

THE
CAMP
FIRE
DANCE

battlefield self guided tour





THE SACK OF FREDERICKSBURG

From the days of the first settlement of Virginia, the area at the falls of the Rappahannock River attracted attention. By 1727, shipping and commerce and farming in the vicinity had attracted enough settlers to warrant the incorporation of the town of Fredericksburg. For the next century and a quarter Fredericksburg enjoyed reasonable growth and pleasant living. The town became one of the centers of culture and intellect in Virginia.

Then in 1861 America was forever changed by a dreadful war, and Fredericksburg suffered as much from the violent upheaval as any locality in the land. Fredericksburg lay precisely halfway between the opposing capitals, and across the main connecting routes. This dangerous location put the old town in the very midst of the battle lines. Four times the mighty armies of the warring states collided in immense and bloody battles in and around Fredericksburg. The town was shelled and looted, burned and ravaged, torn apart - - until the place and its people would never be the same. The melancholy story of America at war with itself is one of the great themes of our national history. Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park preserves and interprets the scenes of the four major battles around Fredericksburg. This tour guide will help you visit and understand the battlefield of Fredericksburg.

YOUR TOUR

The Battle of Fredericksburg was fought over many square miles of territory. Numerous important sites are outside the boundaries of the National Military Park. This tour guide directs you to four key sites in the park and explains the historic events associated with each location. A number of other sites are shown on the map and briefly identified, to enable especially interested visitors to include them in the tour.

THE BATTLE OF FREDERICKSBURG

On December 11–13, 1862, a large Northern army was soundly beaten in a pitched battle in and around Fredericksburg by the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. The veteran Northern army, commanded by Ambrose E. Burnside, came to the hills across the river from Fredericksburg on November 20, with a strength of 110,000 men. It was Burnside's purpose to swiftly occupy the town and push on toward Richmond. Robert E. Lee's Southern army was only 75,000 strong, but it was well led and it enjoyed the protection of an almost impregnable fortified ridge west of the town.

Burnside attempted to cross the river into Fredericksburg on boat bridges on the morning of December 11. General William Barksdale's Mississippi brigade successfully resisted the Federal bridge builders until late in the afternoon. When Burnside could not drive off the Mississippians with soldiers or with artillery, he ordered his cannons to fire on the city itself. In short order, tons of explosive shells rained on the streets and houses of Fredericksburg. The city was eventually taken by an amphibious assault - - one of the first in the nation's history. The next day was spent by Burnside in preparing to storm the Confederate-held hills west of the city, and by Lee in calling up his outlying troops to help defend those same hills.

The morning of December 13 was heavily shrouded by fog. When the fog lifted, the Northern army began a series of frontal assaults. The rattling musketry and roaring artillery soon filled the skies with acrid gunsmoke. A temporary success for the Federals at the southern end of the battlefield was quickly turned into a repulse. Just west of the town, the blue-clad attackers hurled themselves up the slope toward the formidable Confederate lines and were relentlessly shot down. Time and again futile assaults moved out of the town and gallantly braved the storm unleashed upon them. It became apparent to the soldiers that they could never succeed in crossing the fire-swept plain, but the orders kept coming and the men kept marching up the deadly slope. Finally, sometime after dusk, the Battle of Fredericksburg ended. Two nights later Ambrose Burnside recrossed the river under cover of a heavy storm. The first Federal attempt at getting past Fredericksburg had failed, and Burnside's army had suffered one of the most thorough one-sided defeats in American military history.

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FREDERICKSBURG VISITOR CENTER. This is the place to begin your tour. The Visitor Center features a fourteen minute slide program and several rooms with exhibits. Numerous publications which will help you understand the whole Fredericksburg story are for sale. There is no fee charged at this building, or for any of the other facilities and programs in the park.

MARYE'S HEIGHTS AND NATIONAL CEMETERY. This famous ridge received its name from a French Huguenot family named Marye (pronounced like the girl's name "Marie"). The Maryes settled in Fredericksburg and built the impressive mansion, Brompton, which still stands on the northern tip of the Heights. On December 13, 1862, the hill was crowned with rows of Confederate cannon which poured destruction into the Federal lines advancing west from the town.

