



The Battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House

WHERE A HUNDRED THOUSAND FELL

**UNITED STATES
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by Joseph P. Cullen



PHOTOGRAPH BY ARNOLD NEWMAN

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Gathered behind the stone wall below Marye's Heights are relics and equipment that recall the tenacious Confederate stand against successive waves of Union infantry on December 13, 1862. Another arrangement, on pages 54 and 55, displays weapons and gear of the Union army amid a line of entrenchments in the Wilderness.

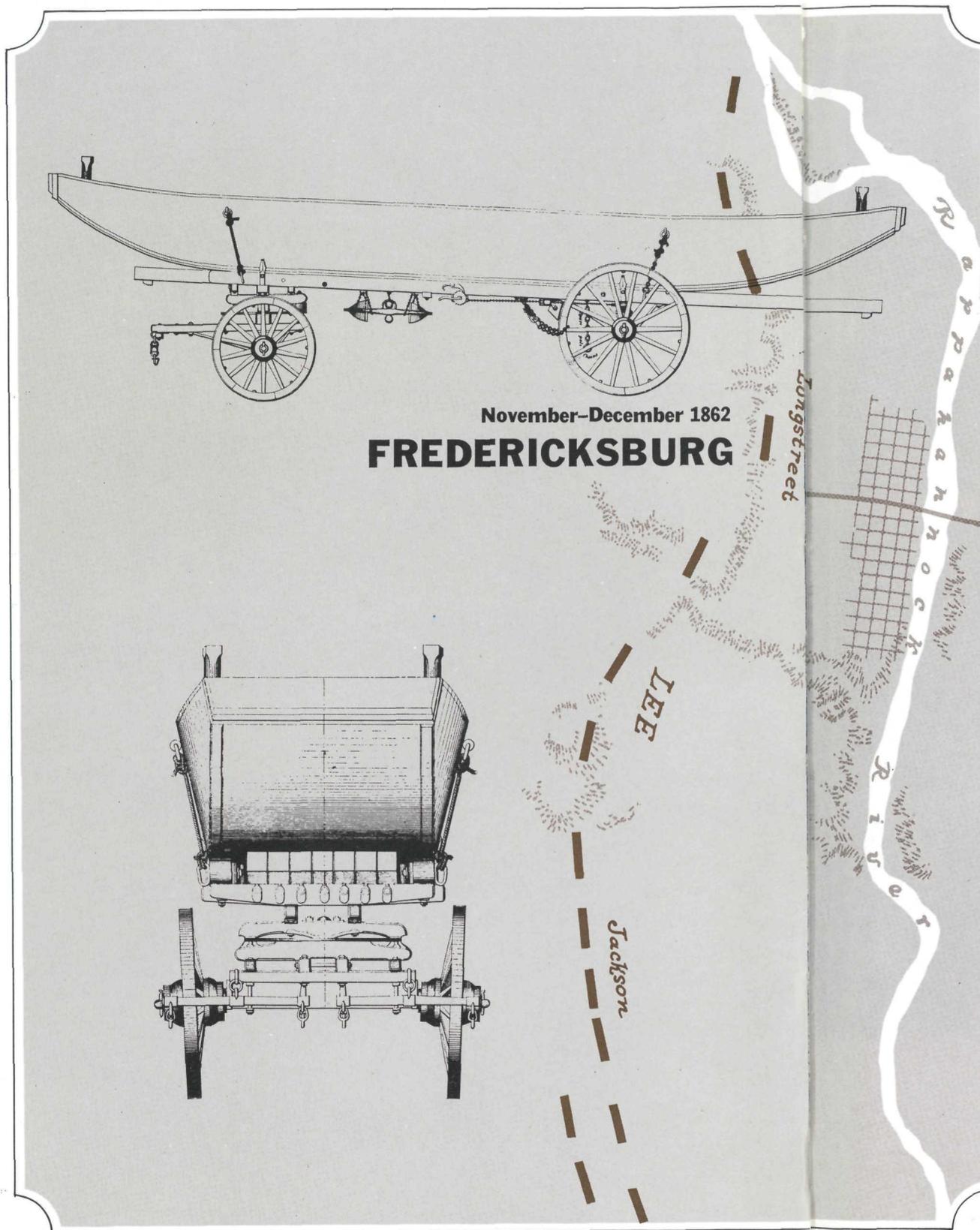
In the midst of doubt, in the collapse of creeds, there is one thing I do not doubt and that is that the faith is true and adorable which leads a soldier to throw away his life in obedience to a blind accepted duty, in a cause which he little understands, in a plan of campaign of which he has no notion, under tactics of which he does not see the use.

—CAPT. OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES,
20TH MASSACHUSETTS VOLUNTEERS.

Probably no other area in the United States so exemplifies the words of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Holmes as Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. Here, within a radius of 17 miles, occurred over 100,000 American casualties in the battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House, all involving strategy and tactics beyond the understanding of the average soldier. The park preserves and interprets some of the scenes of those four great Civil War battles. The quiet, peaceful woods and fields are a constant reminder of how much we owe to the sacrifice of others. Here they came, here they fought, and here they died.



With flashing sword, Gen. Andrew A. Humphrey leads his Pennsylvania division against the Confederate line on Marye's Heights, on the afternoon of December 13, 1862.



“It is well that war is so terrible”

At the head of the navigable waters of the Rappahannock River, Fredericksburg lay midway between the Confederate Capital at Richmond, Va., and the National Capital at Washington, a scant 100 miles apart. Founded in 1727, Fredericksburg by the 1850's was a thriving commercial city of almost 5,000 people, carrying on a direct trade with Europe and the West Indies. Large three-masted schooners, moored at the wharves, gave an air of bustling prosperity to the area. In 1861, however, its importance lay in the obstacle it presented, along with the Rappahannock River, to any overland march from Washington on Richmond. As the political, manufacturing, and military center of the South, Richmond became the symbol of secession to the North and the key to military planning on both sides. For 4 years it remained the primary objective of the Union armies in the east. “On to Richmond” was the cry.

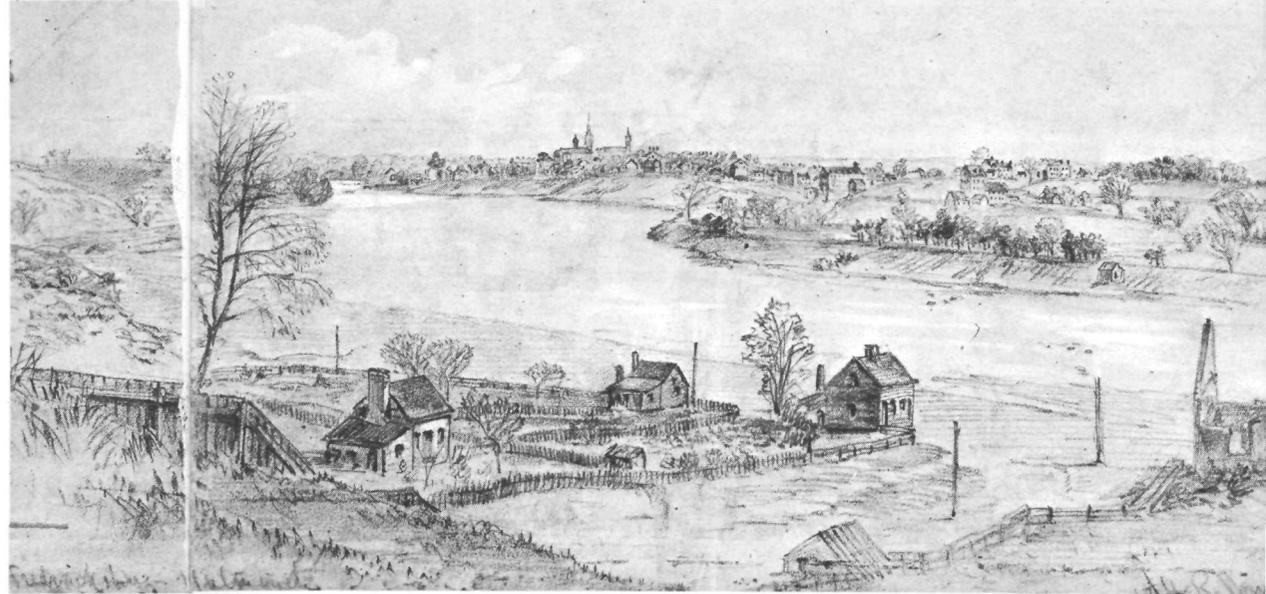
There were two main avenues of approach to the Confederate capital: The direct overland route southward through Fredericksburg; and the approach by water down the Potomac, across Chesapeake Bay to the tip of the peninsula between the York and the James Rivers, and then northwestward up the peninsula. In the summer of 1861 the Federal Government, in its first attempt to drive into Virginia and capture Richmond, decided on the overland approach.

Astride this road to Richmond lay Manassas, a small railroad settlement a few miles east of the Bull Run mountains and north of Fredericksburg. Here, Confederate Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard

Just before the Civil War artist Alfred R. Waud sketched this peaceful view of Fredericksburg from across the river at Falmouth.



Troops and their transports at the Federal supply base at Aquia Creek Landing, on the Potomac below Washington.



blocked the road with a force of about 22,000 men, while Gen. Joseph E. Johnston commanded a smaller force of some 11,000 troops at Winchester in the Shenandoah Valley. And here, on July 21, Gen. Irvin McDowell brought his 35,000 Union troops on their way to Richmond.

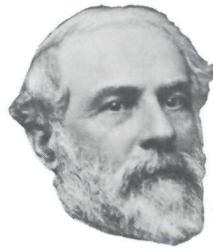
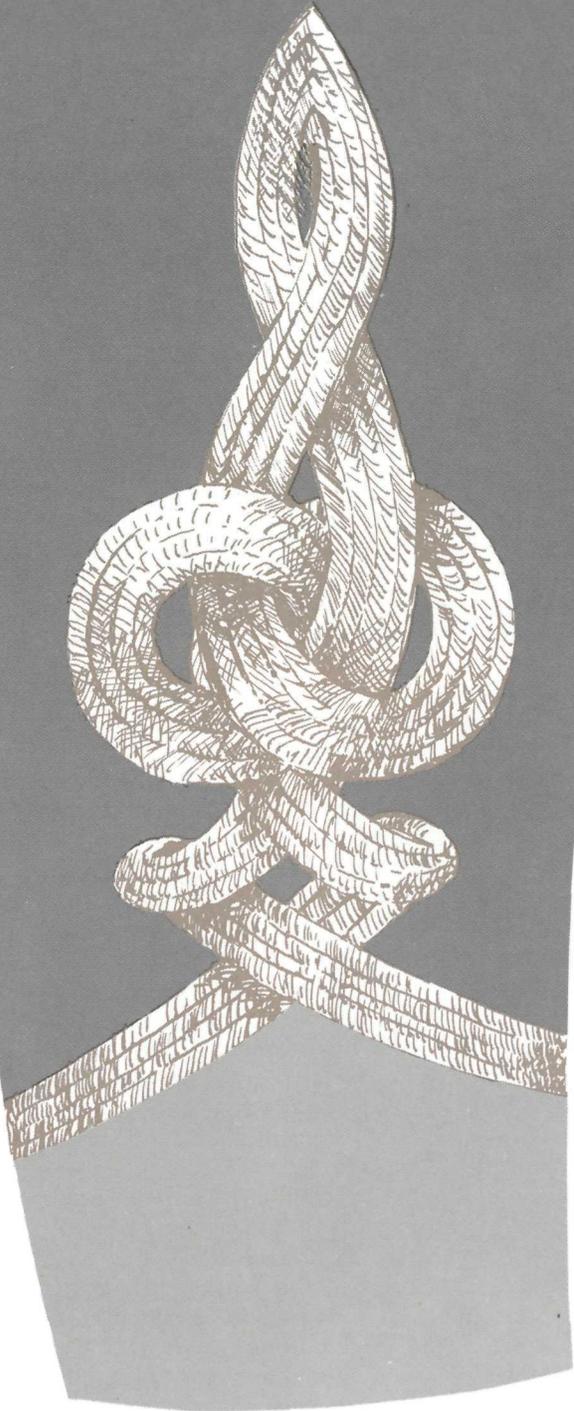
In this first major engagement of the Civil War the Federal army suffered disaster in a nightmare battle of mistakes. Routed from the field, it fled back to Washington in disorder and panic.

President Abraham Lincoln then appointed Gen. George B. McClellan the new commander of the demoralized army. McClellan restored order and discipline and in the spring of 1862 decided to try the water approach to Richmond. This Peninsular Campaign, as it was called, culminated in the famous Seven Days' Battle, when the Army of the Potomac's drive on Richmond was repulsed by Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia on the outskirts of the city.

Lee now chose to try to stop the next "On-to-Richmond" move before it could penetrate very deeply into Virginia. On August 23 he wrote Confederate President Jefferson Davis: "If we are able to change the theater of the war from the James River to the north of the Rappahannock we shall be able to consume provisions and forage now being used in supporting the enemy."

So Lee moved into northern Virginia to meet Gen. John Pope's threatened overland campaign against Richmond. At Second Manassas (Bull Run) the Union Army was defeated again and withdrew into the fortifications around Washington.

Lee took advantage of this opportunity and made his first invasion north into Maryland, only to be stopped by McClellan at Antietam (Sharpsburg) in September. He then retired into Virginia and prepared to spend the winter recruiting and provisioning his army.



Robert E. Lee



Ambrose E. Burnside

A FAST MARCH

President Lincoln used the victory at Antietam to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, but both the Government and the Northern people generally were disappointed at McClellan's failure to pursue vigorously the retreating Confederates. When he gave the poor condition of his horses as one excuse for not moving, Lincoln telegraphed: "I have read your dispatch about sore-tongued and fatigued horses. Will you pardon me for asking what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam that fatigues anything?"

