

8. Terrain and the Battle of Fredericksburg, December 13, 1862

By Judy Ehlen¹

Introduction

The area around Fredericksburg, Va., was a major theater of operations in the American Civil War (1861–1865), beginning with the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862. The city and its environs along the Rappahannock River in north-central Virginia were significant obstacles to Union advances on Richmond, the Confederate capital. The battlefield consists of a series of flood plains and river terraces with gentle slopes paralleled by north-south ridges that provide structural boundaries on either side, all composed of Tertiary and Quaternary Coastal Plain sediments. The Confederates, led by General Robert E. Lee, effectively used natural terrain features to impede attacks made by the Union army. Tactical benefits were also accrued by the Confederates from manmade obstacles on the battlefield, such as stone walls and fences. After crossing the Rappahannock River, the Union army, led by Major General Ambrose E. Burnside, was forced to attack uphill with little cover in its unsuccessful attempts to dislodge the Confederates. Effective use of the terrain thus enabled Confederate forces to defeat the Union army at the Battle of Fredericksburg, which helped delay Union capture of Richmond for almost three years.

Battlefield Terrain

Fredericksburg is located on the west side of the Rappahannock River, partly on flood plain and partly on terraces about 6 to 15 meters (m) (20–50 feet (ft)) or more above the river (fig. 1). The city is about 1,800 m (1.1 miles (mi)) southeast of the Fall Line. The materials forming the terraces are Pleistocene sediments—clay, sandy silt, sand, with some gravel—of the Shirley, Chuckatuck, and Charles City Formations (Mixon and others, 2000). Although only about 1 kilometer (km) (0.62 mi) wide in the vicinity of the city, the terraces widen considerably to the south. High ridges parallel the river on both sides—Stafford Heights to the east and Marye’s Heights and a series of hills, including Willis

Hill, Telegraph Hill, Howison’s Hill and Prospect Hill, to the west. This western ridge curves toward the river about 6 km (3.7 mi) south of the city, forming a wide, open amphitheater. Stafford Heights is formed of the same materials as the terraces in Fredericksburg, and Marye’s Heights is composed of Tertiary sands and gravels and the Cretaceous Potomac Formation (Mixon and others, 2000). The terraces are separated from Marye’s Heights by a narrow band of Quaternary gravelly sand, sandy silt, and clay (primarily the Chuckatuck Formation; Mixon and others, 2000). In the vicinity of Fredericksburg, the Rappahannock is narrow but quite deep, and is treacherous to cross even at low water. During the Civil War, there were no fords or bridges downstream from Fredericksburg, and by the time the battle occurred, bridges that existed in the city before the war had been destroyed.

In the southern part of the battlefield, a low terrace about 3.2 km (2.0 mi) wide slopes uphill from the west bank of the river to the base of the ridge with a grade of about 4.5 percent. The ridge is formed primarily by the Calvert and Aquia Formations, which are mainly sand. Deep Run and Hazel Run flow across the terrace to the river. During the Civil War, the land was cultivated and “. . . much cut up by hedges and ditches” (U.S. War Department, 1888, p. 449). Other obstacles on the terrace included the main road south to Richmond, a railroad embankment, fences, ditches, and a stone wall. Trees were present only in the ravines formed by Hazel and Deep Runs and near the river (O’Reilly, 1993). In this area, the ridge, which is heavily wooded, curves toward the river and is about 60 m (200 ft) above the terrace at Prospect Hill.

The northern part of the battlefield consists of the terraces upon which Fredericksburg is located, a swampy valley to the west (herein called Kenmore valley for ease of reference) occupied by a ditch or millrace that drained the canal network in the industrial section of the city to the north, and a sloping terrace that ends against Marye’s Heights. The 150-m (500-ft)-wide lower terrace is about 6 m (20 ft) above the river, and the upper terrace, about 9 m (30 ft) higher than the lower terrace and 600 m (660 yards (yd)) wide, is west of town. The millrace in Kenmore valley was about 4.5 m (15 ft) wide and between 1.5 and 1.8 m (5 and 6 ft) deep (Whan, 1961), and could be crossed by bridges that carried the main streets. The west side of the valley in this area is a steep, 6-m

¹1408 William Street, Fredericksburg, VA 22401.

