

2nd MINNESOTA BATTERY

“ACTION FRONT”

Circular No. 339

May 2026

On This Date-165 Years Ago

Excerpted from: <https://gastonlibrary.libguides.com/>

- **6 May.** Arkansas secedes.
- **8 May.** The North Carolina legislature passes "An Act to raise 10,000 troops."
- **13 May.** Union General George B. McClellan becomes commander of the Department of the Ohio.
- **20 May.** The Secession Convention meets in Raleigh and North Carolina votes to secede. The convention also adopts a flag: "Be it ordained by this Convention, and it is hereby ordained by the authority of the same, That the Flag of North Carolina shall consist of a red field with a white star in the center, and with the inscription, above the star, in a semi-circular form, of "May 20th, 1775," and below the star, in a semi-circular form, of "May 20th, 1861." That there shall be two bars of equal width, and the length of the field shall be equal to the bar, the width of the field being equal to both bars: the first bar shall be blue, and second shall be white: and the length of the flag shall be one-third more than its width." **21 May.** Richmond, Virginia becomes the capital of the Confederate States.
- **24 May.** Union forces move into the Confederate States. New York Zouaves led by Elmer Ellsworth go by steamboat to Alexandria. The landing is peaceful until Ellsworth spies a large Confederate flag flying from a hotel. Ellsworth himself cuts down the flag from the roof, but as he returns downstairs, the hotel's owner fires a shotgun straight into his chest. He is the first Union officer killed in the war. A private immediately kills the landlord.
- **30 May.** At Norfolk, Virginia Confederates raise the *USS Merrimac* which had been scuttled and burned when the Federal forces left. She will be rebuilt as the *CSS Virginia*.

Upcoming Events

May 14 Old Court House Museum, 315 West Madison Street, Durand, WI.

Arrive by 7:30 to set up five learning stations and rotate students through them, about 18-20 in each group. Following the school groups, we will remain at our stations for members of the Historical Society and the public to visit. **Bring a bag lunch.**

May 25 Memorial Day, Red Wing, MN

Arrive at Bay Point Park by 7:30 to set up. There will be a reading by one of our Battery members for the Memorial Day service and honor volleys from our gun. If you were not at the April meeting and can attend this event, please contact John Cain or Dary; Duden as soon as possible.

Election Results—Amended!

James Livingstone was not in attendance at the last meeting where he was elected president. Upon finding out this news, he politely declined the office, preferring to continue serving as vice president. Since he'd been elected without his actual presence at the meeting, a back up plan was put in place in case James declined. Neil Bruce agreed at the March meeting to serve as president if James declined. Neil was present! This means Neil is now the duly elected president of the Second Battery to fill the unexpired term of Ken Cunningham.

Congratulations and thanks to Neil and James for taking on the responsibilities of these leadership roles.

Next Meeting

May 30, 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 Profiles

Nelson Fulton

Nelson Fulton was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on June 4, 1840. He lived there until he was 17, then came to Minnesota where he settled in Millersburgh, Rice County. He remained there until the war broke out when he went to Indiana to enlist. He enlisted on July 18, 1861, at Blufton, Indiana. He may have gone there to enlist as the Minnesota units then called for were already full.

Nelson served in the 22nd Indiana Infantry Regiment for a year and a half before a special order transferred him to the Second Minnesota Battery. Both Nelson and his commanding officer approved of the transfer and Nelson's name appeared on the roles of the Battery in December of 1862.

In April of 1863, Nelson managed to obtain a furlough and he came back to Minnesota. While on furlough, he married Lusetta R. Sanford, also of Millersburgh. He probably courted her before he left Minnesota to join the army.

Nelson stayed with the Battery, reenlisting in March of 1864, and served until the Battery was mustered out at Fort Snelling on August 16, 1865. Nelson and his wife lived in Dundas for a time, then Northfield, and finally moved to Hawley. He and Lusetta had two children before Lusetta died in 1875.

In the winter of 1875, Nelson was teaching school in the Rollag area of Clay County, Minnesota. He went back to Rice County and married Susan C. Graham of Dundas on October 11, 1877. They returned to Rollag where Nelson taught school again before moving to Dakota County where they took up farming for seven years.