Finally, late in October, the Army of the Potomac advanced cautiously into Virginia, concentrating in the Warrenton-Manassas area. McClellan's immediate objective was Gordonsville, but the movement was so slow, averaging only 5 to 6 miles a day, that Lincoln relieved him of command on November 5 and appointed Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside. General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck telegraphed from Washington: "Immediately on assuming command of the Army of the Potomac, you will report the position of your troops, and what you propose doing with them."

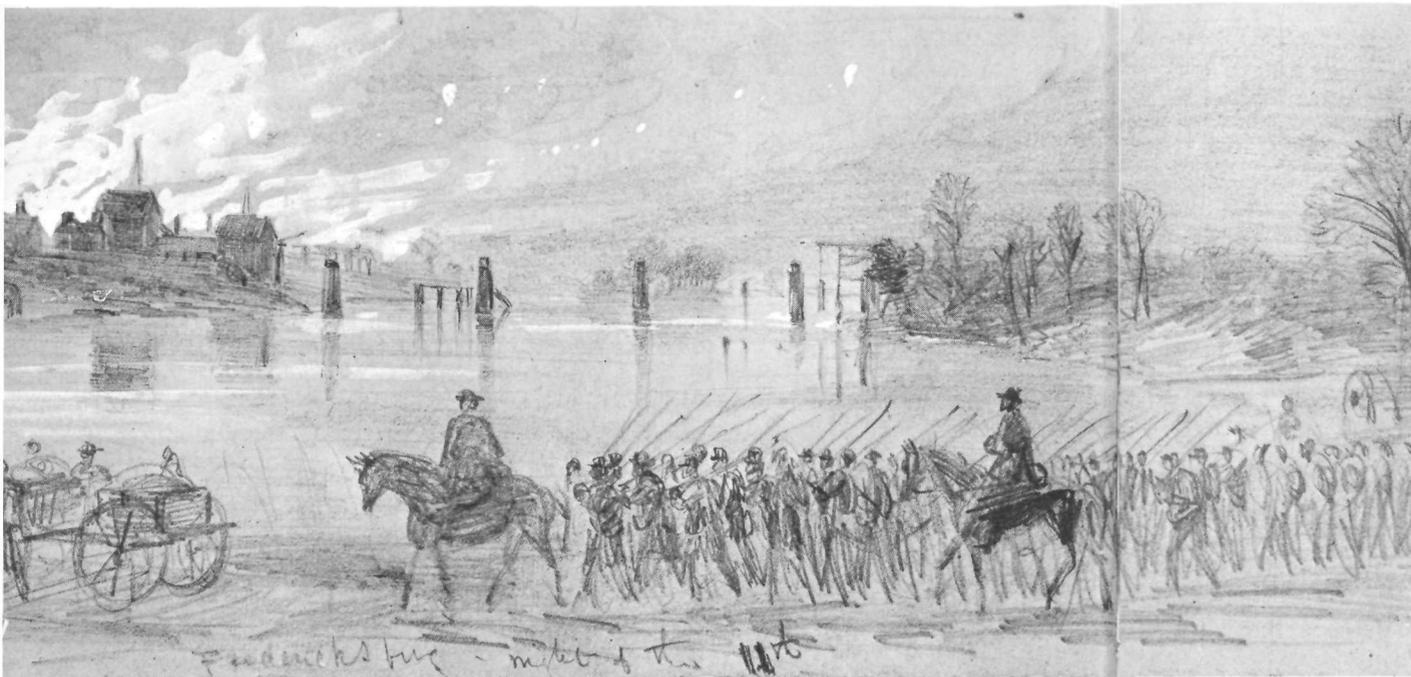
Burnside, a quiet, unassuming man, had a creditable record as a corps commander and was not generally regarded as being overly ambitious. He did not particularly want the job of army commander. "Had I been asked to take it, I should have declined," he informed Halleck, "but being ordered, I cheerfully obey." From his headquarters at Warrenton he promptly proposed a new plan:

To concentrate all the forces near this place, and impress upon the enemy a belief that we are to attack Culpeper or Gordonsville, and at the same time accumulate a four or five days' supply for the men and animals; then make a rapid move of the whole force to Fredericksburg, with a view to a movement upon Richmond from that point.

There were many advantages to this plan, Burnside was careful to explain. It would enable him to take advantage of Union control of the waterways to establish supply bases at Aquia Creek and Belle Plain on the Potomac; it would allow him to use the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad from Aquia Creek to Richmond; the Army of the Potomac would always be between the enemy and Washington; and it was the shortest overland route to the Confederate capital. At the same time he requested permission to reorganize the Army of the Potomac into three "grand divisions" of about two corps each.

The key to the whole plan, as Lincoln shrewdly realized, was contained in the words "a rapid move of the whole force on Fredericksburg." On November 14 Halleck told Burnside: "The President has just assented to your plan. He thinks it will succeed, if you move rapidly; otherwise not."

Burnside moved rapidly. Early the next morning Gen. E. V.



A Federal column moves along the river on the night of December 11, as flames still rise from the city after the day-long bombardment.

corps was now in the vicinity of Winchester in the Shenandoah Valley, while Longstreet's was encamped at Culpeper, about 35 miles northwest of Fredericksburg. Only a token force held the city itself.

Despite the sudden Federal move, Lee showed no inclination to unite the separated wings of his army. He was not yet convinced that Fredericksburg was Burnside's only immediate objective. On November 18 he wrote Davis: "It is possible that he may attempt to seize Winchester, Culpeper, and Fredericksburg . . ." But even if Fredericksburg was the only objective, Lee at this time did not desire to make a stand there, as he saw no particular military advantage in the position. He told Jackson November 19: "I do not now anticipate making a determined stand north of the North Anna River," which was approximately midway between Fredericksburg and Richmond. As a precautionary measure, he ordered Longstreet's corps to Fredericksburg, although admitting as late as November 23 that he was "as yet unable to discover what may be the plan of the enemy."

Finally, on November 26 he ordered Jackson to join him. Lee had now decided to resist the Federal advance along the Rappahannock. "My purpose was changed," he stated, "not from any advantage in this position, but from an unwillingness to open more of our country to depredation than possible, and also with a view of collecting such forage and provisions as could be obtained in the Rappahannock Valley."



Waud's sketch of a captured Confederate.

Sumner's Right Grand Division, consisting of Gen. D. N. Couch's II Corps and Gen. O. B. Wilcox's IX Corps, moved out, followed the next day by Gen. W. B. Franklin's Left Grand Division of Gen. J. F. Reynolds' I Corps and Gen. W. F. Smith's VI Corps, and Gen. Joseph Hooker's Center Grand Division of Gen. George Stoneman's III Corps and Gen. Daniel Butterfield's V Corps.

Sumner's advance reached Falmouth, opposite Fredericksburg, on the 17th after a march of about 40 miles, and he immediately requested permission for part of his command to cross the river fords, the bridges having been destroyed. Burnside, however, deemed the plan "impracticable." He did not want "to risk sending a portion of the command on the opposite side of the river until I had the means for crossing the main body." In the event the fords became impassable, he feared the troops would be cut off. Consequently, he decided to await the arrival of the pontoon boats, expected momentarily, to enable him to bridge the river. By November 19 Burnside and the rest of the Army of the Potomac were encamped on Stafford Heights opposite Fredericksburg.

The suddenness of the move surprised Lee. He had recently reorganized the Army of Northern Virginia into two corps under Gens. James Longstreet and Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, and his plan of defense against McClellan's slow advance had been "to attempt to baffle his designs by maneuvering, rather than to resist his advance by main force." As a result, Jackson's



These Confederate pickets, sketched by Arthur Lumley, fell while opposing the Federal crossing of the Rappahannock.

THE FATAL DELAY

Fortunately for Lee, Burnside was not hurrying either. That the pontoons needed to bridge the river were late arriving was not his fault, to be sure. But even after they finally arrived on November 25, Burnside made no attempt to cross for almost 3 weeks. His feeble explanation for this inexcusable delay was contained in his official report:

By this time [November 25] the enemy had concentrated a large force on the opposite side of the river, so that it became necessary to make arrangements to cross in the face of a vigilant and formidable foe. These arrangements were not completed until about December 10.

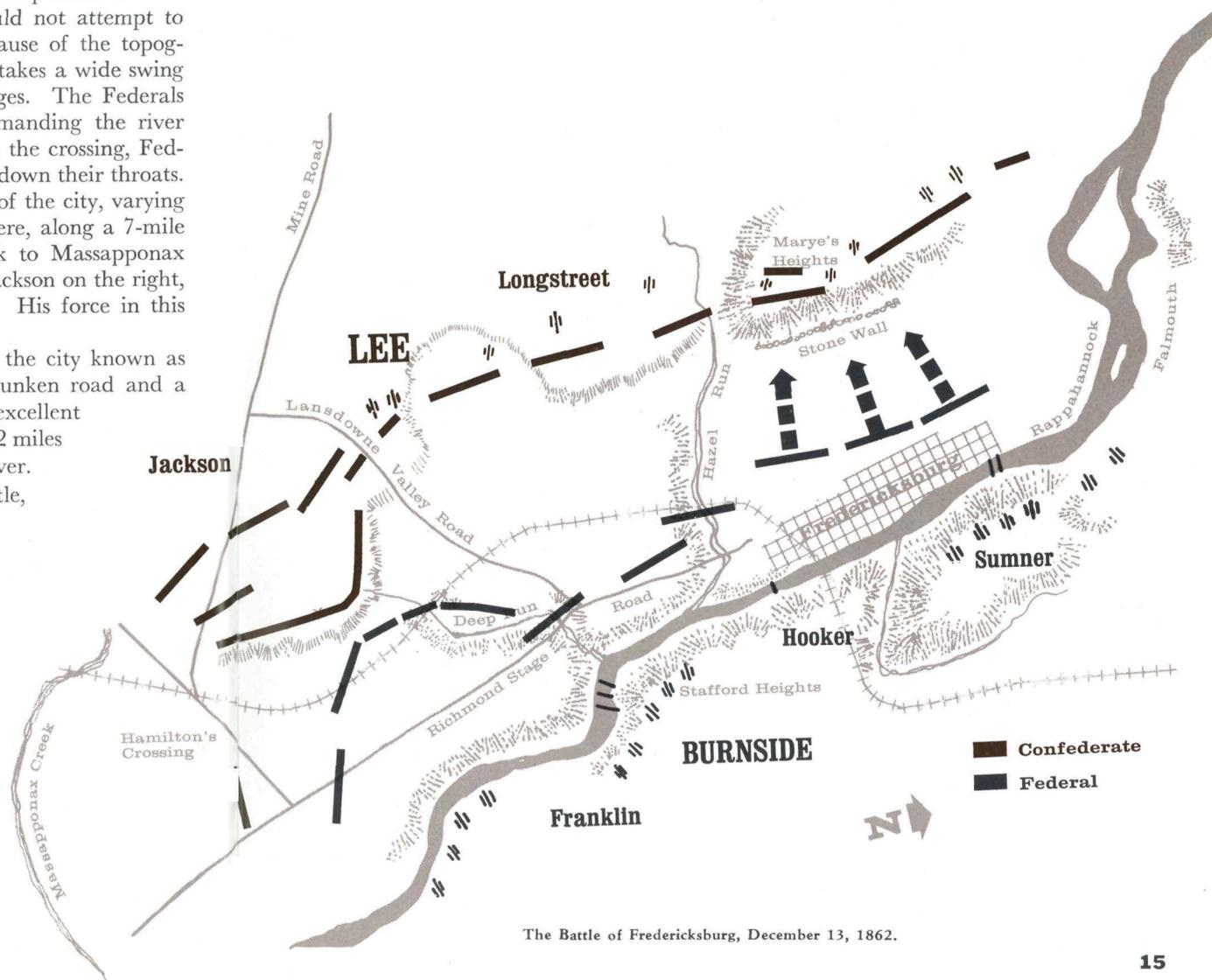
The "large force" referred to was Longstreet's corps of about 35,000 men (Jackson's corps had not yet arrived). Burnside commanded an army of approximately 130,000 men.

Lee took advantage of the delay to make his position behind Fredericksburg almost impregnable. He would not attempt to dispute the Federal crossing of the river because of the topography of the area. The Rappahannock here takes a wide swing to the south to cut between two elevated ridges. The Federals occupied Stafford Heights on the east, commanding the river and the city. Had the Confederates opposed the crossing, Federal artillery literally would have been looking down their throats. Instead, Lee chose to fortify the heights west of the city, varying from 1 to 2 miles distant from the river. Here, along a 7-mile front that stretched from the Rappahannock to Massaponax Creek, he placed Longstreet on the left and Jackson on the right, with over 300 pieces of artillery in support. His force in this line consisted of approximately 75,000 men.

Longstreet's position, along a ridge behind the city known as Marye's Heights, was further fortified by a sunken road and a stone wall at the base of the heights, providing excellent protection for infantry. An open plain about 2 miles wide lay between Jackson's position and the river. To facilitate troop movements during the battle, Lee constructed a military road between the two corps.

Burnside's delay was confusing, even to the Confederates. As days passed with no attempt made to force a crossing, Lee continued to strengthen his position, although he became somewhat apprehensive that Burnside's hesitation suggested "the probability that he is waiting for expected operations elsewhere."

Actually, Lee had no cause for alarm. Burnside was merely trying to decide what to do. It is a military axiom that strategy is the art of bringing the enemy to battle on terms disadvantageous to him and advantageous to yourself. In the positions of the two armies at Fredericksburg after Burnside's delay, it was obvious even to the men in the ranks that Lee had all the advantages. Despite this strategic handicap, Burnside finally decided to attack.



The Battle of Fredericksburg, December 13, 1862.

ACROSS THE RAPPAHANNOCK

Wednesday, December 10, dawned gray and blustery. Snow blew across the tents and guns and covered the fields. The cold wind cut through the men, as couriers galloped from Burnside's headquarters with the orders that finally set the Army of the Potomac in motion.