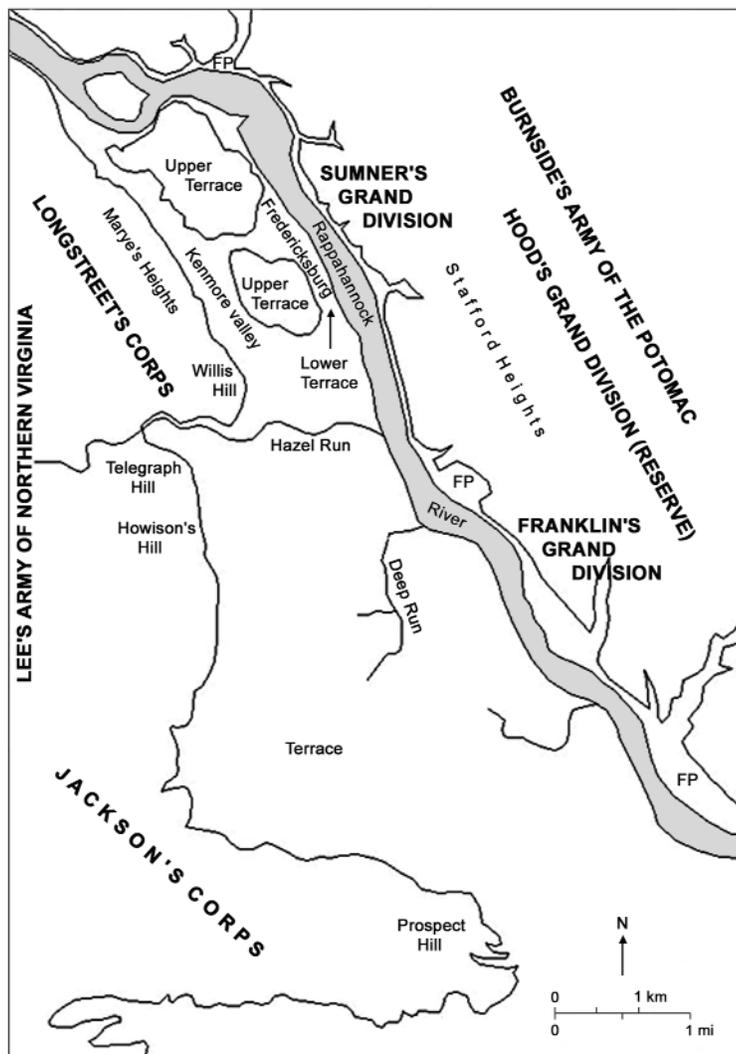


Figure 1. Map showing the distribution of major terrain features in the vicinity of Fredericksburg and the two armies on the battlefield. FP refers to the flood plain of the Rappahannock River, which, although present, is not apparent on the west side of the river at this scale. This map is based on 30-m (98-ft)-resolution digital elevation data. Terrain features having dimensions smaller than 30 m (98 ft), such as much of the flood plain on the west bank of the Rappahannock River, are therefore not shown.

(20-ft)-high bluff. The 275-m (300-yd)-wide, sloping terrace leading up to Marye's Heights has a grade of about 3 percent and consisted of open fields with isolated houses and gardens (Stackpole, 1991). Telegraph Road, a sunken road with stone walls on both sides at the time of the battle, ran parallel to Marye's Heights at the base of the ridge.

The Battle

In early November 1862, Major General Ambrose E. Burnside, recently appointed commander of the Union Army of the Potomac, proposed to take Richmond using the shortest, most direct route from Washington. This route went through the city of Fredericksburg (fig. 2). Burnside's army was located at this time near Warrenton, and the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, commanded by General Robert E. Lee, was located on both sides of the Blue Ridge—in the Shenandoah Valley and near Culpeper. As supplies were moved south from Washington by boat and rail, the two armies moved southeast, meeting at Fredericksburg.

Burnside's army consisted of more than 110,000 men separated into three "Grand Divisions" commanded by Major Generals Edwin V. Sumner, William B. Franklin, and Joseph Hooker. When the army reached Fredericksburg between November 15 and 20, it took positions along Stafford Heights east of Fredericksburg and the Rappahannock River. Franklin was on the left flank to the south; Sumner on the right flank to the north; and Hooker, in reserve, behind Sumner (Esposito, 1959).

Lee's army consisted of two corps comprising about 80,000 soldiers commanded by Lieutenant Generals Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson and James Longstreet. When Lee realized Burnside had sent his army to Fredericksburg, he ordered Longstreet's corps to the Fredericksburg area to protect the route to Richmond and safeguard the rich agricultural area near Fredericksburg (Stackpole, 1991; O'Reilly, 2003). Both Confederate corps were in position on the ridge west of the city by December 5. Longstreet occupied the northern part of the ridge west of town opposite Sumner, and Jackson occupied the southern end of the ridge opposite Franklin (Esposito, 1959). Jackson's line extended some distance



Figure 2. Historical photograph of Fredericksburg from the east bank of the Rappahannock River, looking northwest, in 1863. The structures in the river are the supports for the railway bridge that was destroyed earlier in the war. Source: National Archives Still Photo Unit, College Park, Md.; Timothy O’Sullivan, photographer.

downriver: Lee was not sure where Burnside’s attack would occur, so he extended Jackson’s line to cover all possibilities.

The Battle of Fredericksburg, which occurred on December 13, 1862, has been well described in numerous books, including Whan (1961), Stackpole (1991), O’Reilly (1993), Gallagher (1995), Rable (2002), and O’Reilly (2003), in addition to Volume 21 of the Official Records (U.S. War Department, 1888), newly released in its entirety on CD-ROM. Sections on the battle can also be found in Esposito (1959) and Johnson and Buel (1956). In addition, Luvaas and Nelson (1994) have prepared an excellent guide to the battle for use with military staff rides. Because the battle is so well described in easily accessible publications, only the highlights will be described here.