Nelson took his family back to Clay County and began work as the foreman of farm owned by a Doctor Sill near Hawley. He worked there for three years before moving to Crookston where he operated a creamery for a couple years. His reputation as an excellent butter maker must have preceded him, as in 1890, he went back to Hawley to supervise the building of a creamery there. He ran the creamery for four years.

Nelson had many duties and was very active in the community at Hawley. He ran, in partnership with his son, the newspaper in Hawley, *The Herald*, from the fall of 1894 to June of 1899. Nelson was the postmaster from 1897 until his death. He served on the Republican Party in Hawley and was appointed the county chairman during the campaign of 1898. He held the offices of justice of the peace, president of the city council and other city offices throughout the years. He was a member of the Grand Army Post.

Nelson spent the last four months of his life gravely ill, not able to leave the house and forced to sit in a chair at all times. His death was attributed to liver and heart trouble and he died at his home in Hawley. The first funeral was from his home in Hawley where a large number of people attended and a flag ceremony was presented in his honor. His remains were then taken by train to Dundas by his wife and son for a second funeral where friends in Dundas paid their last respects. Three of his comrades spoke at the funeral including James Hunter who served with him in the Second Minnesota Battery. The veterans fired a final salute to him at his graveside in the Dundas Cemetery.

Nelson's stone is very worn and only the top portion remains above ground.



The Union Submarine

(From the Wikipedia website—footnotes were removed to make this fit!)

USS Alligator, the fourth United States Navy ship of that name, is the first known U.S. Navy submarine, and was active during the American Civil War (the first American underwater vehicle was *Turtle* during the Revolutionary War, and was operated by the Continental Army, rather than the Navy, in 1776 against British vessels in New York harbor). During the Civil War the Confederate States Navy would also build its own submarine, *H. L. Hunley*.



Alligator Junior

Brutus de Villeroi was a French engineer, inventor, and ship designer. Well-regarded in France where he had designed many diving ships, he immigrated to the United States in 1856, where he continued his work in shipbuilding. One of his ships was a salvage ship built in 1859. This ship was later retroactively dubbed the "*Alligator Junior*" (or *Alligator Jr.*) due to serving as something of a prototype for the *Alligator*. It was around 30–35 feet long, a mere 44 inches in diameter, iron-hulled, and weighed several tons. It was powered by a small propeller from the start, rather than the paddles and oars used in earlier designs (and the first version of the *Alligator*). The crew would pull a leather strap from the inside to turn the propeller. In theory, the boat could sail to a location, dive, rest on sea bottom, then release divers to collect nearby sunken salvage.[1]

de Villeroi provided a public demonstration of the boat on October 2, 1859, near Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania, but the salvage ship appears to have been unused afterward, whether due to some unpublicized problem or lack of a financially sound plan to use the ship. At some point in 1861, the boat was moved across the Delaware River to New Jersey, perhaps to dock the boat more cheaply than in the Philadelphia region. de Villeroi seems to have attempted to sell the ship to the US Navy after the attack on Fort Sumter, but his attempt was apparently ineffective or lost. The ship was reactivated and sailed the Delaware