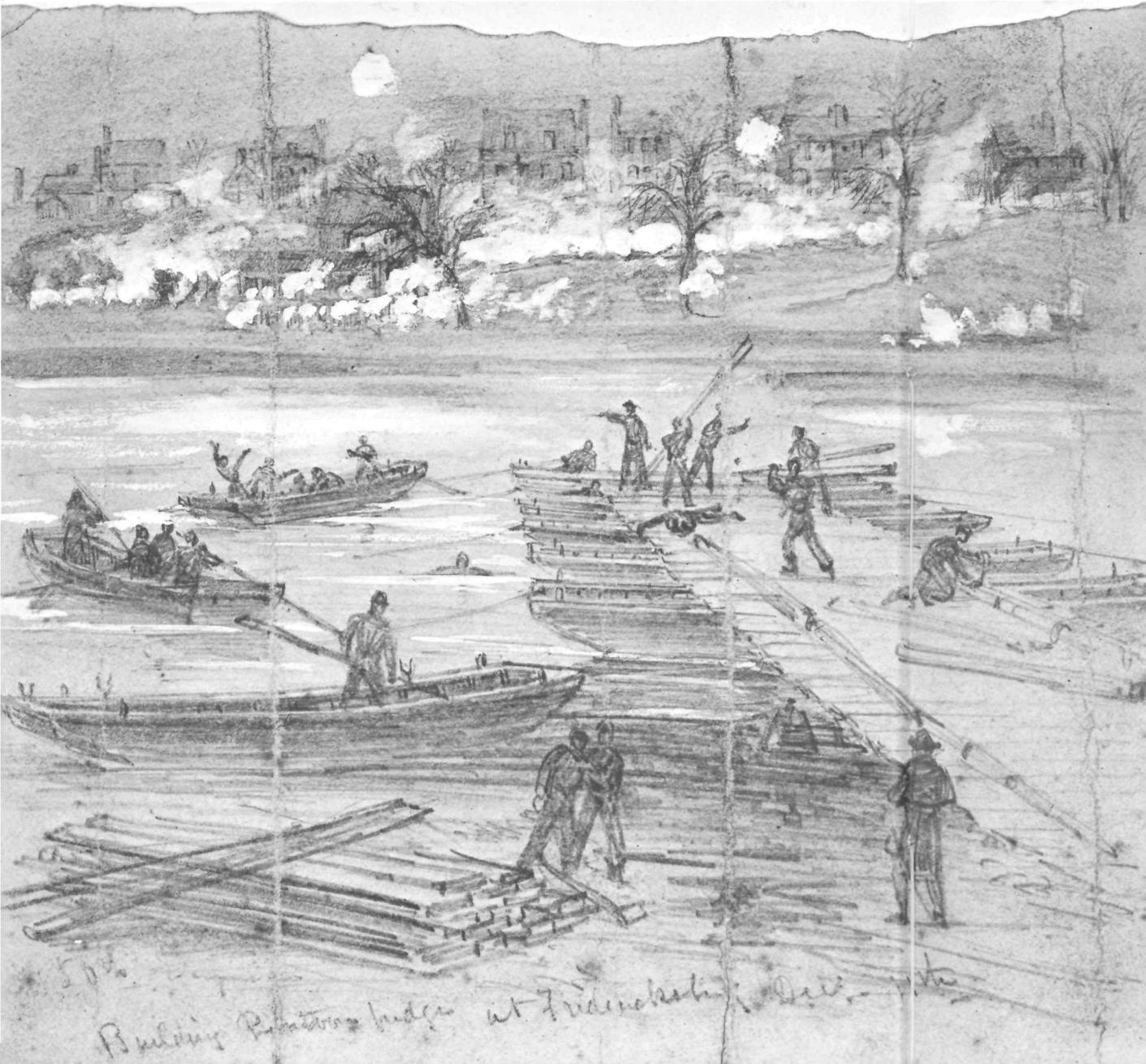
Franklin's Left Grand Division would cross the river below Fredericksburg and advance on Jackson's position; Sumner's Right Grand Division was to cross opposite the city and attack Longstreet on Marye's Heights; Hooker's Center Grand Division was held in reserve, ready to support either wing if the occasion warranted.

Early the next morning under cover of a heavy fog, Federal soldiers began laying the pontoon bridges, six in all, varying in length from 400 to 440 feet. Below the city the work proceeded as scheduled, but opposite Fredericksburg it was a different story. As the first rays of sun pierced the mist, Confederate sharpshooters, concealed in the houses and streets, opened a deadly fire. The bridge building stopped.

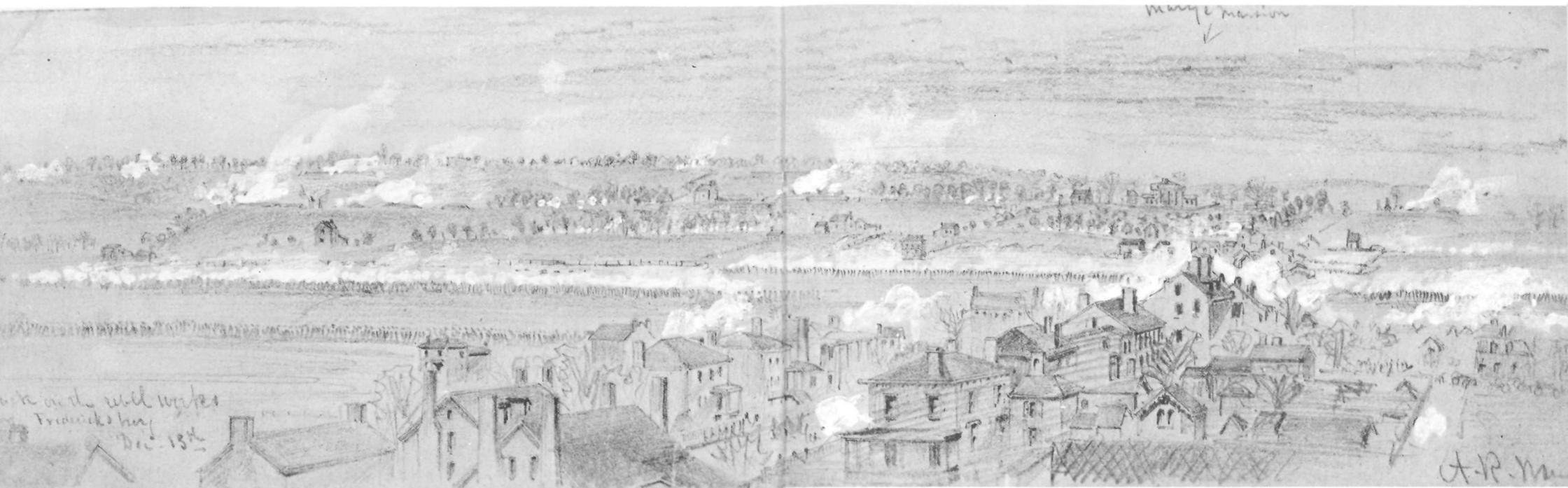
Burnside ordered a bombardment. The massed Federal artillery on Stafford Heights opened with a frightful roar. A storm of shot and shell tore through the streets, alleys, and houses, spreading death and destruction. Thick clouds of smoke swirled high in the air as buildings caught fire. Walls and chimneys crashed to the ground. Yet when the bombardment lifted and the smoke drifted away, the sharpshooters were still there.

In desperation the Federal officers called for volunteers who were ferried across the river in a daring bridgehead operation. After bitter house-to-house fighting, the outnumbered Confederates withdrew to the heavily fortified heights behind the town, enabling the engineers to complete the bridges.

The next day Federal troops poured over the river. Franklin put Reynolds' I Corps on his left opposite Jackson's right at Hamilton's Crossing where the Mine Road crossed the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad. Smith's VI Corps formed on Reynolds' right, opposite Jackson's left at Lansdowne Valley. Sumner had Couch's II Corps in Fredericksburg, and Willcox's IX Corps just south of the city connecting with Smith's right near Deep Run. By nightfall everything seemed set. Corps and division commanders waited anxiously for their attack orders. Behind them was the river; in front were the heights, bristling with Confederate cannon and bayonets.



Working under a brisk and accurate rifle fire, Federal engineers begin laying a pontoon bridge across the Rappahannock early on the morning of December 11.



As the attack on the Federal left below the town foundered, Burnside ordered his right wing to assault the heavily defended heights behind Fredericksburg. In this sketch by Waud, waves of infantry push across the broken plain on December 13 in the face of fierce Confederate musket and artillery fire. The Marye mansion is at right.

BURNSIDE'S FAILURE

Even with most of his army safely across the river, Burnside still had no definite plan of attack. Not until early the next morning did he issue his orders, and then they were vague and confused, couched in generalities. Corps and division commanders had no clear conception of what was expected of them. Franklin with one division was ordered "to seize, if possible" the heights at Hamilton's Crossing. Sumner was ordered to push a division through the city "with a view to seizing the heights in the rear," whatever that was supposed to mean. Incredible as it seems, with an army of 130,000 men under his command Burnside's so-called battle orders basically did nothing but commit two divisions to action, one to "seize if possible," the other "with a view to seizing."

Reynolds picked Gen. George Meade's division of Pennsylvanians to make the attack near Hamilton's Crossing, supported by Gen. John Gibbon's division on his right, with Gen. Abner Doubleday's division in reserve on the left. Meade formed his men along the Richmond Stage Road hidden by a heavy fog. Shortly after 9 a.m. the fog lifted. The Union soldiers marched bravely out across the open plain to attack Gen. A. P. Hill's division of Jackson's corps, concealed in the woods at the base of the heights and behind the shelter of the railroad embankment.

At Lee's command post, on top of a hill that has borne his name ever since, Confederate officers were treated to an awe-inspiring spectacle. They had a panoramic view of thousands of blue-clad soldiers in battle formation, marching with parade-ground precision out across the open fields to the attack. Bugles blared, and drums rolled. Horse-drawn artillery wheeled into line in skilled maneuvers. Steel bayonets flashed in the pale winter sun. The rich colors of the regimental flags unfurled in the breeze. Officers, on horseback shouting orders, charged up and down the line. It was a breathtaking sight—a picture-book study of war that prompted Lee to remark: "It is well that war is so terrible—we should grow too fond of it."

Then the Confederate artillery opened, ripping holes in the blue lines. The charging Federals were obscured in smoke as regiment after regiment behind the railroad embankment erupted into action. Still they came on, up to the embankment, over it, clubbing and stabbing with musket and bayonet.

Without knowing it, Meade had hit a weak spot between Archer's and Lane's brigades of Hill's division and pierced the Confederate line. But in the process he lost contact with Gibbon on his right and, unsupported on his left, was forced to retreat when Jackson quickly threw in his reserves. The gallant charge was wasted, since the Federals were driven back to the vicinity of the Richmond Stage Road.

“THAT TERRIBLE STONE WALL”

Sumner, on the Federal right, fared even worse. On Marye's Heights and in the sunken road behind the stone wall at the base of the Heights, Longstreet had placed Ransom's division and Cobb's Georgia brigade of Gen. Lafayette McLaws' division.

As Gen. William French's division of Couch's II Corps formed for the attack on the edge of the city, it came under a devastating artillery fire from the Confederate guns on the surrounding hills. Then as the brigades swung out in battle formation across the open fields, their alignment was broken by a canal drainage ditch that Burnside obstinately refused to admit existed. The blue line staggered and slowed as men fell like leaves in an autumn wind. Regrouped under fire, the men sprang forward again, passing under the range of the artillery on the hills, only to be met by a sheet of flame as the Confederates behind the stone wall, reinforced by Gen. Joseph Kershaw's brigade, exploded into action. When the smoke eddied away, remnants of the Federal regiments could be seen retreating across the fields to the shelter of a slight rise in the ground.

Burnside stubbornly refused to admit his mistakes. He continued to hurl brigade after brigade against the stone wall, first committing to action Gen. Winfield Hancock's division, then Gen. Oliver O. Howard's and later two divisions from the IX Corps. As one soldier described it: “They reach a point within a stone's throw of the stone wall . . . that terrible stone wall. No farther. They try to go beyond but are slaughtered. Nothing could advance farther and live.”

It was hopeless and useless, a waste of life, a horrible mistake. Nothing was accomplished by the attack. Darkness mercifully put an end to it. And that night, as the snow lay hard on the hills, many of the wounded slowly froze to death. “It is fearful to wake at night,” one veteran wrote, “and to hear the sounds made by the men about you. All night long the sounds go up of men coughing, heavy and hoarse with halfchoked throats, moaning and groaning with acute pain, a great deal of sickness and suffering on all sides”

Even then, Burnside hesitated. Not until 2 days later did he finally make up his mind to withdraw. During the night of December 15, under cover of a violent rainstorm, the Army of the Potomac retreated across the Rappahannock and went into its old camp on the heights beyond the city. The Federals had suffered 12,653 casualties in killed, wounded, and missing; the Confederates 5,309.