Burnside intended to attack across the Rappahannock using pontoon bridges. Although ordered long in advance, the pontoons did not arrive until late November (Stackpole, 1991); crossing points were not selected until December 10, after the Confederate army was in position. Preparations for battle thus began on December 10 with the construction of pontoon bridges at three locations: two at the north end of Fredericksburg (fig. 3), one at the south end (fig. 4), and three farther south beyond Deep Run. On December 11, construc-

tion of the upper and middle pontoon bridges was disrupted by Confederate sharpshooters deployed in houses connected with trenches on the river edge of the lower terrace (Whan, 1961). The formidable Union artillery on Stafford Heights could not provide adequate protection for the engineers due to heavy fog (U.S. War Department, 1888) and because the gun crews could not depress the barrels of their cannons sufficiently. Federal artillery on Stafford Heights comprised 147 guns, many of large caliber, including 20-pounder Parrotts and 4.5 inch (in) siege rifles (O’Reilly, 2003). After the fog lifted, nine unsuccessful attempts were made to complete the upper bridges (McLaws, 1956). Eventually, volunteers forced a bridgehead, allowing the engineers to complete the bridges and the infantry to cross the river (Rable, 2002). The Confederates were slowly forced back to the upper terrace. The fierce hand-to-hand fighting along city streets and between buildings was one of the few instances of urban warfare during the Civil War (O’Reilly, 2003). Union bridge builders faced only minimal opposition during construction of the middle bridge because the terrain beyond the bluff, consisting of open fields sloping gently upward to the base of the western ridge, exposed Confederate defenders to the Union artillery on Stafford Heights. There was also little opposition

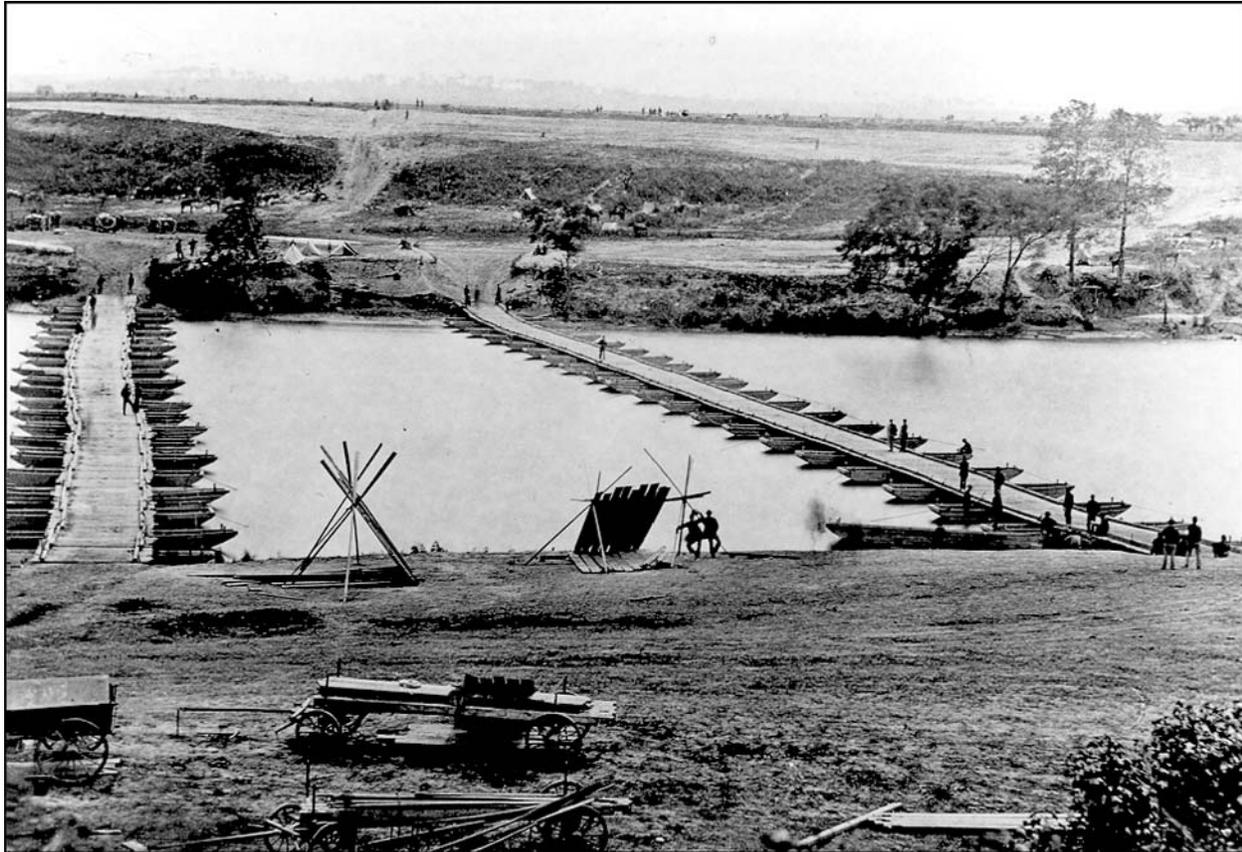


Figure 3. Historical photograph of the upper pontoon bridges at the north end of Fredericksburg, looking east toward Stafford Heights. Date unknown. Source: National Archives Still Photo Unit, College Park, Md.; Timothy O’Sullivan, photographer.

to construction of the lower bridges for the same reason—there was no cover to protect Confederate troops from the Union artillery. By nightfall on December 12, Burnside’s army had crossed the Rappahannock River and was on the flood plain and on the lower terrace throughout Fredericksburg.

