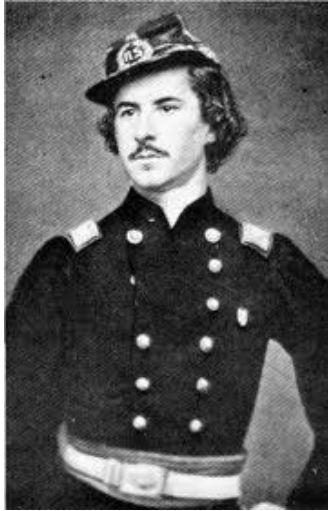


## **FIRST CIVIL WAR CASUALTY COLONEL ELMER E. ELLSWORTH**

April 11, 1837 – May 24, 1861



Elmer E. Ellsworth, born near Saratoga Springs, NY, left home and went to New York City at an early age. He then moved to Chicago, IL, where he worked as a law clerk, became interested in military science, and joined Chicago's National Guard Cadets. Made Colonel of the group, Ellsworth infused the unit with his enthusiasm. He introduced his men to the flashy Zouave uniforms and drill that emulated French colonial troops in Algeria and turned the group, renamed the U.S. Zouave Cadets, into a national champion drill team. In the summer of 1860, the unit performed hundreds of quick, flashy movements with their muskets and bayonets for awed audiences in 20 cities.

In August, Ellsworth went to Springfield, IL, to study law in Abraham Lincoln's office. He helped Lincoln with his campaign for president and went with him to Washington, DC. Lincoln called Ellsworth "the greatest little man I ever met." When the Civil War erupted, Ellsworth went to New York City and raised a regiment of volunteers from the city's firefighters.

As Colonel of the New York Fire Zouaves, Ellsworth was anxious to be the first to invade the South. On May 24, 1861, the day after Virginia seceded; Ellsworth led his men uncontested down the streets of Alexandria, VA. He sent some of his men to take the railroad station while he and a few others went to secure the telegraph office. On the way, he noticed a Confederate flag atop the Marshall House Inn. Colonel Ellsworth and four others ascended the stairs; Ellsworth cut down the flag and was on the way down the stairs when the proprietor killed him with a shotgun blast to the chest. Corporal Francis Brownell immediately killed the innkeeper.

President Lincoln, grief-stricken, had an honor guard bring his friend's body to the White House, where it lay in state on May 25, 1861. The body was then moved to City Hall in New York City, where thousands paid their respects to the first man to fall for the Union. Colonel Ellsworth was buried in Mechanicville, NY.

### **OCCUPATION OF ALEXANDRIA MAY 24, 1861**

At 2:00 A.M. on May 24, 1861, the day after the citizens of Virginia voted three to one to secede from the Union, 11 regiments of Union soldiers invaded Virginia and occupied the countryside across the Potomac River from Washington, DC. The few Rebel pickets in Arlington, the town directly across the river from Washington, quickly retreated from the two Union columns that descended upon them. Confederate General Robert E. Lee's spacious estate on Arlington Heights was quickly occupied as a Union military command post. The 700 Virginia militiamen stationed six miles downstream at Alexandria, an important post and railroad center were warned of this invasion in time for all 35 of them to retreat through one end of town as Union troops rushed in the other.

Two Union forces converged on Alexandria Colonel Orlando B. Wilcox and his 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Regiment marched down from Arlington and Colonel Elmer E. Ellsworth and his exotically dressed 11<sup>th</sup> New York Zouave Regiment arrived at the Alexandria wharf aboard three river steamers. The Zouaves rushed ashore at daybreak and quickly secured the railroad station and telegraph office. As Ellsworth moved through the town, he spied a large Confederate flag flying from atop an inn called the Marshall House Hotel on King Street.

Colonel Ellsworth rushed into the inn with four companions, climbed the stairs to the top, and cut down the flag. As they were going back down with the flag, innkeeper James W. Jackson met them at the third floor landing with a double-barreled shotgun, which he leveled at Ellsworth and killed him instantly with a shot to the chest. Jackson, whose second shot missed, was himself shot in the face, bayoneted to death by Private Francis E. Brownell.