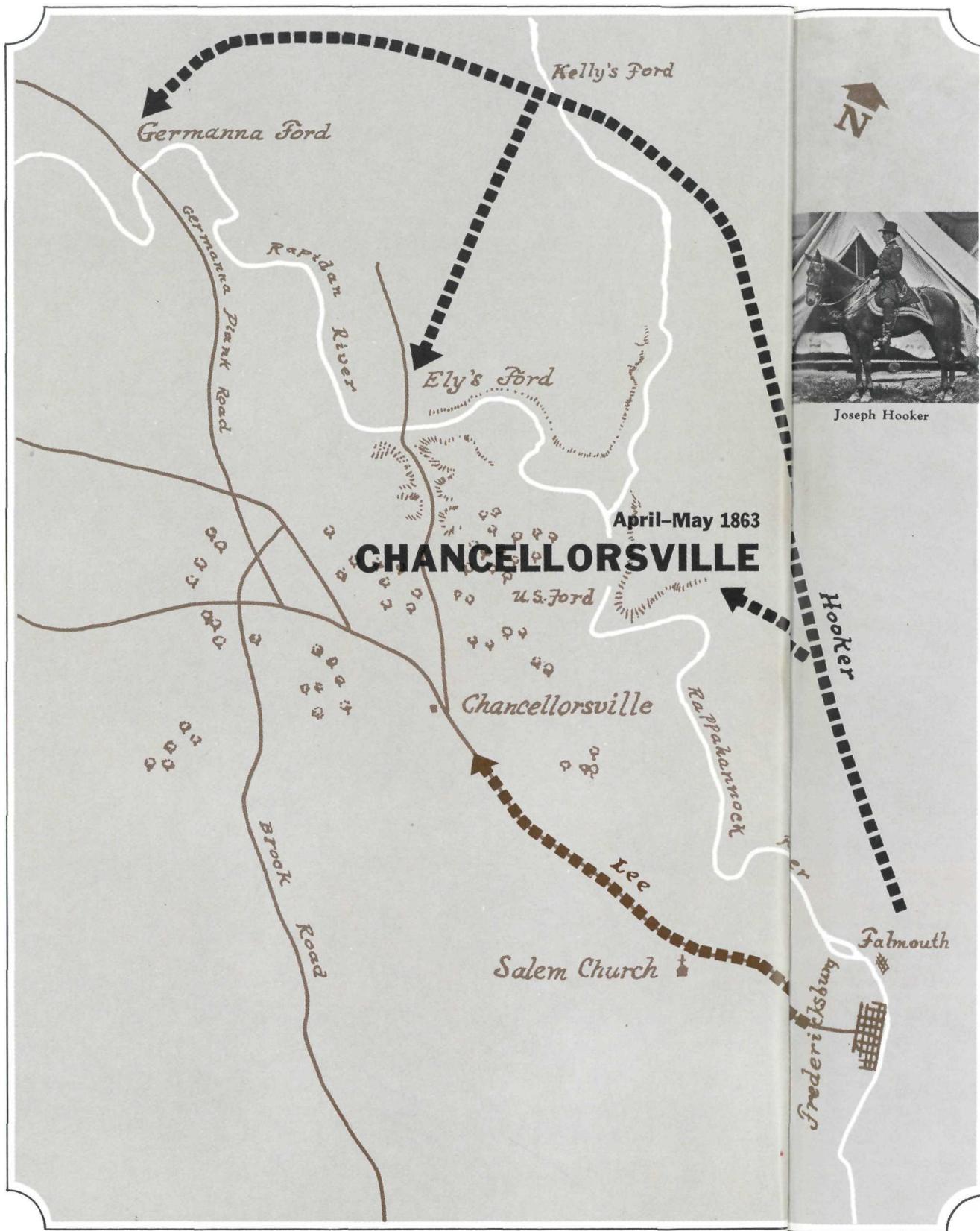
Frederic Cavada, a Union lieutenant, recorded Sumner's vast and futile charge against the strong Confederate line along Marye's Heights on the afternoon of December 13.



OVERLEAF: The citizens of Fredericksburg also felt the war's sharp edge. On December 11 Union artillery heavily damaged the town, leaving marks still visible today. Other destruction took place during the brief occupation. Waud sketched these Union soldiers sacking the town during a night of the occupation.

Night: The Sackings of Red Bank - & Progress of Union Troops





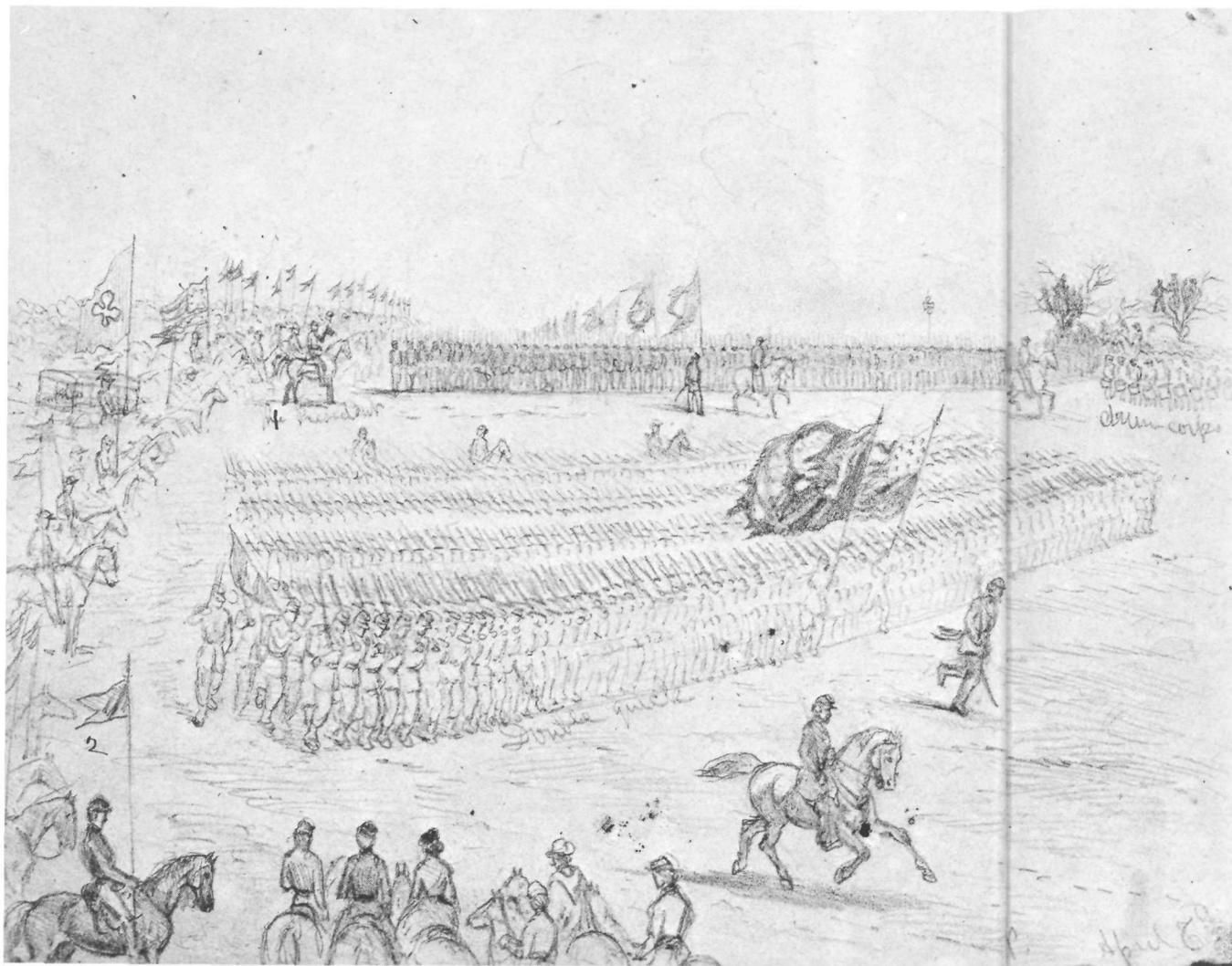
Joseph Hooker

Of trees and a quick march

A NEW COMMANDER

AFTER the Fredericksburg disaster President Lincoln appointed Gen. Joseph (“Fighting Joe”) Hooker to succeed Burnside. Hooker realized his first job was to restore morale and discipline to the demoralized Union army, and in this he showed rare administrative ability that few suspected he possessed. Abandoning Burnside’s unwieldy Grand Divisions, he reorganized the army on the corps level, forming the cavalry into a separate corps. The quality and quantity of the rations was increased, camp sanitation and living conditions improved. By spring of 1863 the Army of the Potomac, numbering about 135,000 men, was probably the best equipped and supplied army in the world. It was now becoming evident that the South could win victories and emerge permanently weakened, and that the North could suffer defeats and emerge still stronger.

Yet when Lincoln reviewed the army early in April, he seemed to have a premonition of disaster. What bothered him was Hooker, who prefaced almost every sentence with the words “When I get to Richmond . . .” This led Lincoln to remark that “the hen is the wisest of all of the animal creation because she never cackles until the egg is laid.” And he gave Hooker and Couch, next in command, some sage advice. “In your next fight gentlemen,” he told them, “put in all of your men.” Unfortunately for the North, the suggestion went unheeded.



Hooker's columns push in orderly ranks along the north bank of the Rappahannock on their way to Kelly's Ford on April 30, 1863. The sketch is by Edwin Forbes.

HOOKER'S PLAN

Hooker did develop a good plan, however. He would take three corps up the Rappahannock to a point northwest of Fredericksburg, then cross both the Rappahannock and the Rapidan to get on Lee's left flank and rear. Two corps would stay in front of Frederickburg to hold the Confederates in their defensive positions, while the remaining two corps would be held ready to go wherever the best opportunity presented itself. The men would carry 60 rounds of ammunition, and 8-days' rations

Early in April 1863 President Lincoln joined Hooker and the Army of the Potomac for a week's vacation from the burdens of office. The visit refreshed the care-worn chief executive, and his friendliness stirred the troops. On April 6 at Falmouth part of the Army passed in review before Lincoln and his commanders, marching grandly. Edwin Forbes sketched the parade; Lincoln is on horseback at the upper left.

of hardtack, salt pork, coffee, sugar, and salt. Each ration weighed 3 pounds. For the first time in the east, 2,000 pack mules would be used instead of the usual supply wagons to speed up the movement. The cavalry corps would take off on a raid to disrupt Lee's communications with Richmond.

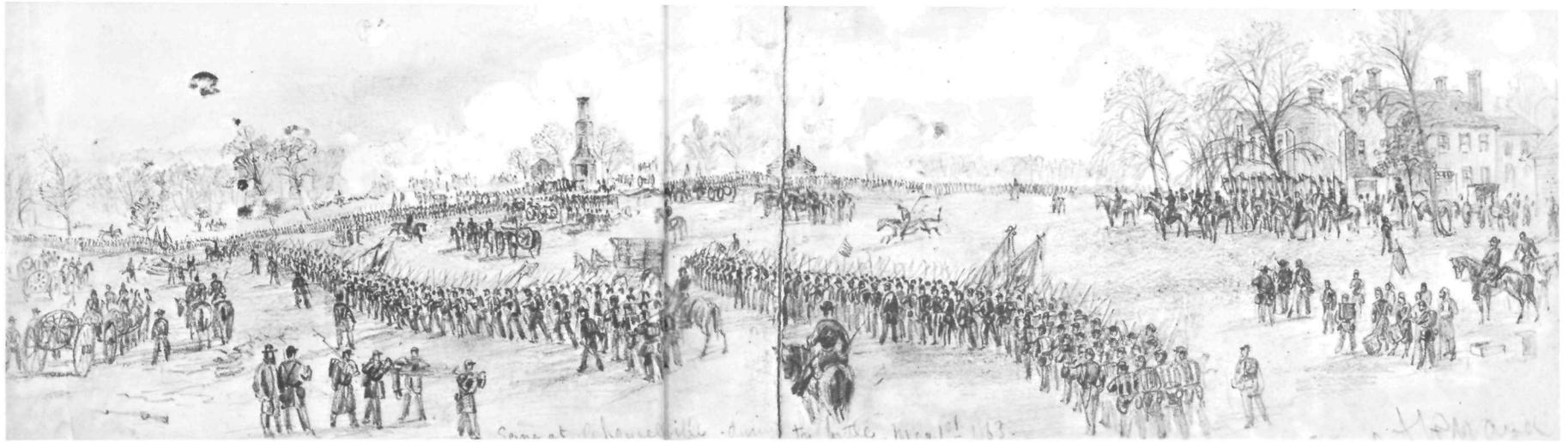
Hooker reasoned that with three Federal corps on his rear, Lee would have to retreat toward Richmond, and in retreating would, in effect, be executing a flank movement across Hooker's front, a movement generally regarded as suicidal if performed in front of an aggressive commander. Hooker was supposed to be aggressive. His orders to his cavalry commander certainly sounded that way when he reminded him that "celerity, audacity and resolution are everything in battle. Let your watchword be fight, fight, fight."

The campaign got underway April 27 when Meade's V, Howard's XI, and Gen. Henry Slocum's XII Corps started up the Rappahannock, crossing it the next day at Kelly's Ford. "For miles nothing could be heard but the steady tramp of the men," wrote one campaigner, "the rattling and jingling of canteens and accouterments, and the occasional 'close-up-men-close-up' of the officers." On April 29 they crossed the Rapidan at Ely's and Germanna Fords and by April 30 reached Chancellorsville, a strategic crossroads on the edge of an area known as the Wilderness.

While this flanking march of some 40 miles was taking place, Couch's II Corps and Gen. Daniel Sickles' III Corps bluffed a crossing at U.S. Ford on the Rappahannock in an attempt to deceive Lee as to Hooker's intentions. When he completed the flank march, Hooker ordered the two corps to cross the river and join him at Chancellorsville. This left Reynolds' I Corps and Gen. John Sedgwick's VI Corps opposite Lee at Fredericksburg.

So far everything had worked perfectly. "I have Lee in one hand and Richmond in the other," Hooker boasted.





May 1, 1863, was a day of maneuvering for both armies. Here the Federals concentrate at Chancellorsville, the home of the Chancellor family at the important road junction of the Orange Turnpike and Ely's Ford Road. The house standing at right was Hooker's headquarters and a hospital during the battle. It later burned.

LEE'S RESPONSE

Surprisingly, there was some truth in Hooker's statement. Lee had been outflanked. He had not believed that Hooker would move his army that far up the Rappahannock, knowing he would have to cross two rivers instead of one. By April 29, however, his cavalry commander, Gen. J. E. B. ("Jeb") Stuart, had captured enough Federal stragglers to inform Lee that Hooker had undoubtedly split his army into two wings, either of which could be as large as the total Confederate force. Longstreet, with Pickett's and Hood's divisions, was on a foraging expedition down on the Peninsula. This left Lee with only Jackson's corps and the divisions of Gens. R. H. Anderson and McLaws, for a total of about 60,000 men. At least three Federal corps were on his left and rear. Heavily outnumbered, the logical move seemed to be to retreat and join Longstreet somewhere between Fredericksburg and Richmond, probably at the North Anna River.

