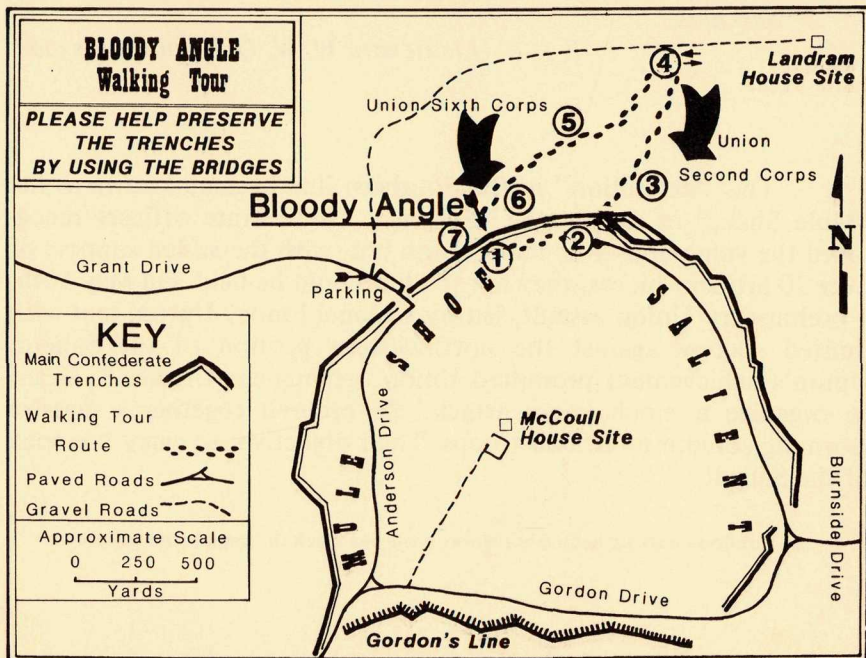


# BLOODY ANGLE



The Battle of Spotsylvania, fought May 8-21, 1864, included some of the most desperate hand-to-hand fighting of the Civil War. On May 12th, Union and Confederate soldiers struggled over this ground for more than 20 hours, through pouring rain, producing unparalleled examples of both courage and carnage. A 30-minute walk, covering not quite a mile, traces several important points on this memorable field. Use the metal map at Stop 1 to help orient yourself and to locate troop positions prior to the May 12th battle.

1. In 1864, this area appeared much the way it looks today; cleared fields and open farmland separated the opposing lines. Late on May 8th, Confederate General Edward "Allegheny" Johnson's division, about 3,000 men, built this outer line of entrenchments. These low earthen mounds are all that remain of the original works. During the battle, however, these trenches stood shoulder high, were reinforced with logs, and had walls running straight back from the main line about every 20 feet.

*The ground was examined, and General Johnson found we were on the brow of a ridge, which turned somewhat shortly to the right. The campfires in our front seemed to us to be considerably below the plane of our position...It was now quite late in the night, and General Johnson deflected his line and followed the ridge, so far as it could be distinguished in darkness.*

—Lieutenant W. W. Old, Johnson's aide

This "deflection" in the Southern line became known as the "Mule Shoe," or simply the "Salient." Confederate officers recognized the vulnerability of the position but, with the added support of over 20 artillery pieces, they felt the line could be held. On May 10th, a preliminary Union assault, led by Colonel Emory Upton, met with limited success against the northwestern portion of the Salient. Upton's achievement prompted Union commander Ulysses S. Grant to organize a much larger attack. He ordered together a massive storming column of 20,000 troops. Their objective: to carry the apex of the Salient.

Continue walking behind the works until you reach the large battle painting.

2. Peering through the morning mist in the predawn darkness of May 12th, the Confederates caught their first glimpse of the Union attack.

*Click, click sounded along our ranks as each man cocked his musket and every eye was strained to discover in the dim light of early dawn, the first appearance of the Yankee line as it emerged from the woods. Some moments passed before we could see a single Yankee, when suddenly the enemy poured out of the woods on our right; as far as the eye could see the enemy was seen, covering the whole field...*

—Isaac Seymour, Confederate Staff Officer

With an hurrah, the blue masses swept forward, first striking here at the "East Angle." They quickly captured General Johnson and over 2,500 of his men, thanks in part to the absence of Confederate artillery which had been ordered away the previous evening.

*The storm had burst upon us. I could see General Johnson with his cane striking at the enemy as they leaped over the works, and a sputtering fire swept up and down our line, many guns being damp. I found myself...in the midst of foes, who were rushing around me, with confusion and a general melee in full blast.*

—Major Robert Hunter, Confederate Staff Officer

From here, cross the trenches at the bridge and follow the mowed path.

3. Union General Winfield S. Hancock's Second Corps attacked across the open ground, past where you are standing, and against the works at Stop 2.

*I remember the thin picket line of the enemy, with their bewildered look. There was a little patter of bullets, and I saw a few of our men on the ground; one discharge of artillery...and we were up on the works with our hands full of guns, prisoners and colors.*

—General Francis Barlow, USA

4. Northern columns formed along the tree line in front of you. Union soldiers built the trenches running parallel to the dirt road after the morning attack.

Although one of the largest frontal assaults of the war, the attack began inauspiciously because commanding officers were not certain how to reach the Confederate works. After much initial confusion, General Barlow, overcome by the "absurdity of the situation," exclaimed to his guide: "For Heaven's sake, at least face us in the right direction, so we shall not march away from the enemy and have to go around the world and come up in their rear!"

Follow the gravel road to your right for about 500 yards to the Landram House site, which served as headquarters for General Hancock and as a field hospital. If you do not wish to see this site, continue along the mowed path.

5. From this point you have a panoramic view of the trenches which were so bitterly contested. The shallow draw to your front served to shield the Federals, and funnel them toward the hottest part of the fight.

*They received a tremendous fire as they came up out of the ravine...No troops could stand such a fire and they were driven back, leaving the ground strewn with their dead and wounded. Troops cannot live over that slope.*

—Colonel J. B. Parsons, 10th Massachusetts

6. During the savage fighting for the Bloody Angle, these small ridges and swales provided some measure of protection from the steady storm of lead. Those who still survived now faced hours of harrowing combat at point blank range in a pouring rain.

*The dead and wounded were torn to pieces by the canister as it swept the ground where they had fallen. The mud was half-way to our knees...Our losses were frightful. What remained of many different regiments that had come up to our support had concentrated at this point, and had planted their tattered colors upon a slight rise of ground where they staid during the latter part of the day.*

—Private G. N. Galloway, 95th Pennsylvania

Conclude your tour where you began—at the Bloody Angle.

7. Here, throughout the afternoon and well into the night, Yankee and Rebel fought each other with relentless determination. Nearby, a 22-inch oak, whittled in two by the incessant musket and artillery fire, gave testimony to the tenacity of both sides.

*Nothing but the piled up logs of breastworks separated the combatants. Our men would reach over the logs and fire into the faces of the enemy, would stab over with their bayonets; many were shot and stabbed through crevices and holes between the logs; men mounted the works and with muskets rapidly handed them kept up a continuous fire until they were shot down, when others would take their places.*

—General L. A. Grant, USA

The outnumbered Confederates eventually fell back to a new line, and the battle of May 12th ended. But the fight for the Bloody Angle stood out in sharp contrast from other battles. Its terrible slaughter seemed to signal a shift in each side's perception of this war. Never again would Lee have the strength to lead his men north; now, he fought to survive. Grant, too, left here with a clearer, albeit brutal, image of the future. No matter what the cost, he would fight Lee's army until he destroyed it.