At the time of the Civil War the town was much smaller than it now is, and a great bare plain stretched from the base of these heights to beyond the point where the Northern troops formed for their assaults near the edge of town. Although the scene has changed almost beyond recognition, you may visualize the battle with the aid of the large painting displayed on the edge of the hill within the National Cemetery. A recorded message next to the painting further explains the dramatic story.

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After the war was over, a grateful government established a National Cemetery for the Union dead. Nearly 16,000 Northern soldiers, most of them unknown, are bur-

ied here. Among them are many of those who unsuccessfully tried to capture the ridge by force in 1862. The dead are largely the casualties of the four great battles around Fredericksburg, together with a few interments from later wars. By an ironic coincidence, the Confederate Cemetery is located about a mile to the east, in the midst of the Federal positions on the plain.

SUNKEN ROAD AND STONE WALL. Fringing the base of Marye's Heights, and to your left as you descend from the cemetery, lies the heart of the position of the Confederate infantry. For about 600 yards a Sunken Road ran along the fringe of the Heights, with a Stone Wall on the town side, and in places on the hill side as well. The road had developed as a practical aid to transportation across the Virginia countryside; quite by accident it was also an ideal military position. During the repeated Federal attacks, the road was jammed with Confederate soldiers rapidly loading their guns under the protection of the wall and firing them over the wall. For hours they kept at it, while their attackers were shot down in heaps, with almost no chance to capture the road or the hill from the Confederates.

Walk down the road, through the lines which were held by the Confederates. There are numerous signs and markers. The Ennis House, which stood here during the battle, is preserved today, with a taped message to tell its story. At the far end of the road a section of the original stone wall still stands. In that area you can see a painting depicting the fighting and a large monument to

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Climb the short trail to the top of Lee Hill. From this commanding overlook, Robert E. Lee and his subordinate generals directed the victorious Confederate defense. Stonewall Jackson, James Longstreet and other Southern leaders reported here and sometimes watched the fighting with their chief. When the swirling fog lifted just before the battle, revealing a dazzling array of Federal troops as far as the eye could reach, Lee was moved to say: "It is well that war is so terrible - - we should grow too fond of it".

Lee Hill also served as an artillery position. Confederate guns here helped repulse the Northern attacks, and occasionally duelled with the Federal artillery. During one of the exchanges an incoming shell buried itself at General Lee's feet, but failed to explode. The guns on Lee Hill today are similar to those that were fired from this spot more than a century ago.

Continue down Lee Drive for just over 4 miles. Along the way you will pass several places where you may wish to stop and read signs or look at battle maps.