The Union attack began mid-morning on December 13 (McLaws, 1956). Burnside’s battle plan called for Franklin to attack first and seize Prospect Hill, the right flank of Jackson’s line. Once this had been accomplished, Sumner was to attack and seize Marye’s Heights from Longstreet’s corps. Hooker’s corps was held in reserve.

Franklin’s attack began about 1000 (10:00 a.m.) with an artillery barrage. One gun, a 12-pounder Napoleon (fig. 5), from Confederate Lieutenant General J.E.B. Stuart’s Horse Artillery, slowed the initial infantry attack that began about an hour later by enfilading the Union line (firing on the line of advancing troops at an angle to their front) from a depression near Hamilton’s Crossing (O’Reilly, 1993). Union artillery soon forced the gun to retire, but the delay allowed Jackson to clearly see the Union position (O’Reilly, 1993). The Confederate artillery, concealed by woods, withheld fire during the Union artillery barrage, and did not open fire until the advancing infantry were well within range, about 720 m (790

yd) from the Confederate guns (U.S. War Department, 1888; O’Reilly, 1993, 2003). As a result, Franklin’s generals did not know exactly where the Confederate forces were when the infantry attack began. Union Major General George Meade’s division spearheaded the attack, beginning about 1300. Confederate artillery fire from three sides funneled the Union infantry toward dense woods in the center of the Confederate line. Jackson had assumed the woods were impenetrable, and as a result, they were inadequately defended. Meade was thus able to penetrate the Confederate line at this point. He was unable to hold the position (Smith, 1956), even with support from a second division, and his forces were eventually pushed back. About 1430, Franklin received orders to attack with his entire force (Whan, 1961). Franklin’s new attack was to serve as a diversion to the heavy fighting west of town (Whan, 1961). Franklin had already deployed in a defensive position (O’Reilly, 2003), so was unable to provide relief for Sumner.

Burnside ordered Sumner to attack the Confederate position west of Fredericksburg shortly after 1030 (Whan, 1961), regardless of his earlier orders and without knowing the status of Franklin’s attack. He merely assumed that Franklin had been successful and that Lee had weakened his left flank to support his right (Freeman, 1943). Burnside should have known this was not the case, because by this time the fog had



Figure 4. Photograph showing the location of the former middle pontoon bridge at the south end of Fredericksburg. Ferry Farm, boyhood home of George Washington, is above the open grassy area on the opposite side of the river.

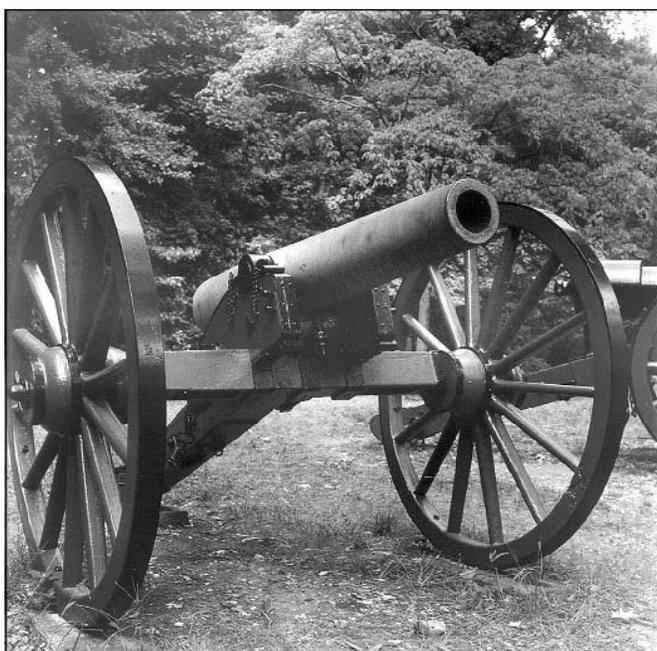


Figure 5. Cast bronze "Light" 12-pounder gun-howitzer, or Napoleon, at Howison's Hill. This gun was made in 1864 by James R. Anderson and Co., Tredegar Foundry, Richmond, Va. (Hazlett and others, 1988). Although cast long after the battle, this gun is virtually identical to Napoleons that would have been used during the Battle of Fredericksburg.



Figure 6. Historical photograph of Hanover Street looking west across the Kenmore valley. One of the bridges used by Union infantry can be seen in the center of the photo (x). Source: National Archives Still Photo Unit, College Park, Md.; Matthew Brady studio, photographers.

lifted and reports from his reconnaissance balloons above Stafford Heights would have indicated that Lee had not done so. Longstreet expected the main attack to occur on his right near Telegraph Hill, which was Lee's headquarters (Luvaas and Nelson, 1994), but the attack was made against his center along the base of Marye's Heights.