But Lee undoubtedly realized that that was exactly what Hooker expected him to do, so he refused even to consider retreat. The only question in his mind was which of the Federal wings to attack. Finally convinced that the troops in front of Fredericksburg were merely a diversion, he decided to attack the force at Chancellorsville. Consequently, on May 1 Jackson was ordered to Chancellorsville to join Anderson and McLaws. Gen. Jubal Early's division was left to hold the heights at Fredericksburg.

That morning the Federal corps commanders at Chancellorsville were impatiently awaiting the order to advance. They realized Hooker had outflanked Lee, but a delay now could lose all the advantages gained by the maneuver. Most of their men were still in the Wilderness, a dense forest of second-growth pine and scrub oak, with numerous creeks, gullies, swamps, heavy tanglefoot underbrush, and few farms or open spaces. Two or three miles east on the Orange Turnpike toward Fredericksburg, however,



would bring them to open areas where they could maneuver effectively.

Finally, late in the morning, Hooker ordered Meade and Slocum forward. Meade sent two divisions down the River Road and one down the turnpike. Slocum took the Orange Plank Road farther south. The only force in front was Anderson's and McLaws' divisions near Zoan Church, about 3 miles east of Chancellorsville. But when they made contact with the Confederate force, Hooker suddenly abandoned the whole idea and ordered them back, despite the strong protests of his corps commanders. "The position thus abandoned was high ground," Couch reported, "more or less open in front, over which an army might move and artillery be used advantageously." Meade grumbled disgustedly, "If he can't hold the top of the hill, how does he expect to hold the bottom of it."

A well known fact of military history is that by the faulty disposition of troops a battle can be lost before it starts. Hooker not only committed this error, but by dropping the offense and assuming a defensive attitude, he voluntarily surrendered the initiative to his opponent. This despite the fact that the one clear lesson from all the campaigns of the great military commanders was that a defensive posture should never be assumed except as a means of passing to the offensive under more favorable conditions. The strength of the offensive lies in maneuvering at will, screening forces for surprise, and, the primary duty of a good strategist, massing superior power at the opponent's weak point.

Lee quickly decided to take full advantage of the opportunity Hooker had given him. The Federal right flank extended just west of Wilderness Church on the Turnpike. When Stuart reported that it was not resting on a natural obstacle and seemed ill-prepared to resist, Lee decided this would be the main point of his attack. The risk was high, for the attacking force would have to make a flanking march of some 12 miles across the front of the Union Army, the most dangerous military maneuver in the book.

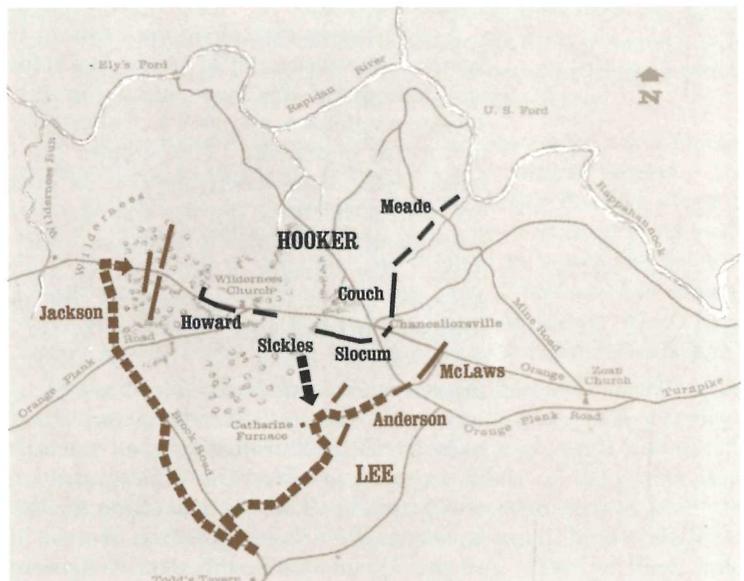
JACKSON DISAPPEARS INTO THE FOREST

At a conference that night between Lee and Jackson it was decided that Jackson's corps would make the attack. A local guide was found who knew a seldom-used trail through the woods that would keep them out of sight of the Federals for most of the march. Lee would keep pressure on Hooker as best he could with his limited force until Jackson was in position. Stuart's cavalry was to screen the movement.

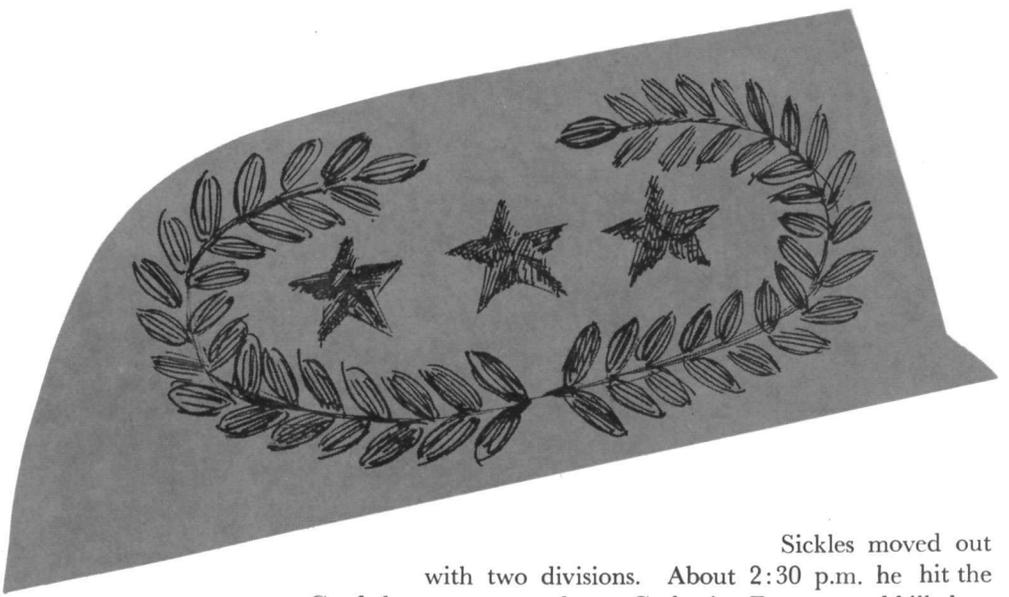
The Union Army's right flank was held by Howard's XI Corps, stretching west about a mile from Wilderness Church and generally facing south. East of Howard was Sickles' III Corps, with Slocum's XII and Couch's II curved around the Chancellorville crossroads. Meade's V Corps held the left flank, with its own flank resting on the Rappahannock.

Saturday, May 2, broke clear and hot. As the sun burned down, Jackson's column, 6 miles long, wound its way across the Union front. Shortly after the march began, Federal observers, posted atop tall trees, reported a heavy movement in front of Sickles. Hooker declared jubilantly, "Lee is in full retreat towards Gordonsville."

Sickles requested permission to attack. But it took Hooker until noon to make up his mind, and then his orders were hesitant and timid. "Move out cautiously and harass the movement." The word "attack" was not even mentioned, and only Sickles was ordered to move. Strange orders, indeed, for a commanding general who earlier had informed his cavalry commander that the secret of success in battle is to "fight, fight, fight."



Jackson's flank march, May 2, 1863.



Sickles moved out with two divisions. About 2:30 p.m. he hit the Confederate rear guard near Catharine Furnace and killed or captured most of the 23d Georgia Regiment. But by 2:30 Jackson's leading regiment, the 5th Alabama, was already forming for the attack across the turnpike west of Hooker's right flank.

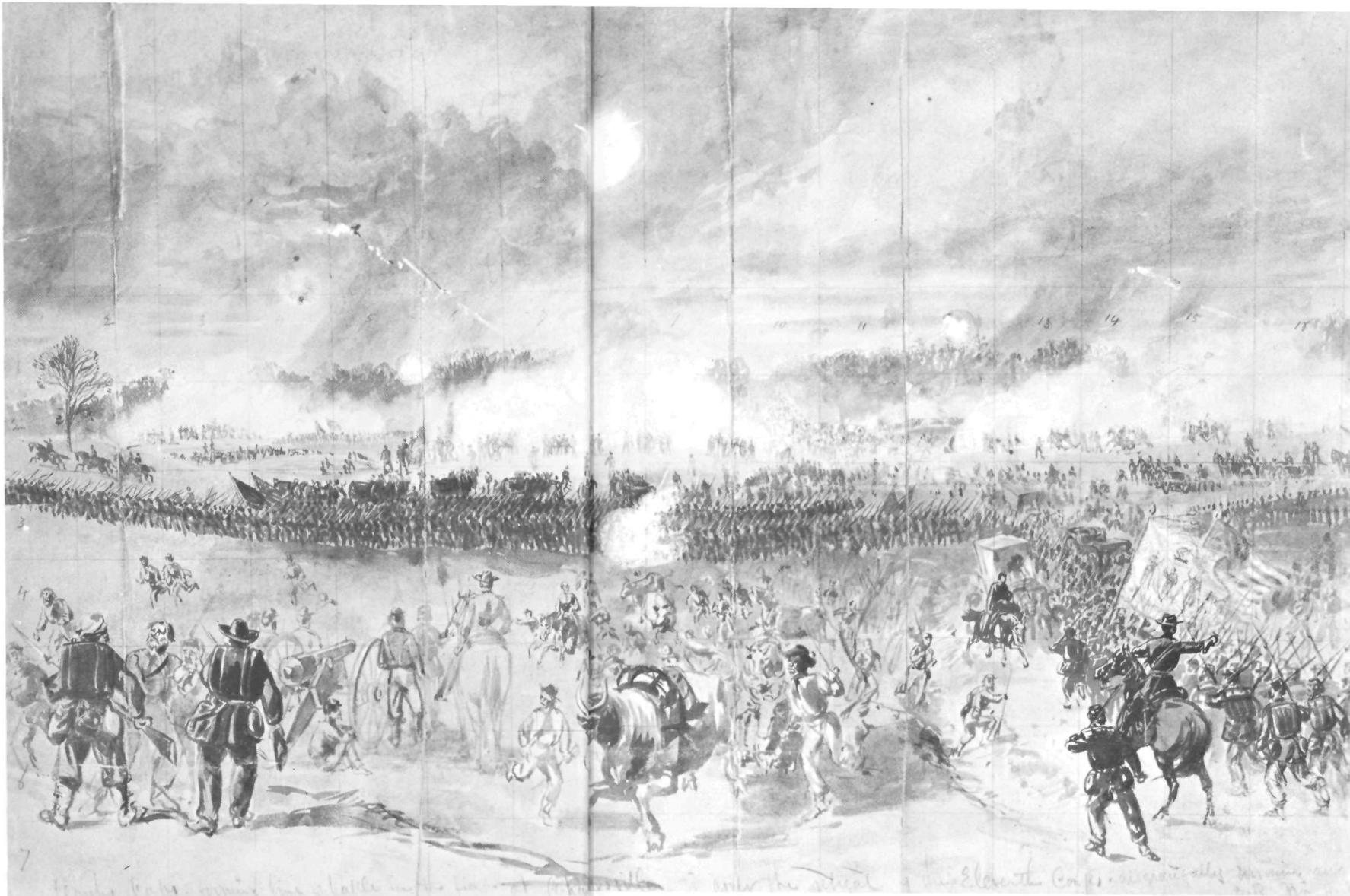
As the other Confederate regiments gradually came up and formed in the woods, the Union pickets were aware that something was afoot. Junior officers of the line tried to alert corps headquarters, but Howard, imbued with Hooker's belief that Lee was fleeing and convinced that the woods were too thick on his flank for a major assault, refused to take any action. At Army headquarters back at Chancellorsville, the warnings also went unheeded. In desperation, one officer in command of some pickets sent a final message to Howard that the enemy was forming in strength in the woods on his flank, and ended with, "For God's sake make disposition to receive him." About that time Hooker was informing Sedgwick: "We know the enemy is fleeing, trying to save his trains."



Thomas J. Jackson

Shortly after 5 o'clock Jackson was ready. Many of the Union soldiers, their muskets stacked, were preparing supper, some were playing cards, others were sleeping. At the shouted orders the gray-clad regiments exploded out of the woods to the sound of the rebel yell and rolled up Hooker's right flank. Most of Howard's corps was quickly shattered into a frightened, disorganized mob and streamed back toward Chancellorsville. A soldier in the 13th Mass. Volunteers remembered that "along the road it was pandemonium; on the side of the road it was chaos."

In the shadows of dusk the initial charge lost its momentum as scattered Federal units were brought into line to stem the tide. Their alinement broken by the charge through the woods and the excitement of the attack, the Confederate regiments halted to reorganize. In the hope that he could continue the assault, Jackson himself went forward on the turnpike in the growing darkness to study the situation at firsthand. But in returning to his lines he was mistakenly shot and mortally wounded by his own men, ending any chance of another major attack before morning.



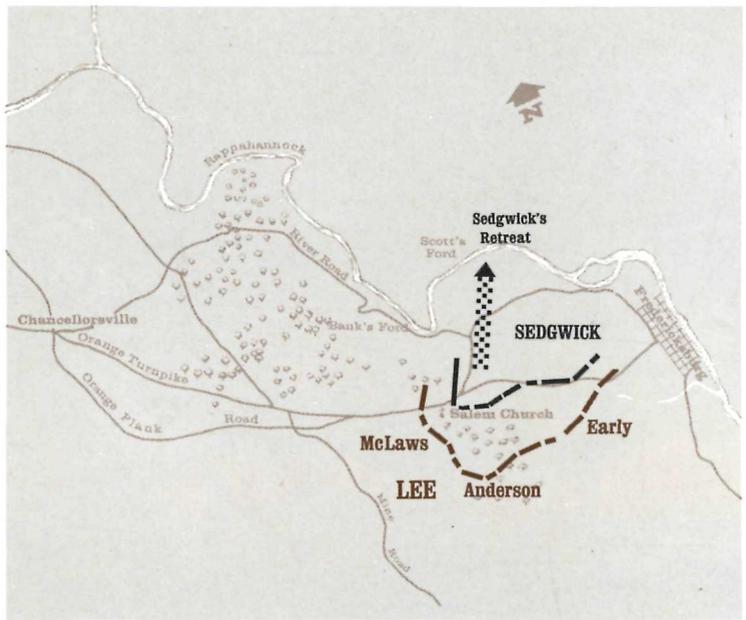
Under a darkening late afternoon sky, units of Couch's I Corps move up to stem Jackson's fierce onslaught, while Howard's corps (foreground) flees from the field.