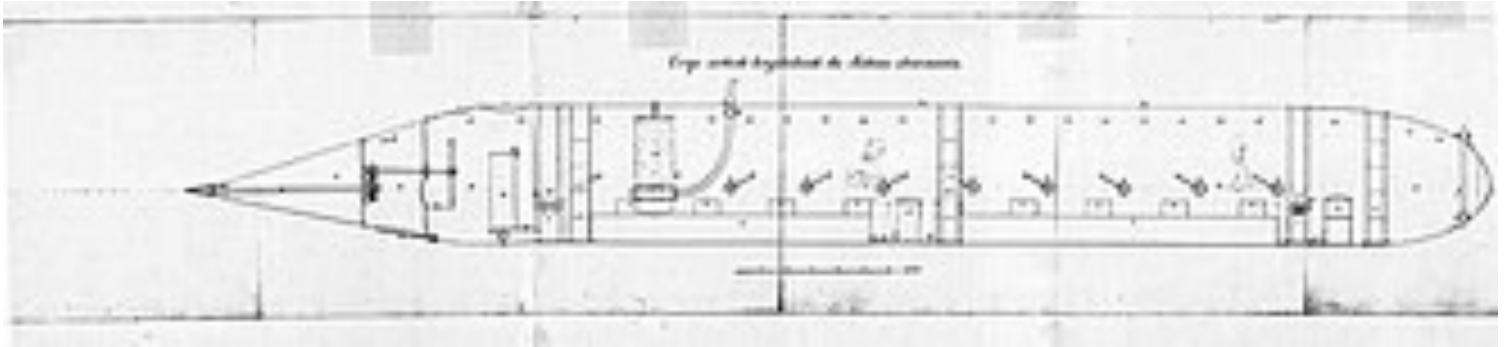
on the night of May 16 and morning of May 17, 1861; it was spotted by the Harbor Police, the two crewmen were arrested, and the ship was impounded at the Noble Street pier in Philadelphia. The crew's claims of the US Navy having arranged the voyage were quickly proven false. The curiosity drew public attention, speculation, and excitement. Commandant Samuel Francis Du Pont decided that the ship was not a threat, and returned it to its owners after an inspection at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. de Villeroi continued to press for the use of his invention, and Du Pont sent three officers to examine the boat on May 20. Their report in July found the existing ship as not feasible to use as a weapon – it was too slow and operated poorly in inclement weather conditions. de Villeroi offered to sell the ship to the US Navy, but was ignored; he wrote directly to President Lincoln asking that his inventions be given a chance. It was decided that while the old salvage ship was an interesting model but unworkable in practice, a larger and faster diving ship might yet have some potential.[1]

The *Alligator Junior* seems to have been essentially abandoned afterward; it was probably tied up at the Rancocas Creek in New Jersey, but not maintained. Its position has been lost, although in 2024 a team proposed that they found a deposit of metal that may be the lost ship.

In the autumn of 1861, the Union Navy asked the firm of Neafie & Levy to construct a small submersible ship designed by de Villeroi, who also acted as a supervisor during the first phase of the construction. The boat was about 47 feet long, with a beam of 4 feet 8 inches and height of 5 feet 6 inches. It was made of iron, with the upper part pierced for small circular plates of glass, for light, and in it were several water tight compartments". She was designed to carry 18 men. For propulsion, she was equipped with 16 hand-powered paddles protruding from the sides. On July 3, 1862, the Washington Navy Yard had the paddles replaced by a hand-cranked propeller, which improved its speed to about four knots. Air was supplied from the surface by two tubes with floats, connected to an air pump located inside the submarine; it was the first operational submarine to have an air purifying system. The boat had a forward airlock, and was the first operational submarine with the capability for a diver to leave and return while both remained submerged. Divers could affix mines to a target, then return and detonate them by connecting the mine's insulated copper wire to a battery inside the vessel.

The Union Navy wanted such a vessel to counter the threat posed to its wooden-hulled blockaders by the former screw frigate *Merrimack* which, according to intelligence reports, the Norfolk Navy Yard was rebuilding as an ironclad ram for the Confederacy (*CSS Virginia*). The Union Navy's agreement with the Philadelphia shipbuilder specified that the submarine was to be finished in not more than 40 days; its keel

was laid down almost immediately following the signing on November 1, 1861 of a contract for her construction. Nevertheless, the work proceeded so slowly that more than 180 days had elapsed when the novel craft finally was launched on May 1, 1862.



Plan of his submarine, by Brutus de Villeroi, describing the oar arrangement. Samuel Eakins, first commander of *Alligator*

Soon after her launching, she was towed to the Philadelphia Navy Yard to be fitted out and manned. Two weeks later, she was placed under command of a civilian, Mr. Samuel Eakins. On June 13, the Navy formally accepted the boat.