Union infantry marshalled in the city and on the upper terrace about 550 m (600 yd) from the base of Marye's Heights. The advance was slowed by the millrace in Kenmore valley; the water was deep, covered by ice, and surrounded by marshy ground, and the walls of the millrace were lined with stone and with wooden boards (O'Reilly, 2003), so the only practical crossing points were the road bridges (Couch, 1956; fig. 6). This funneled the infantry toward the sunken part of Telegraph Road along the base of Marye's Heights (fig. 7) and considerably restricted troop movements (U.S. War Department, 1888). As the Union skirmishers approached Marye's Heights, they were hit by a wall of musket fire from the sunken road which they were unable to see (U.S. War Department, 1888; McLaws, 1956; Whan, 1961), and were forced back. Six attempts were made to take the Confederate position (Longstreet, 1956), but all failed, in part because of the difficulties caused by the terrain—that is, crossing the millrace.

At the end of the day, Union and Confederate infantry in the southern sector of the battlefield occupied the same positions they had occupied at the beginning of the day. West of town, Sumner's infantry spent the night where they lay. Lee did not counterattack for several reasons. First, it was dark, and he expected Burnside to renew his attack the next day, so he did not want to lose his good defensive positions. Second, he was well aware of the devastation his army would face from the Union artillery on Stafford Heights if he did attack. Burnside, however, did not attack on December 14, although heavy skirmishing occurred throughout the day on both flanks. He in fact moved most of his army back from the front line and continued to fortify the city. Both armies now maintained defensive postures. The next day, Burnside requested a truce to care for the wounded and bury the dead. That night he moved his army across the Rappahannock under cover of a violent storm and removed the pontoon bridges (Freeman, 1943). On the morning of December 16, Lee was surprised to see no Union troops on the western side of the river, and knew then that although the battle was a defensive victory for the Army of Northern Virginia, it had gained them nothing. Although damaged, Burnside's army was still intact and in position on Stafford Heights.



Figure 7. Photograph of Telegraph Road, the sunken road, looking south. The wall on the left behind the fence is the only section of the original wall still extant.

Effective Use of Terrain

Terrain was a crucial factor in the progress and outcome of the Battle of Fredericksburg. The favorable terrain was under Confederate control, whereas the terrain over which the Union infantry advanced was generally disadvantageous. As the battle progressed on December 13, the balance for the Confederates shifted from more vulnerable terrain south of Fredericksburg to superior terrain below Marye's Heights west of Fredericksburg. The southern terrain was heavily defended, but here the Union forces had some freedom of movement and protection from Confederate infantry and artillery fire. The terrain below Marye's Heights was less heavily defended, but Union forces in this area had no room to maneuver and little protection from Confederate fire. The main Union advantage in both sectors of the battlefield was the formidable heavy artillery on Stafford Heights (Rable, 2002; O'Reilly, 2003).

Lee's Army of Northern Virginia occupied a defensive position on high ground, and Burnside's Army of the Potomac was forced to attack uphill over lower ground. In addition, Union troops had numerous obstacles to negotiate—not least of which was the Rappahannock River. On

Burnside's left flank, these included, in addition to the river, the open nature of the terrace and deep ravines, numerous hedges and ditches in the open farmland, a railroad embankment, and the Richmond Road. In addition, the curved shape of the ridge gave Confederate artillery good positions for enfilading fire. On Burnside's right flank the most significant obstacles, in addition to the river and the city itself, were the frozen millrace; limited space for troop deployments; the smooth, open ground below Marye's Heights; numerous fences, houses and gardens; marshy areas both north and south of the main point of attack; the shape of the ridge that allowed Confederate enfilading fire; and most important, the sunken road and its stone walls.

Stackpole (1991) contends that the tactical Confederate success at Fredericksburg was based on Lee's ". . . keen sense of terrain appreciation" (p. 172). Lee took a defensive position because ". . . the natural features of the ground were made to order for the purpose . . ." (p. 271). Lee's judgment, confidence, and effective use of terrain, coupled with Burnside's incompetence, indecision, and limited knowledge of the battlefield, appear to have been instrumental factors controlling the battle which thus contributed in no small part toward the final outcome.

Acknowledgments

This description of the Battle of Fredericksburg and the terrain upon which the battle was fought is based on a previously published paper co-authored with Robert J. Abraham, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom (Ehlen and Abraham, 2002). Although Bob had no involvement with this field guide, I wish to acknowledge his part in the work that led to its preparation. I also wish to thank Cynthia Merchant, Northborough, Mass., who assisted me in preparation of the road log.