During the night the XI Corps was reorganized and held at Chancellorsville. Reynolds' I Corps, which had previously been ordered up from Fredericksburg and arrived on the field during the attack, now held the Federal right flank, with its own flank resting on the Rapidan River and facing west rather than south.

Lee's strategy was successful. The whole movement had been a model of maneuvering, screening, and massing. Yet Lee had gained little. His situation was almost as critical as when the flanking movement was being made. The Army of Northern Virginia was split into three parts, with Sickles' corps and most of Slocum's between Lee and Jackson's corps, now commanded by Stuart. Until he could reunite these two wings Lee was in danger of being destroyed piecemeal.

THE COMMANDER WHO WOULD NOT DARE

The Army of the Potomac had not been seriously hurt by Jackson's surprise attack. Howard's corps, though temporarily routed in panic, suffered only 2,412 casualties during the whole campaign, while Sickles' corps, for example, lost 4,119 and Slocum's 2,824. During the night Howard reorganized his men, and by morning they were ready and willing to fight, if given a chance. Moreover, with the arrival of Reynolds' corps from Fredericksburg, Hooker now had approximately 90,000 men around Chancellorsville to throw against Lee's divided 48,000. Unfortunately for



Lee turns back Sedgwick at Salem Church, May 4, 1863.

the Army of the Potomac, Hooker was thinking only of defense. Strategically, most of the advantages were still his, but the Union commander had lost his nerve.

Early the next morning Lee and Stuart resumed the assault, fighting desperately to connect with each other. Then Hooker suddenly made it easy for them. He voluntarily withdrew Sickles to strengthen his new, shorter defensive line to the north. This not only enabled Lee to unite the two wings of his army, it also gave him strategic high ground at Hazel Grove, just south of Chancellorsville, from where his artillery could inflict severe damage on the Federals. This forced Hooker to withdraw from Chancellorsville entirely into a new defensive position closer to the rivers. The Union army now arched between the Rapidan and the Rappahannock. Behind the strong defensive works that he had built, Hooker should have felt safe even though his 90,000 men were "surrounded" by Lee's 48,000.

In the meantime, Sedgwick's VI Corps had been ordered to seize Marye's Heights behind Fredericksburg from Early's division, then march to Hooker's assistance. In a daring bayonet charge, Sedgwick drove Early off the heights and back toward Richmond. Pausing only long enough to regroup, he then proceeded west on the turnpike toward Chancellorsville.

When Lee learned that Early had lost the heights and a Federal force was marching on his rear, he again boldly split his army. Showing his complete contempt for Hooker, he marched McLaws' and Anderson's divisions back toward Fredericksburg, leaving Stuart with about 25,000 men to hold the Union army of 90,000.

Late that afternoon Lee met Sedgwick's advance division near Salem Church on the Orange Turnpike and halted it, while Sedgwick waited for his other divisions to come up. The next day, May 4, Early advanced on the Federals from Fredericksburg.

Attacked furiously on three sides, Sedgwick wisely abandoned any idea of joining Hooker. Instead, he gradually swung his corps around toward the Rappahannock to protect his flanks and that night crossed the river to safety at Scott's Ford, just below Banks' Ford. Hooker made no move to help Sedgwick at any time.

Lee promptly marched his weary men back to Chancellorsville to join Stuart, intending to attack Hooker again in his strongly fortified position. Fortunately for the exhausted Confederate troops, the Army of the Potomac retreated across the Rappahannock before Lee could mount another assault. The battle of Chancellorsville was over. The Union loss in killed, wounded, and missing totaled 17,287; the Confederate, 12,821.

LEE MOVES NORTH

While Richmond rejoiced at the brilliant victory, the deep despair in Washington was summed up by Lincoln's anguished statement: "My God! What will the country say?"

The situation for the North was not as bad as it first seemed. In a sense, the Army of the Potomac had not been defeated, only its general. At no time during the battle had it been committed to action as an army. Over 40,000 troops had seen no action at all, despite Lincoln's admonition to Hooker to use all his men. The losses suffered in the campaign were soon made good by new recruits, and when Lincoln appointed George Meade to succeed Hooker, the Army of the Potomac was stronger than ever. Although few people realized it, while the North was losing battles it was at the same time inexorably winning the war by consistently whittling away at Southern resources.

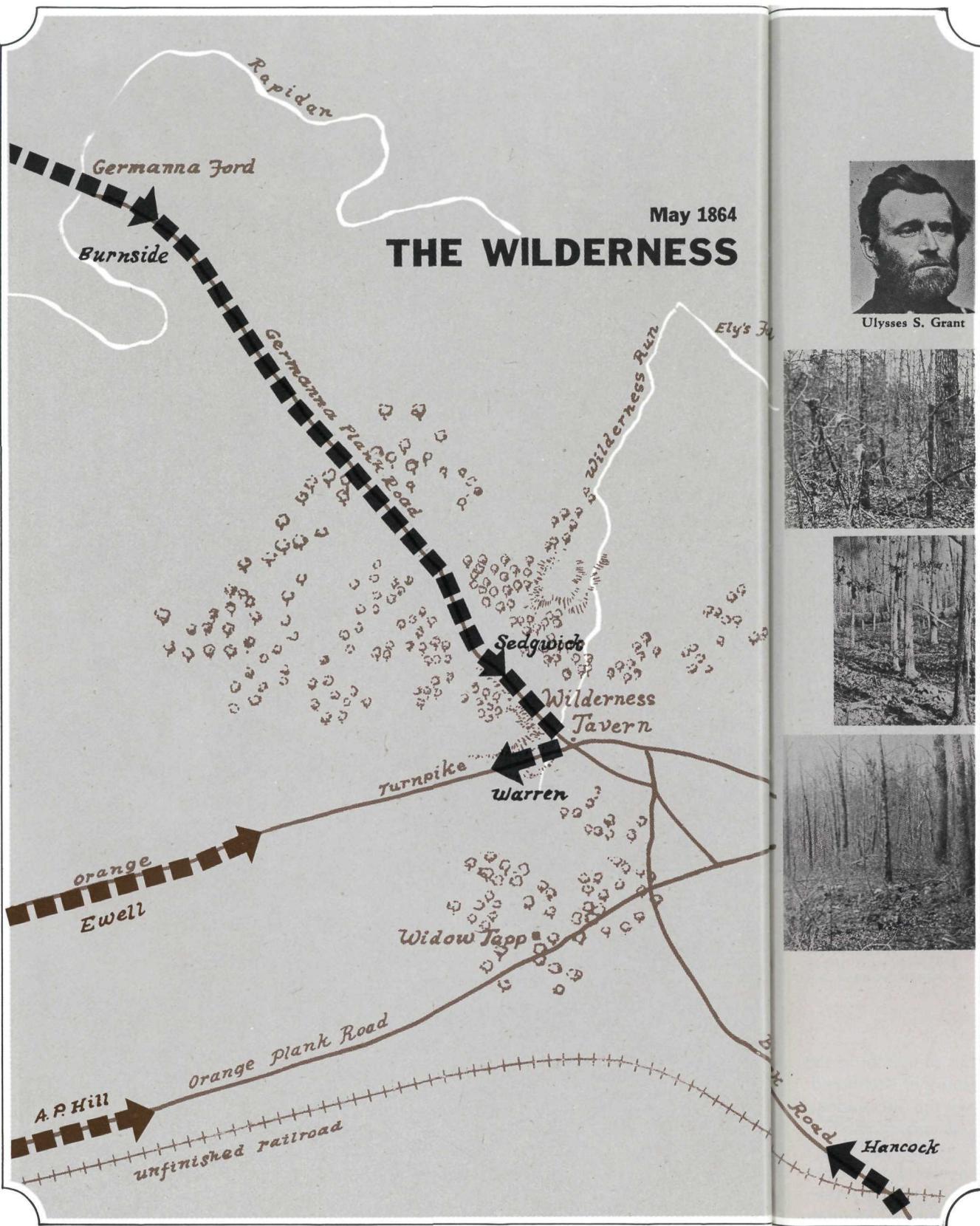
And while Richmond celebrated, the truth was that the South had gained little if anything from the victory. To be sure, another "On-to-Richmond" drive had been stopped, but that was the extent of it. The loss of "Stonewall" Jackson was a serious blow to the Confederacy. Without him, the Army of Northern Virginia never again executed the bold and vigorous strategy that had characterized it. "I have lost my right arm," Lee declared sadly.

Nevertheless, the decision was made to attempt a second invasion of the North. The Confederate government believed that the victory at Chancellorsville had seriously affected Northern morale and hoped that an invasion now would put so much pressure on Lincoln that he would be forced to call a halt to the war. So Lee moved into Pennsylvania, only to be defeated by Meade at Gettysburg in July 1863. He then retreated back into Virginia and prepared to spend the winter in the Mine Run area behind the Rapidan.

OVERLEAF: On May 3, 1863, while attempting to smash through Lee's rear and unite with Hooker's main force at Chancellorsville, Sedgwick stormed the Confederate position on Marye's Heights. This time Union infantry carried the stone wall and swept to the top of the hill over the bodies of defenders such as these. Sedgwick's action gained him little. The next day, still separated from the main army, he had to beat off Confederate attacks from three sides at Salem Church.



Capt. Russell Ford



Ulysses S. Grant



Death hung in the air

IN MARCH 1864 President Lincoln appointed Gen. Ulysses S. Grant commanding general of all the Union armies. Said Grant:

In the east the opposing forces stood in substantially the same relations toward each other as three years before, or when the war began; they were both between the Federal and Confederate Capitals. Battles had been fought of as great severity as had ever been known in war . . . from the James River to Gettysburg, with indecisive results.

He hoped to change this situation by putting pressure on all Confederate armies at the same time, something that had never been done before.

Lee's strategy had always been to "risk some points in order to have a sufficient force concentrated, with the hope of dealing a successful blow when opportunity favors." He believed "as the enemy cannot attack all points at one time . . . the troops could be concentrated . . . where an assault should be made." With its interior, or shorter, lines of communication the South could so concentrate its forces.

This is exactly what Grant realized and wished to prevent. The way to prevent the Confederates from concentrating, as he saw it, was to put and keep pressure on all points at all times, so that the South would be unable to continue its thus successful strategy.



ONCE MORE INTO THE FOREST

Grant's plan called for Gen. Benjamin Butler to march up the south side of the James River and attack Petersburg or Richmond, or both, and for Gen. Franz Sigel to push down the Shenandoah Valley driving Gen. Jubal Early before him, thereby protecting Washington. Gen. Nathaniel Banks in New Orleans would march on Mobile; Gen. William T. Sherman would cut across Georgia driving Gen. Joseph E. Johnston before him, take Atlanta, and if necessary swing north to Richmond; Meade's

Army of the Potomac, with Grant actually in command, was to push Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and capture Richmond. As Grant stated: "To get possession of Lee's Army was the first great object. With the capture of his army Richmond would necessarily follow."

Lee was well aware of Grant's determination. He wrote to Jefferson Davis:

The importance of this campaign to the administration of Mr. Lincoln and to General Grant leaves no doubt that every effort and every sacrifice will be made to secure its success.

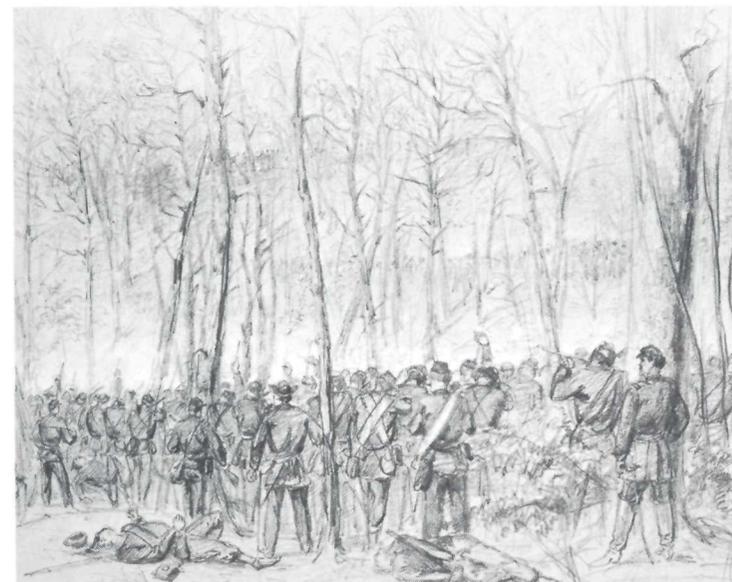
He realized that he had to destroy Grant's army before he got to the James River. "If he gets there it will become a siege, and then it will be a mere question of time." To accomplish this, his strategy was to inflict such heavy losses on Grant that either he would abandon the campaign or the North would become tired of so costly a struggle and not reelect Lincoln.

The campaign began on May 4 when the Army of the Potomac crossed the Rapidan at Ely's and Germanna Fords and headed into the Wilderness. Grant wanted to turn Lee's flank and get him out from behind his fortifications at Mine Run, farther up the river, so he risked battle in the Wilderness even though he could not use his preponderance of forces to best advantage.

That night Gen. Gouverneur Warren's V and Sedgwick's VI Corps encamped at a strategic crossroads near the Wilderness Tavern. Here the Germanna Plank Road leading south crossed the Orange Turnpike, running east and west. South of the turnpike, but before it met the Orange Plank Road, the continuation of the Germanna Road crossed Brock Road. Hancock's II Corps camped around the crossroads at Chancellorsville, where the Ely's Ford Road met the turnpike. Burnside's IX Corps was still north of the river.

