?" *Vanity Fair* published a cartoon showing Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott, the senior general of the Union army, as the comet's head and a slew of bayonets comprising the tail.

During this time, Charles Johnson, a private in the 9th New York Infantry, wrote in his diary, "The comet is now tired of his visit to these regions of space, or disgusted it may be with the appearance of things on this side of the planet, for he is now leaving in seemingly greater haste than he came, with his tail between his legs, for the unknown regions out yonder."

The Great Comet of 1861 faded during the week of the First Battle of Bull Run, leading to vast speculation on that meaning. But comets were not done with the war. In 1862, Tuttle discovered another comet that would rise to significant brightness.

The era in which the Civil War occurred saw a dramatic upheaval in the U.S., but also witnessed the rise of astrophysics.

Astronomer Lewis Swift had also spotted the comet, which became known as Swift-Tuttle. When that comet faded in September 1862, many attached its significance — one way or another — to the battle of Antietam, a substantial Union victory. Decades later, astronomers would identify this comet as the source of the Perseid meteor shower.

In December 1862, during the battle of Fredericksburg in Virginia, a different kind of celestial omen made its appearance. After a discouraging lack of progress during the war's first two years, Lincoln assigned Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside to command the Army of the Potomac, the principal Union army in the east. Burnside faced Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee at Fredericksburg, which ended in a Union disaster.

Following the battle, as the cries of wounded men filled the icy air, an aurora appeared in the sky, visible to many thousands of soldiers on both sides. "A brilliant aurora illuminated the night and much facilitated the work upon the entrenchments," wrote Confederate Col. Edward Porter Alexander.

The light show was taken as an omen of victory by Southerners, who had inflicted heavy losses on the Yankee troops. And, of course, many Union soldiers saw it as an omen of doom. Citizens in Fredericksburg, in Charlottesville, and all over the

region remarked on the unusual aurora. "Oh, child, it was a terrible omen," wrote Elizabeth Lyle Saxon in her 1905 reminiscences, quoting an elderly woman's words to her. "Such lights never burn, save for kings' and heroes' deaths." A writer for the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* proposed the crimson columns of light represented "the blood of those martyrs who had offered their lives as a sacrifice to their native land."

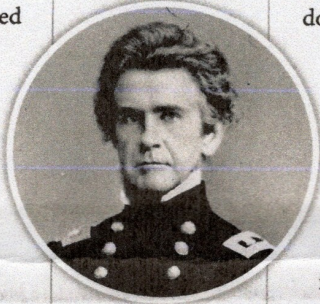
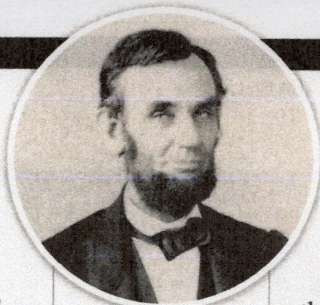
IN THE FOLLOWING months, a significant event rocked the command structure of the Confederate Army. The battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863 was yet another huge win for the Confederacy, following the triumph at Fredericksburg. But in the action, the Southern general Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, was accidentally and mortally wounded by other Confederate troops.

Recently, astronomers have shed some light — or rather some moonlight — onto why the events of that night led to Jackson's death. As the Sun faded on that fateful day at Chancellorsville, Jackson pressed his men forward. Stonewall's flank attack crushed a portion of the Union force, held by Maj. Gen. Oliver Howard's 11th Corps. Jackson rode out under moonlight to the Plank Road, assessing the situation and determining the feasibility of a night attack by the light of the full moon. Soldiers in the 18th North Carolina Infantry believed the small group of riders, including Jackson, were Union cavalry and opened fire. Jackson was hit with three bullets, including in his left arm, which had to be amputated later that night. Confederate doctors attempted to transport him to Richmond for follow-up care, but he developed pneumonia and died eight days later.