Next, the steam tug *Fred Kopp* was engaged to tow the submarine to Hampton Roads, Virginia. The two vessels got underway on June 19, and proceeded down the Delaware River to the Delaware and Chesapeake Canal, through which they entered the Chesapeake Bay for the last leg of the voyage, reaching Hampton Roads on the 23rd. At Norfolk, the submarine was moored alongside the sidewheel steamer *USS Satellite*, which was to act as her tender during her service with the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. A spring 1862 newspaper report called the vessel *Alligator*, in part because of its green color, a moniker which soon appeared in official correspondence.[3]

Several tasks were considered for the vessel: destroying a bridge across Swift Creek, a tributary of the Appomattox River; clearing away the obstructions in the James River at Fort Darling, which had prevented Union gunboats from steaming upstream to support General McClellan's drive up the peninsula toward Richmond; and blowing up the *CSS Virginia*, should that ironclad be completed on time and sent downstream to attack Union forces. Consequently, the submarine was sent up the James to City Point where she arrived on the 25th. Commander John Rodgers, the senior naval officer in that area, examined *Alligator* and reported that neither the James off Fort Darling nor the Appomattox near the bridge was deep enough to permit the submarine to submerge completely. Moreover, he feared that while his theater of operation contained no targets accessible to the submarine, the Union gunboats under his command would be highly vulnerable to her attacks should *Alligator* fall into enemy hands. He therefore requested permission to send the submarine back to Hampton Roads.

The ship headed downriver on the 29th and then was ordered to proceed to the Washington Navy Yard for more experimentation and testing. In August, Lt. Thomas O. Selfridge Jr. was given command of *Alligator* and she was assigned a naval crew. The tests proved unsatisfactory, and Selfridge pronounced "the enterprise ... a failure".

On July 3, 1862, the Navy Yard replaced *Alligator's* oars with a hand-cranked screw propeller, thereby increasing her speed to about 4 knots. President Lincoln observed the submarine in operation on March 18, 1863.

About this time, Rear Admiral Samuel Francis du Pont, who had become interested in the submarine while in command of the Philadelphia Navy Yard early in the war, decided that *Alligator* might be useful in carrying out his plans to take Charleston, South Carolina, the birthplace of secession. Acting Master John F. Winchester, who then commanded *Sumpter*, was ordered to tow the submarine to Port Royal, South Carolina. The pair got underway on March 31.

The next day, both encountered bad weather which, on April 2, forced *Sumpter* to cut *Alligator* adrift off Cape Hatteras. She either immediately sank or drifted for a while before sinking, ending the career of the United States Navy's first submarine. An attempt to find it in 2005 was not successful.

Amended dates!

Second Minnesota Battery 2026 Calendar

These events are approved by membership vote at the March meeting.

- May 14 Durand, WI Pepin County Historical Society Bob Zika
315 W Madison St Durand WI (Confirmed)
- May 25 Red Wing, MN 2026 Memorial Day Observance John Cain
Bay Point Park Red Wing MN
- Jul 4 Red Wing, MN Semiquincentennial (to be determined) John Cain
Bay Point Park Red Wing MN
- Aug 1 Elba, MN Whitewater River Fest Krystal Marking 507-450-0206
1200 S Main Street Elba MN 55910 10:30am
- Aug 15-16 Canton, SD Canton Civil War Days Dave Renli 605-351-4452
North Bridge Street Canton SD 57013
- Aug 22-23 Morristown, MN 2026 Ahlman's Shooters Roundup Stacy Chmelik
9525 230th St W Morristown MN 55052
- Sept 12 Castlerock Museum James Livingstone
204 South Second Street Alma WI 54610 10:00am – 4:00pm
- Sep 26 Little Falls, MN Minnesota Military & Veterans Museum John Cain
15000 Highway 115 Little Falls, MN 10:00am – 4:00pm
- Nov 11 Winona, MN 2026 Veterans Day – Veterans Memorial Park Brian Tomashek
Lake Park Drive Winona MN 55987
- Nov 24 Plymouth, MN Providence Academy Kristine McElroy
15100 Schmidt Lake Road Plymouth MN 55446

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.

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