Winslow Homer's painting suggests the vague nature of the fighting in the Wilderness, where the thickets broke up the battlelines and the enemy, more often than not, remained unseen.

A line of James Wadsworth's Union division goes into action on May 6. Waud wrote on the drawing that it was near this spot that the stout old general, much admired by his troops, was killed.



Many of the men remembered later that a sad silence settled over the army that night. The cry of the whippoorwill echoed through the deep shadows. Bones of the unburied dead from the Chancellorsville battle just over a year before gave a gruesome air to the place and sapped the morale of the new men in the blue ranks. Around the campfires in the stillness of the woods, even the veterans were unusually quiet, haunted by memories and premonitions. One recalled that they all seemed to have "a sense of ominous dread which many of us found almost impossible to shake off." Under soft stars the pickets near the Wilderness Tavern heard a rumbling far off to the west and guessed that the Confederates were moving somewhere in the night to meet them.

They guessed right. Because of the size of the Federal forces, Lee did not contest the crossing of the Rapidan. Instead, he planned to strike Grant's right flank in the area of the Wilderness where the Federal artillery would be practically disabled and he could use his smaller force to best advantage.

At the first streaks of dawn the Federal army was on the move. Hancock marched south from Chancellorsville and then angled slightly west to unite with Warren, who then moved south from Wilderness Tavern, followed by Sedgwick. Warren wisely took the precaution of leaving Gen. Charles Griffin's division on the turnpike to guard his right flank while he started his other two divisions south.

As Griffin's men moved west the air became still and sultry, the dry underbrush crackling beneath their feet. From beyond the trees in their front came the dull popping of the skirmishers' guns. Yellow slits of light began to blink along the regimental lines and little balls of smoke, gray and compact, floated upward in the stifling air. Minie balls buzzed among the branches and slapped into the trees. Leaves and pine needles showered down like the first splatter of a sudden summer storm. The whirlwind of battle fast approached.

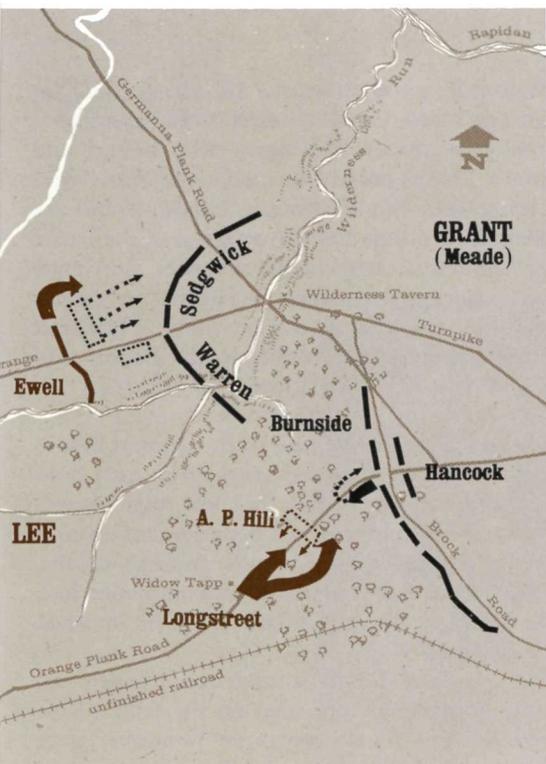
The Federals ran into Gen. Richard Ewell's corps advancing east on the turnpike, the first of Lee's force to make contact.

As the troops on both sides spread north and south of the turnpike, they disappeared into the twilight gloom of the dense foliage among the gnarled and twisted tree trunks. Soon the woods echoed to the roar of cannon, the crack of musketry, the angry, confused shouts of men trying desperately to kill each other.

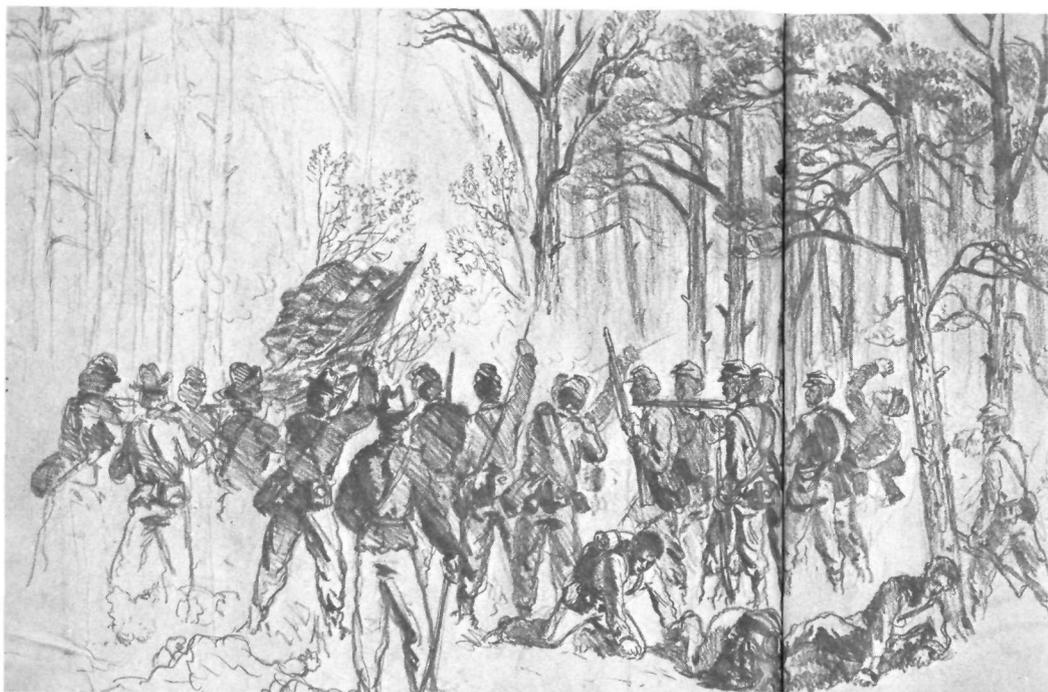
When Grant realized that this was more than just a Confederate reconnoitering force on his flank, he quickly suspended the movement south. Warren's other two divisions were ordered back and went into line south of the turnpike on Griffin's left, and Sedgwick was moved north of the turnpike on Griffin's right. Hancock was to swing west and hold the strategic Orange Plank and Brock crossroads, where only a thin line of cavalry patrolled it. But when Lee sent A. P. Hill's corps down the Orange Plank Road, quickly driving off the Federal cavalry, Grant realized Hancock could not get there in time, so Gen. George Getty's division of Sedgwick's corps was rushed over to fill the gap until Hancock could come up.



In this hasty sketch by Waud Francis Barlow's Union division pushes forward into smoke-filled underbrush on May 6, 1864. Some of the wounded were carried to safety, as Waud depicts below. Others were consumed by the flames.



The Battle of the Wilderness, May 6, 1864.



THE FLAMING WILDERNESS

During the day fighting raged furiously all along the line, from south of the Orange Plank Road to north of the turnpike—fighting such as these two armies had never seen before and would never see again. Troops could not maneuver in the wild country, battlelines broke into tiny fragments, nobody could see anything at all. Line officers guessed at the progress of the battle by the sound of the musketry. Regiments, brigades, and even divisions became inextricably mixed. Yet, in fighting as vicious as any in the whole war, neither side gave an inch. Here and there the dry underbrush caught fire, adding to the horror and confusion, and many of the wounded burned to death in the flaming Wilderness.

In the hot, still air the thick smoke clung to the ground before lifting, and through it muskets flashed and crackled as men fired blindly. The noise roared to a crescendo that left them dazed. Regimental and company commanders lost communication and control in the dense forest, amid the underbrush, swamps, creeks, smoke, flames, and noise. In some places even companies had to advance or retreat in single file, never knowing who or what was on their left or right.

As the sunset faded, darkness finally settled like a gently restraining hand over the horror and confusion on the field. Motionless forms covered the ground in grotesque positions, as if carelessly heaved there. That night, in the flickering light of candles and lanterns, stretcher bearers worked to carry in the wounded and dying.

Fighting near the junction of the Orange Plank and Brock Roads, a line of Winfield Hancock's VI Corps looses a volley in the above sketch by Edwin Forbes. Below, a supply wagon brings ammunition to troops of Gouverneur Warren's V Corps in the Wilderness.

The next morning it began all over again. Hancock had reached the Brock Road late the previous afternoon, just in time to save Getty's division from being driven off by A. P. Hill, and now was firmly entrenched along it. When Burnside's IX Corps came up, Grant used it to try to fill the gap between Hancock's right and Warren's left. The entire army was now committed to action, and Grant ordered Hancock to drive Hill back and roll up Lee's right flank before Longstreet's corps could arrive. Sedgwick and Warren were to keep pressure on Ewell to prevent Lee from shifting forces from left to right to help Hill.

Hill's men had fought all the previous day and were trying to straighten out their lines that morning when Hancock's relatively fresh troops hit them and drove them west along the Orange Plank Road. About 2 miles west of the crossroads was a meager little clearing in the woods around the Widow Tapp farm. Here stood Lee himself among some parked guns trying to rally the men. Another mile west and the Federals would be around his right flank and among his supply trains, and the whole Army of Northern Virginia would be in grave danger.

But as Hancock's men emerged from the woods into the Tapp clearing, the massed Confederate cannon blasted them back. Before they could regroup for another advance, Longstreet's troops appeared dramatically on the field at the most crucial moment of the battle for Lee. The furious fighting continued all day, but Longstreet had stopped Hancock's advance. By swinging south of the Plank Road he had overlapped the Federal left, and forced Hancock to withdraw behind his works along the Brock Road. Confederate attempts to capture these works failed, and, in the process of reconnoitering, Longstreet was wounded. Gen. A. H. Anderson then assumed command of the corps.

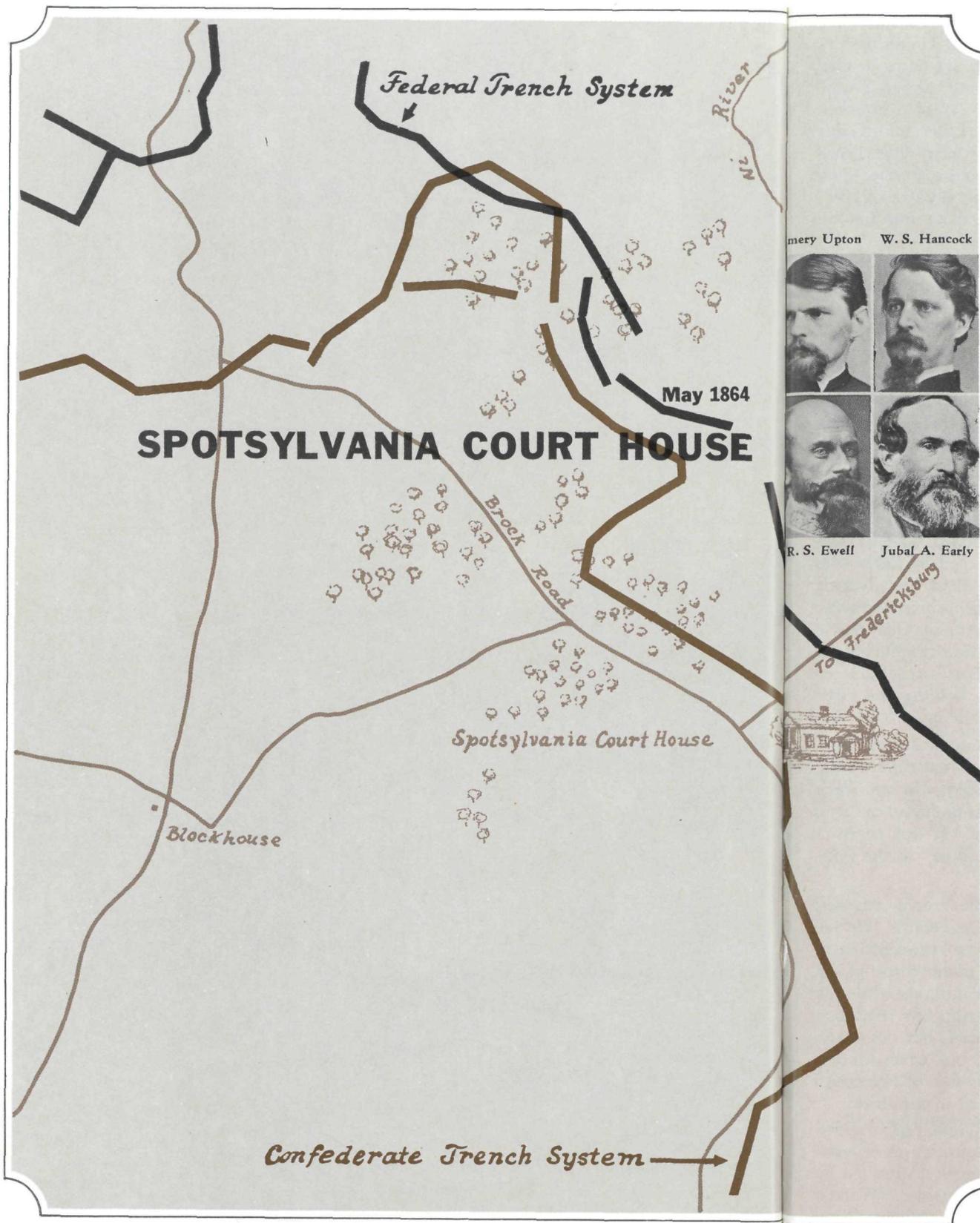
As night came on, it was evident to both Lee and Grant that the two armies were now entrenched so strongly that attack by either side could be suicidal. The struggle in the Wilderness was over. The Federals lost 15,387 out of 118,000 in killed, wounded, and missing; the Confederates 11,400 out of 62,000.



OVERLEAF: As the ranks cheer, Grant pushes through to the head of his columns on the night of May 7, 1864, heading south and leading his men on to more fighting.