In 2013, a group led by Don Olson of Texas State University determined that, based on astronomical research and battle maps, Stonewall and his party would have been viewed as a group of dark silhouettes using the light of the moon, which sat at a low 25° above the horizon, as their guide. Their positions ultimately obscured their identities, resulting in the soldiers mistakenly opening fire.

NORTH OF THE Mason-Dixon Line, another prominent figure was strongly associated with the night sky.

On the Union side, a well-known astronomer became one of the most prominent general officers in the western theater. Ormsby Mitchel had been born in Kentucky but grew up in Lebanon, Ohio,



FROM TOP: On Aug. 9, 1862, Abraham Lincoln posed for this portrait. Two weeks later he made a surprise nighttime visit to the U.S. Naval Observatory.

Maj. Gen. Ormsby Mitchel oversaw a famous episode of the Civil War, the Great Locomotive Chase through northern Georgia. Before the war, he established the Cincinnati Observatory.

At the battle of Chancellorsville, **Lt. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson** was accidentally fired on and mortally wounded by his own troops in the moonlight.

and was a classmate of Robert E. Lee at West Point. During his career, he helped establish the U.S. Naval Observatory and the Harvard College Observatory. Mitchel also studied the double star Nu (ν) Scorpii and found in 1846 that the fainter of the two stars was also a close double.

After West Point, Mitchel became a professor of mathematics at the military academy, but then returned to Ohio, became a lawyer and engineer, and began a professorship at Cincinnati College. He organized the Cincinnati Astronomical Society and became an early popularizer of the subject. In 1859, Mitchel moved to the Dudley Observatory in New York. But in 1861, as the war rapidly approached, he returned to his military roots at the age of 51.

Commissioned a brigadier general, Mitchel first supervised defenses around Cincinnati and northern Kentucky. In 1862, he conspired with a Union spy, James J. Andrews, on a plot that would come to be known as the Great Locomotive Chase. Given the nickname Andrews' Raiders, they stole the Confederate locomotive *The General* in northern Georgia, intent on disrupting the important railway between Atlanta and Chattanooga. The plan that Mitchel ordered but did not participate in eventually failed. Many of the raiders were captured and eight were hanged by the Confederacy, including Andrews himself, while others were able to escape. Afterward, 19 of the living and the executed men became the first recipients of the Medal of Honor.

Despite the raid's failure, Mitchel continued to lead other successful operations throughout the year. By September 1862, he was assigned command of a post in Beaufort, South Carolina, but he contracted yellow fever and died there in October.

THE ERA IN which Mitchel lived and the Civil War occurred not only saw a dramatic upheaval of the U.S. but also witnessed the rise of astrophysics. During this time, a field of simple observing and cataloging transformed into understanding the physical nature of what the universe contains.

Out of a maelstrom of chaos eventually came order, a start down the long road to justice and equality, and the beginnings of an understanding of our larger universe. ▣

David J. Eicher is editor of *Astronomy*, author of 17 books on science, and of nine books on the American Civil War.

Recap

We had no events in June, so there is nothing to recap, however, one of our members was very busy at a local city celebration!

Linnea portrayed the laundress, demonstrating how to do laundry and how the laundress was connected to the army! Private Schmit accompanied her and they were able to share history with many visitors.

Way to go, Linnea and Thomas!
(Photo stolen from Facebook!)



The Second Minnesota Light Artillery Battery is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of Civil War history by living it.

Membership is \$12 per year. Non-member newsletter subscription rate is \$6.00 per year.

For information on the Battery, please contact:

President

Neil Bruce
859 Pioneer Road
Red Wing, MN 55066 Phone: (651) 301-9232

Treasurer

Daryl Duden
1210 West 4th Street
Red Wing, MN 55066 Phone: (651) 388-6520

Twin Cities Metro Area Contact

Ron & Vickie Wendel
12419 Redwood Street NW
Coon Rapids, MN 55448 Phone: (763) 754-2476

E-mail: 2mnbattery@gmail.com

Battery Website:
<http://www.2mnbattery.org>