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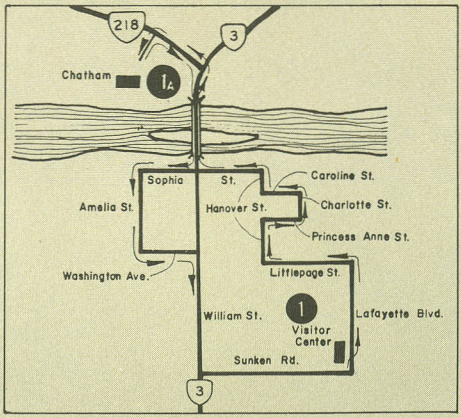
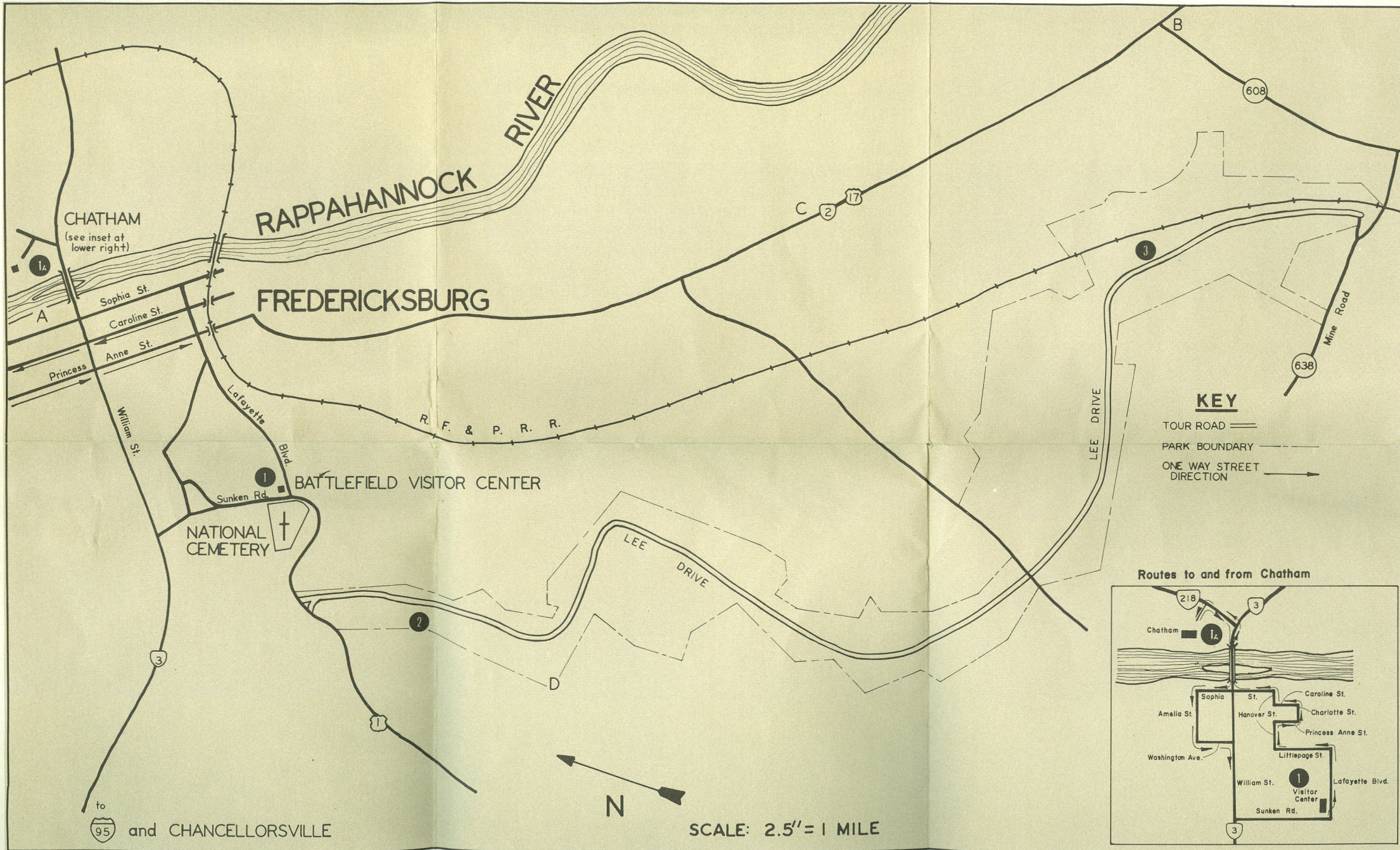
A FEDERAL BREAKTHROUGH. While a part of the Union army was suffering repeated bloody repulses in front of Fredericksburg on the 13th, one division of the same army managed a limited and temporary success in this location. During the morning of that day, long

attacking in the area of the monument.

The Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad still runs across the battlefield just in front of Prospect Hill. In 1862 the track had been torn up by the warring armies, but the embankment played a key part in the battle. It served as a ready-made earthwork for Southern skirmishers.

Just around the corner to your right, the railroad crossed a country road. The crossing was named for one of the early residents of the vicinity, Captain Hamilton. Hamilton's Crossing anchored the end of the main Confederate line, although cavalry and artillery and skirmishers were spread across the swampy lowlands from here to the river. The Crossing also marks the end of Lee Drive and of your tour of Fredericksburg battlefield.