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ROAD LOG AND STOP DESCRIPTIONS FOLLOW

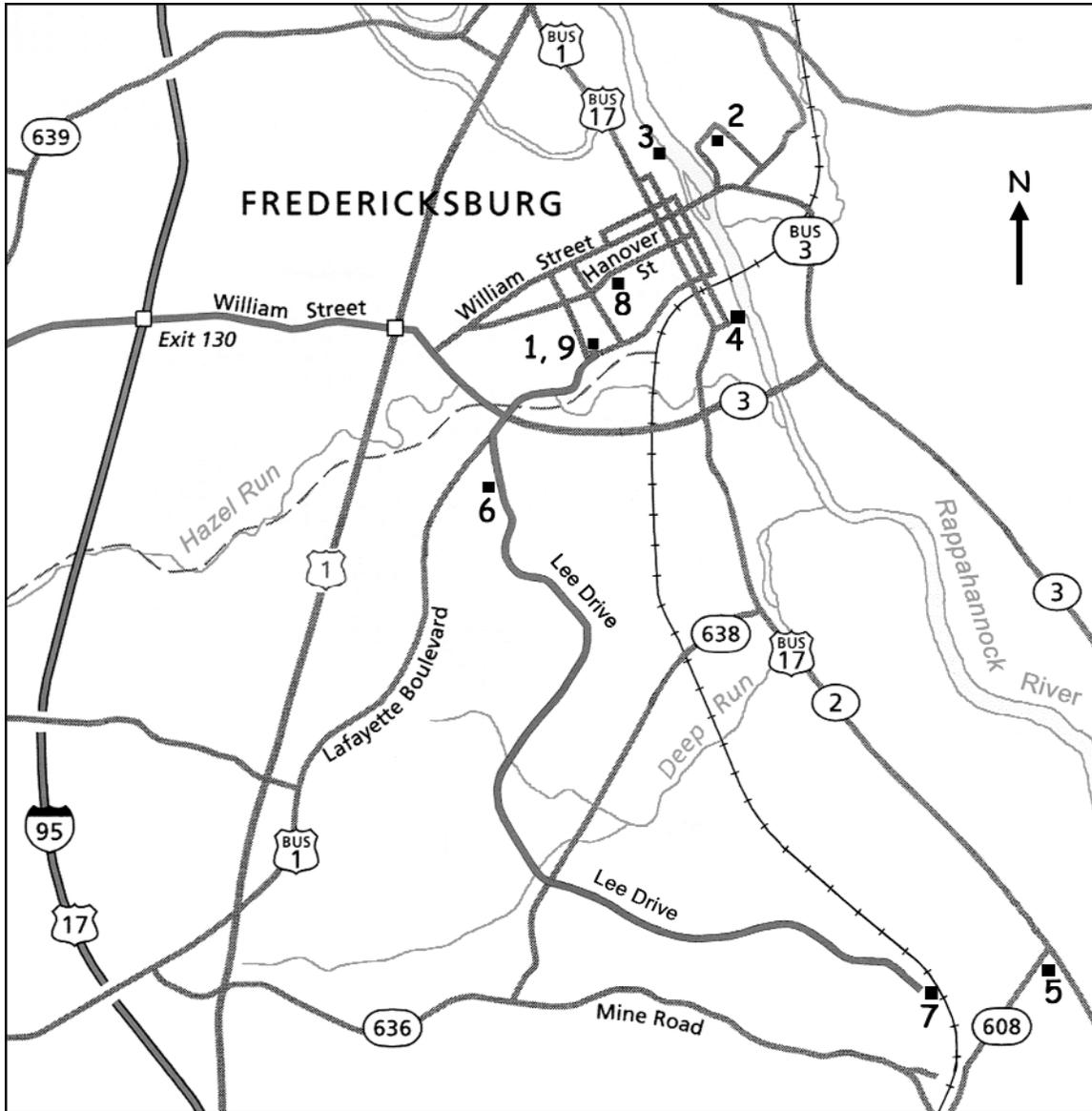


Figure 8. Map of the Fredericksburg area showing field trip stops. Modified from map in the National Park Service battlefield brochure.

Road Log and Stop Descriptions

See figure 8 for field-trip stop locations.

Take I-95 South from the Capital Beltway, I-495.

Mileage

Incremental	Cumulative	
0.0	0.0	Take Exit 130-A (Fredericksburg) onto Va. 3 East; turn left on Lafayette Boulevard.
2.5	2.5	Park and go to Visitor Center.

Stop 1. Visitor Center, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park.

View the park video and visit the museum. Restrooms available.

Mileage

Incremental	Cumulative	
1.8	4.3	Turn left on Lafayette Boulevard. Go nine blocks and turn left on Caroline Street. Go five blocks and turn right on William Street. Cross the river, then turn left on Chatham Heights Road. Following brown signs to Chatham Manor, turn left on Chatham Lane. Caroline Street in this area is on the lower terrace.

Stop 2. Chatham Manor, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park Headquarters.

Chatham Manor, located on Stafford Heights and the home of the Lacy family, was General Sumner's headquarters during the battle. The Union army had heavy artillery deployed along Stafford Heights, which commanded the battlefield, from Falmouth to just across the river from the Confederate right flank. One hundred forty-seven heavy guns were deployed in four sections (Rable, 2002; O'Reilly, 2003). The location of the former upper pontoon bridges is clearly visible from the terraces on the river side of the house. Restrooms available.

Mileage

Incremental	Cumulative	
0.9	5.2	Exit Chatham Manor and turn left on River Road. Turn right on Va. 3 (William Street), crossing the river. Turn right on Sophia Street. Go four blocks to the historical marker on the right. River Road is on the flood plain of the Rappahannock and Sophia Street is on the lower terrace.

Stop 3. Upper Pontoon Bridge crossing.