Gen. V. S. Grant at: Wolden, Minn.



Grant pounds southward

THE FIGHT FOR THE SALIENT

INSTEAD of retreating to lick his wounds as other Federal commanders had done, Grant again decided to move around Lee's right flank by sliding leftward and southward. South and slightly east of the Wilderness area was another strategic crossroads at the village of Spotsylvania Court House. The village itself was just a sleepy hamlet, a handful of houses scattered about a country crossroads, but Federal possession would seriously endanger the Confederate line of communication to Richmond.

During the night of May 7, Warren was ordered to pull out of line and proceed toward Spotsylvania Court House by way of the Brock Road, passing behind Burnside's and Hancock's corps. Sedgwick would follow Warren by way of Chancellorsville and the Piney Branch Church Road to where it met the Brock Road. Burnside would proceed farther east and take the Fredericksburg-Spotsylvania Court House Road. When the rest of the army had moved, Hancock would follow Warren on the Brock Road. The cavalry had been ordered to clear the way.

In the blackness of the night the men stumbled along the unfamiliar country roads, falling into ditches, tripping over underbrush, floundering in swamps, walking into bushes and limbs of trees. Some fell asleep marching; imagination played havoc as mirages appeared before tired eyes; a clump of trees became a group of the enemy, a runaway horse, a cavalry charge. Faces of lost buddies seemed to stare out between the silent trees. "It is no small tax upon one's endurance to remain marching all night," one veteran recalled. "During the day there is always something to attract the attention and amuse, but at night there is nothing."

Warren reached Todd's Tavern on the Brock Road about 3 a.m., but here he was halted by Confederate and Union cavalry blocking the road. The delay enabled Anderson's corps to take up an entrenched position on the high ground, about a mile and a half northwest of the vital crossroads. Warren attacked him about 8 o'clock but was beaten back. Later in the day Sedgwick came up and formed on Warren's left, while Ewell formed on Anderson's right just in time to repulse another Federal attack. Then Hill's corps, now under Early because of Hill's illness, formed on Ewell's right, and Hancock came into line on Warren's right.

That night Grant ordered his cavalry, under Gen. Philip Sheridan, to make a raid around Lee's army to disrupt his communications with Richmond, and then to proceed south to reprovision his force from Butler's army south of the James River. Grant believed Lee would be forced to send Stuart's cavalry after Sheridan, and this in effect would protect the Union supply trains from Confederate cavalry raids. Lee did send Stuart after Sheridan, and in a later engagement of the two cavalry forces at Yellow Tavern, on the outskirts of Richmond, Stuart was killed.

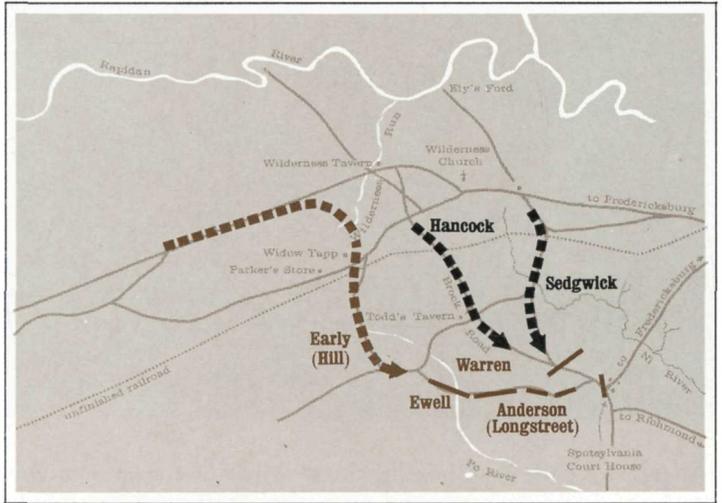
The next day, May 9, Grant, misled by reports that Lee was withdrawing from the Federal right, ordered Hancock across the Po River to take Lee in flank and rear. Before Hancock could make contact, however, the mistake was realized, and he was recalled. In recrossing the river he was attacked by Early who had marched from the Confederate right to block his advance. Hancock extricated himself from the dangerous position and went into line again on the left of the VI Corps, now under Gen. Horatio Wright. Sedgwick had been killed by a Confederate sharpshooter. Burnside held the left of the Union army, next to Hancock. Then came Wright and Warren holding the right flank.

Lee had Anderson on his left opposite Warren and Wright. Ewell was in front of Hancock, and Early on the right facing Burnside. All were strongly entrenched. There was one weak spot in the line, however. Ewell's entrenchments jutted out in a U-shaped salient beyond the rest of the lines. It was nearly a mile deep and half a mile wide. The "Mule Shoe," as the Confederates called it, made an inviting target.

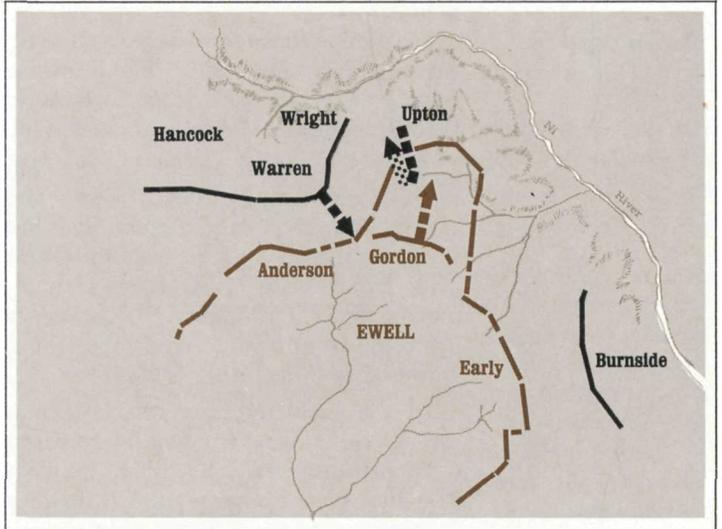
On May 10 Col. Emory Upton, of Wright's corps, attacked the west side of the salient with 12 picked regiments. He ordered the assault made with four lines of three regiments each. When the first line reached the salient, they planned to fan out left and right to take the Confederate troops in flank, while the remaining regiments went straight ahead to stop any reinforcements that might be sent up. After some brief, but desperate, hand-to-hand fighting, the attack succeeded, but when the expected support from Gen. Gershom Mott's division of Hancock's corps failed to appear, the Federals were forced to withdraw.

Upton's plan had worked, however, and Grant now decided to use the same tactics on a larger scale. Hancock was ordered to break the salient at its weakest point, the apex, supported by Burnside and Wright attacking the east and west sides. Warren would keep pressure on Anderson in his front, at the same time

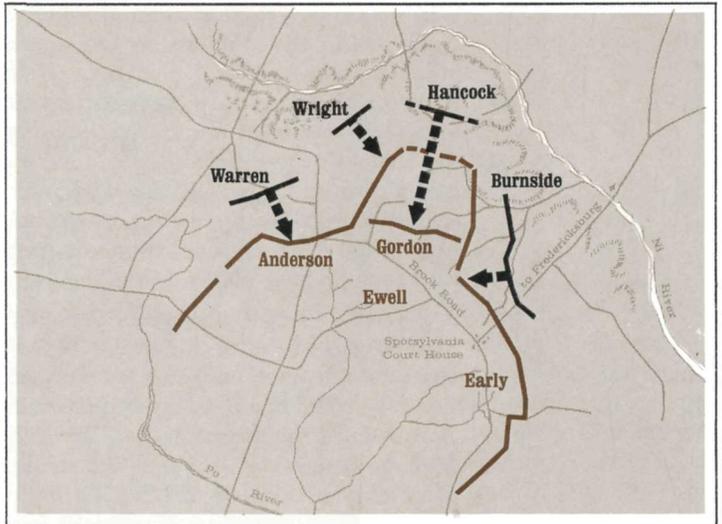
From the Wilderness to Spotsylvania



Upton assails the Salient, May 10, 1864



The struggle for the Bloody Angle, May 12, 1864





holding himself ready to support the other corps if needed. Again, as in the Wilderness, the whole army was committed to action.

In the predawn darkness of May 12, rain set in, wrapping the area in a sullen mist. The drops ticked off the leaves monotonously as Hancock's men formed for the attack, stumbling through the dark, the rain, and the mud.

Their noisy approach alerted the Confederate pickets that this would be no small attack. Ewell knew that the apex of the salient was his weakest point and had placed 22 guns there. But Lee, misled by a report that Grant was moving around his right flank again, ordered the guns to the rear to be ready to move quickly if necessary. Now they were frantically galloping up to the front again, arriving just in time for 20 of them to be captured without firing a shot.

In the early morning rain, the massed Federal column hit the apex of the salient and broke through, capturing over 3,000 Confederates, while Burnside and Wright assaulted the sides. The blue-clad troops poured through the gap. But, instead of fanning out to the left and right to widen the breach and enable Burnside and Wright to come through, they went straight ahead. Again, as in the Wilderness, Lee appeared on the field to rally his men in this critical moment. If the assault succeeded, the Army of Northern Virginia might be cut in two. But the timely arrival of reserves from Early's corps stopped the advance, and the Federals were driven back to the captured trenches. The heavy fighting raged all day and into the night as Lee vainly sought to recover the position. Although he failed in this attempt, the Confederates did hold until Lee could build new works at the base of the Mule Shoe to straighten his line.

A few hundred yards west of the apex the Confederate trenches made a slight bend to the south. Here the men of Wright's corps came face to face with Ewell's veterans in brutal hand-to-hand fighting. Clubbed muskets and bayonets were used freely, as the rain came down in sheets and the trenches ran red with blood. In some places the wounded and dying of both sides were trampled into the mud in the frantic fighting. "The flags of both armies waved at the same moment over the same breastworks,"



In the Forbes drawing at left, soldiers of Hancock's II Corps clear a field of fire along the Brock Road on May 10, 1864, a position they held only with hard fighting and heavy losses. Two days later his Union infantry massed for the dawn attack on Lee's salient (above). The fighting there was some of the toughest of the entire war. At one point, wrote Hancock, the two battlelines were so close that the Confederate flags stood on one side of the intrenchments while ours stood on the other, only separated by the parapet, the two lines firing into each other's faces.' The Confederate below lies at the foot of a barricade he had defended during Ewell's attack on the Union right on May 19.

one soldier noted, "while beneath them Federal and Confederate endeavored to drive home the bayonet through the interstices of the logs. The fire was so intense, that in one instance an oak tree, nearly two feet in diameter, was cut through by bullets. . . ." Since that day this area has been known as the "Bloody Angle."

During the night Lee's men withdrew to their new line at the base of the salient. Then a tragic silence settled over the field. In the dark woods, surgeons were busy amputating by the eerie glow of lanterns. The very air was sick and troubled. The night was deep with grief.

A comparative lull settled over the area for the next several days as Grant continued to maneuver his left farther eastward and southward. On May 18 Hancock made a last attempt to break Ewell's new line, but this time the attack was blasted by 30 massed cannon and beaten back before it even reached the Confederate position. The next day Ewell tried to find a weak spot on the Federal right flank but was quickly repulsed. The battle of Spotsylvania Court House was over. Union losses in killed, wounded, and missing were 17,555; Confederate losses are unknown.



ANOTHER MARCH

As in the Wilderness, there had been no victory and no defeat, only mud, blood, and death. But one fact was becoming clear: Grant would not turn back under any circumstances. Despite his heavier losses, he was slowly but methodically destroying Lee's ability to wage offensive war. Death, disease, and desertion were slowly dissolving the proud Army of Northern Virginia.

So, 2 days later, the armies marched away from the fields of Spotsylvania. Yet for the men of Lee and Grant, now grappling southward in a twilight struggle, even more glory and agony lay ahead. Another year's fighting at Cold Harbor, Richmond, and Petersburg would follow before peace drifted in with the spring-tide of 1865 at a dusty village called Appomattox Court house.



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The National Park System, of which this park is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of the people.

A superintendent, whose address is Box 679, Fredericksburg, Va., 22401, is in immediate charge of the park.

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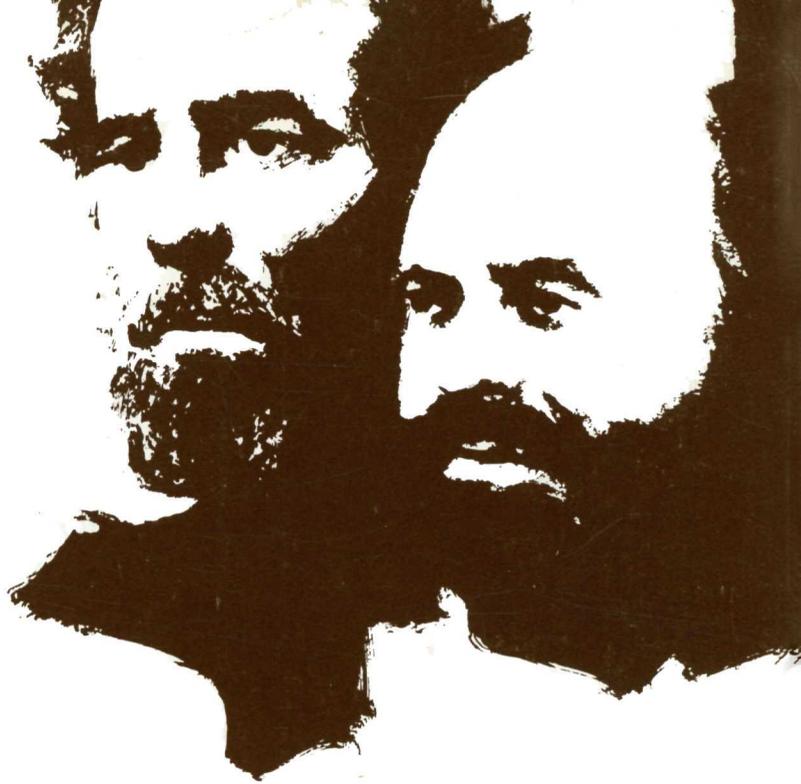
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OF
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MURDERER

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