Retrace your route up Lee Drive to Lafayette Boulevard. From that intersection you can turn left for 4 miles to reach Interstate 95, or turn right to return to Fredericksburg. We hope you will continue your visit to the National Military Park by driving to the Chancellorsville battlefield, the scene of the next Federal attempt to get past Fredericksburg. The place to start a visit to Chancellorsville is at the Visitor Center, located on Route 3 about 7 miles beyond the western edge of Fredericksburg. You can reach Route 3 by turning left off Lafayette onto Littlepage Street, and then left onto William Street (Route 3).



a particularly memorable Confederate soldier. The Marye mansion, "Brompton", is not open to the public, but it can be seen on the top of the ridge above the original stone wall.

Return to your car and exit to the front of the Visitor Center. Turn left and proceed three blocks to Littlepage Street (see map inset). Follow the Chatham Manor signs through Fredericksburg and across the bridge over the Rappahannock River. Turn left at the first traffic signal beyond the bridge and then turn left again onto Chatham Lane. Proceed two blocks to the Chatham parking lot.

1A Chatham, an 18th century Georgian mansion, played a prominent role during the Civil War as a headquarters, hospital and artillery and communications center. It is the only extant building known to have been visited by both George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. A folder available near the painting by the parking lot explains more about Chatham's history and three rooms of the house are open to the public daily.

Return to your vehicle and follow the signs to the exit. Note: buses, motor homes, and cars pulling large trailers should exit down Chatham Lane and retrace their route to the bridge over the Rappahannock River. Recross the bridge and turn right onto Sophia Street (see map inset). Follow the signs to the Fredericksburg Battlefield Visitor Center. When you reach Sunken Road and Stone Wall you may wish to stop again at the Visitor Center. To continue the tour however, proceed to Lafayette Blvd. and bear to your right. Proceed .5 miles to Lee Drive and turn left. Park in the pullout on your right a few hundred feet down the Drive.

lines of Northern infantry were deployed and started to the attack. Their commander was General George G. Meade, still only a subordinate officer, but the man destined to command the whole Federal army at Gettysburg a few months later. Several times they were beaten back by artillery, but finally the soldiers reached the Confederate lines and discovered a large gap that was undefended. They rushed through the gap and penetrated to this spot. Here in the thick woods, a South Carolina brigade under General Maxcy Gregg was in reserve, oblivious to the gap in front of them. When the storm suddenly broke on the resting men, they were overrun and Gregg was mortally wounded. The ample Confederate reinforcements near at hand quickly drove out the attackers and chased them back out of the woods and across the plain.

PROSPECT HILL. Just a few hundred feet further down the Drive is the hill on which the Confederate artillery strength was located. Here some 14 guns kept up a steady fire on the attackers, doing severe damage to each assaulting force. The commander of these guns was Colonel Reuben Lindsay Walker, a towering figure reported to be "the handsomest man in the Confederate Army". Scattered across the hilltop you can see the remains of the numerous fortifications which protected his guns.

You can glimpse through the trees to your left beyond the railroad, and see a large stone pyramid erected about 30 years after the battle to mark the general area of the Federal breakthrough. It is easy to imagine the heavy impact that cannon on this hill would make on soldiers

OTHER BATTLEFIELD SITES—

A—PONTOON CROSSING. This is one of three locations where the Union army crossed the Rappahannock River just before the battle, by means of boat bridges called "pontoons". Heavy Confederate resistance was finally pushed back by a unique amphibious assault. Since the crossing site is where the battle really started, a visit there will help you understand the circumstances leading up to the fighting on December 13. You can reach the site through the lovely old town, as shown on the map.

B—PELHAM MARKER. Here, a youthful Southern cannoneer fought a lonely delaying action against heavy odds, while both armies looked on from surrounding hills. General Lee's report called him "the gallant Pelham".

C—THE FEDERAL LINE. The Bowling Green Road (also called the Richmond Stage Road) was the point from which the several Federal assaults toward Prospect Hill were begun. There is no park land here, but from the road - - now Virginia Route 2 and U. S. 17 - - you can look across the fields toward the Confederate ridges.

D—HOWISON HILL. Just below Lee Hill is another Confederate artillery position. Here, as on Lee Hill, there was a gigantic 30-pounder Parrott - - a siege gun brought from Richmond.

Caution:

**Driving tours require turning
on and off of heavily traveled
highways. Please be careful.**

**National Park Service
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