There were three pontoon bridge sites across the Rappahannock River. This upper crossing (fig. 3), which consisted of two bridges, was the most strongly contested by the Confederate army. Sharpshooters positioned themselves in houses and in basements along the edge of the lower terrace, and defeated nine attempts by Union engineers to complete

construction of the pontoon bridge. The Union artillery on Stafford Heights was unable to depress the barrels of the guns sufficiently to fire upon the sharpshooters and provide cover for the bridge builders. The tenth attempt, carried out by volunteers, was successful, and Union infantry were able to cross the river during the night of December 11. This was the first bridgehead landing ever secured under fire by U.S. forces (O'Reilly, 2003). Once Union troops crossed the river, they had to traverse the very small flood plain in this area under fire, and force themselves up the 10-m (33-ft)-high bluff to the lower terrace. The Confederate sharpshooters—Barksdale's Mississippians—withdrew slowly from the terrace edge, which resulted in fierce hand-to-hand fighting in this area of the city. This was one of the few occurrences of urban warfare in the Civil War.

Mileage

Incremental Cumulative

		Continue north one block on Sophia Street.
		Turn left on Pitt Street.
		Go two blocks and turn left on Princess Anne Street.
		Turn left on Frederick Street.
		Go one block and turn right on Sophia Street.
1.3	6.5	Proceed to the Public Boat Landing (City Dock; dead end).

Stop 4. Middle Pontoon Bridge crossing.

This is the flood plain of the Rappahannock River, with the lower terrace to the west. Although the terrain in this area provided superior defensive positions for Confederate sharpshooters, bridge building was not strongly opposed, because the terrain above and west of the bluff was exposed to the full firepower of Union artillery on Stafford Heights across the river. One bridge was built in this location (fig. 4). This area also was the location of the historic ferry crossing from Stafford County to the city of Fredericksburg. Ferry Farm, from which the ferry crossed, was the boyhood home of George Washington. It is said that the cherry tree incident occurred on Ferry Farm and that it was really this part of the Rappahannock across which George Washington threw his dollar, not the Potomac River.

Mileage

Incremental Cumulative

		Go north one block on Sophia Street.
		Turn left on Frederick Street.
		Go three blocks and turn left on Charles Street.
		Turn right on Dixon Street (Va. 2 and U.S. Bus. 17), which becomes Tidewater Trail.
		Turn right on Va. 608, Benchmark Road.
4.0	10.5	Pull into the gravel lane immediately on the left.

On the horizon to your right as you drive south along Tidewater Trail is the ridge upon which the Confederate army was deployed. At the time of the Civil War, the terrace to the right was treeless and used for farming.

Stop 5. "The Gallant Pelham."

Grove of cedar trees from which "The Gallant Pelham" (Major John Pelham, commander of Stuart's Horse Artillery) distracted the Union army at the beginning of Franklin's attack against Jackson's position along the ridge to the west. Pelham received this sobriquet from Lee because of his action here. Pelham's fire, initially with only one gun, a 12-pounder Napoleon (fig. 5), delayed the Union attack and also revealed the Union

position to Jackson, giving him an even greater advantage than what he derived from his excellent position. As a result, Jackson was able to withhold both his artillery and small arms fire until the Union infantry were well within range, giving the Confederate army a significant advantage in this part of the battle.

Mileage

Incremental	Cumulative	
		Turn right on Va. 608.
		Turn left on Tidewater Trail/Dixon Street (Va. 2 and U.S. Bus. 17).
		At first stop light after going under the Va. 3 overpass, turn left on Charles Street.
		At next stop light, turn left on Lafayette Boulevard.
5.1	15.6	Turn left at the brown National Park sign (Lee Drive).

Stop 6. Lee's Hill.

This was Lee's headquarters during the battle (National Park driving tour stop 2). From this point in the center of the Confederate lines, he could clearly view action on both flanks. It was here that he made his famous statement, "It is well that war is so terrible - we should grow too fond of it" (Freeman, 1934, p. 462). At the time of the Civil War, this hill was called Telegraph Hill. The two cannons beyond the shelter serve as examples of artillery pieces that might have been used during the battle. The 30-pounder Parrott rifle on the left would most likely not have been present on the battlefield; Parrotts used in the field were typically 10-pounders. Parrott rifles represented state-of-the-art, cutting-edge technology in 1862. They were first introduced in 1861 and were the first American rifled cannon. They were also the first truly successful rifled cannon because of the method used for reinforcement. The cannon on the left is a smoothbore "Light" 12-pounder gun-howitzer, or Napoleon (fig. 5). This was the most common weapon in northern arsenals, and the preferred smoothbore cannon for both Union and Confederate armies.

Mileage

Incremental	Cumulative	
4.5	20.1	Continue south on Lee Drive.

Stop 7. Prospect Hill.

This was the far right flank of Jackson's line. Meade's attack came from the east toward the left where the woods reach the railway track. The pyramidal monument in the distance was built by railroad men in honor of this attack. Meade's men advanced through the woods and up the hill to your left before they were stopped and then pushed back. The artillery positions in this area are typical of artillery positions of the time, and the cannon displayed are also typical. These include, from right to left facing east, an iron 3-in ordnance rifle, which was the most popular rifle in Union artillery batteries during the war; a bronze 14-pounder James rifle (fig. 9); and two bronze 6-pounders. Six-pounders were the most common Confederate artillery pieces. They were relatively ineffective against Napoleons and Union rifles, however, because of their short range. A number of six-pounders, including these two, were thus returned to the foundries for rifling in the hope that this would increase their effectiveness. Any such increase did not last long, however, because the lands and grooves wore down too rapidly due to the twisting action of the projectiles in the barrels.

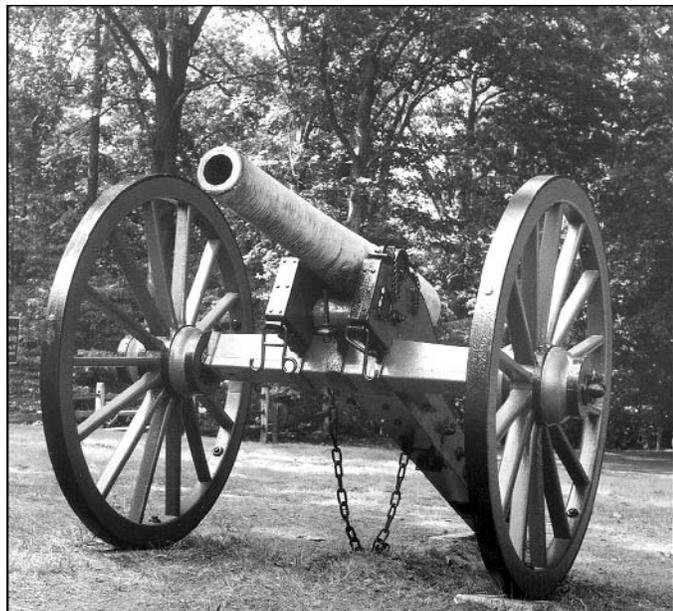


Figure 9. Cast bronze 14-pounder (3.8-in) James rifle at Prospect Hill. This gun was made in 1861 by Ames Co., Chicopee, Mass. (Hazlett and others, 1988).

Return to Lafayette Boulevard, viewing entrenchments on the right (east) side of Lee Drive.

The first organized use of “hasty” entrenchments in warfare occurred during the Battle of Fredericksburg in this area (Luvaas and Nelson, 1994). Prior to this time, entrenchments were built only around permanent fortifications. The landscape to the east just before crossing Lansdown Road is considered to be very similar to the landscape in the area at the time of the battle.

Mileage

Incremental	Cumulative
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		Turn right on Lafayette Boulevard.
		Turn left on Kenmore Avenue.
6.2	26.3	Go four blocks and park just before the stop light on Hanover Street.

Stop 8. Kenmore valley.

You are now in the Kenmore valley in the vicinity of the millrace. To the east is the upper terrace; this is the direction from which the Union army advanced on Marye’s Heights. The bridge in figure 6 must have been very near this spot. Just beyond Kenmore Cleaners on your right is the bluff beneath which Union infantry found cover after crossing the millrace. Because the area was swampy and the millrace was covered with ice, the only feasible crossing points were bridges on Hanover, William, and Prussia Streets (O’Reilly, 2003). At the time of the battle, the area west of the bluff was open, with scattered houses and fences. Other than the small bluff and a swale that extended across the front, there was no cover for the attacking Union infantry. Crossing Kenmore valley at this point, however, was far better than to the north where swampy areas were more extensive. The area to the north was also crossed by numerous canals, which would have complicated traversing the swamp even more.

Mileage

Incremental	Cumulative	
		Turn left on Lee Avenue (almost a U-turn).
		Go one long block and turn right on Charlotte Street.
		Go two blocks and turn left on Littlepage Street.
		Go two blocks and turn right on Lafayette Boulevard.
0.5	26.8	Turn right into the National Park Visitor Center parking lot.

The area you are driving through is the ground over which the Union army advanced. Littlepage Street marks the approximate location of the swale.

Stop 9. Visitor Center, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park.

This area below Marye's Heights was the focus of Major General Sumner's "Grand Division's" attack on Longstreet's corps. The foundations of several houses are preserved, and one house from the 1860s still stands. The wall along the north end of the sunken road is the only part of the original wall extant (fig. 7). Confederate infantry and artillery were deployed along the top of the ridge, and additional infantry, several men deep, were behind the stone wall. Union infantry advanced across the open fields, and most attacks got no closer than 100 m (110 yd) to the Confederate line. One bayonet charge, that of Humphrey's Division, did get within about 25 m (80 ft), resulting in hand-to-hand fighting (Reardon, 1995). The Marye House of Civil War fame is now Brompton, the home of the president of Mary Washington College. Confederate infantry repulsed six attacks on their position during the battle. The National Cemetery just west of the Visitor Center is located on Willis Hill, from which the best views of the city and this part of the battlefield can be obtained. Restrooms available.

Turn right out of the parking lot onto Lafayette Boulevard.
Turn right on Va. 3 (Blue-Gray Parkway).
Turn right onto I-95 North and return to Northern Virginia.