

Battle of frediericksburg analysis

War



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The Battle of Fredericksburg David P. Wrihten, CPT, MS Class 09-002 Small Group 6, MAJ Sims 03 April 2009 Abstract In early December 1862, the Union Army of the Potomac had massed on the northern bank of the Rappahannock River as it was in position to strike the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia. The Union also position themselves to cut off the Confederate Army's main supply route for the import and export of goods in the south. The Confederate Army of Northern Virginia confronted the Union Army's attempted strike on the south side of the Rappahannock by occupying the high ground overlooking the riverside town of Fredericksburg.

Caught between the two opposing armies, Fredericksburg was destined to the battleground for a bloody prelude of major battles between the Union and Confederate armies in the open fields of the south. The Battle of Fredericksburg Introduction The Battle of Fredericksburg occurred on 11 December 1862 on the banks of the Rappahannock River near the small town of Fredericksburg, Virginia. Pitting three divisions of the Union Forces commanded by MG Edwin V. Sumner, MG Joseph Hooker, and MG William B.

Franklin, approximately 120, 000 Soldiers against the two Confederate Forces Corps of Northern Virginia commanded by LTG James Longstreet and LTG Thomas L. Jackson approximately 90, 000 Soldiers. This battle emphasized the effective use of Weather, Maneuver, ObservationFields of Fire, Cover, and concealment, Obstacles, Key Terrain, and Avenues of Approach. The use of the Battlefield Operating Systems was instrumental in the success of the mission. The primary source used to gather information was, Decisive Battles of theCivil War: the Battle of Fredericksburg by LT. COL.

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Joseph B. Mitchell Drama on the Rappahannock: the Fredericksburg Campaign by Edward J. Stackpole. Secondary sources used were The Battle of Fredericksburg a Special Edition of: Civil War Times by Edward J. Stackpole and Guide to the Battles of Chancellorsville and Fredericksburg by Jay Luvaas and Harold W. Nelson. Strategic Setting Fredericksburg, Virginia during the 1860s had developed into a family oriented community. This town happened to be the farthest point to navigate up the Rappahannock River. It was a very important site for trading for imported and exported goods.

However, the larger, newer sailing vessels had difficulties in navigating the Rappahannock, which greatly hinder the international trade with other less modern customers of trade. This allowed members of Fredericksburg to live a more normal or less congested big city lifestyle. Militarily, this river is important for resupplying Soldiers critical supplies in order to fight effectively. The town of Fredericksburg changed hands many times throughout the war. Being located so closely to Richmond and Washington, it can greatly assist or resist in a potential attack on Richmond or Washington.

In addition, this town could act as a staging area prior to launching an attack on the nation's capital. Furthermore, four major battles fought within a seventeen-mile radius of Fredericksburg, Virginia. The major encounter during the Battle of Fredericksburg took place in Virginia. MG Ambrose Burnside's Federal Army of the Potomac tried to countermine Gen Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and capture Richmond. However, this would be a difficult task, since the Confederates were deeply entrenched into a defensive position west of town.

Tactical Situation 1. Mission: Gen Burnside's was to cross the Rappahannock River and seize the heights behind Fredericksburg, Virginia before Gen Lee's army arrived. After seizing the town of Fredericksburg, the Army of the Potomac would then advance south to Richmond. In order to cross the Rappahannock Burnside had to build multiple bridges; for this purpose, support elements sent pontoon bridge equipment to Fredericksburg. The Union Forces arrived to the northern banks of the Rappahannock; there were no Confederate Forces in sight. It would seem as if the advantage would be on the side of the Union Forces. 2. Equipment: Gen Hunt deployed riflemen to provide covering fire for the engineers at each end of the three construction points. He also possessed 147 artillery pieces to serve as the main deterrent to the Confederate Forces opposing the Union effort and accommodate a moderate logistics train. His ammo and other classes of supply were plentiful but the distance would slowly cause these resources to erode. The Confederates had sufficient food and water, but other classes of supply were scarce, particularly their ammo.

Many carried hunting rifles and shotguns of varying caliber. The Union Forces had a clear advantage. 3. Terrain: The city and its environs along the Rappahannock River in north-central Virginia were significant obstacles to Union advances on Richmond, the Confederate capital. The battlefield consists of a series of flood plains and river terraces with gentle slopes paralleled by north-south ridges that provide structural boundaries on either side, all comprised of Tertiary and Quaternary Coastal Plain sediments. The Confederates, led by Gen Robert E.

Lee, effectively used natural terrain features to impede attacks made by the Union army. Tactical benefits also accrued by the Confederates from manufactured obstacles on the battlefield, e. g. , stone walls and fences. After crossing the Rappahannock River, the Union Army, had to attack uphill with little cover in their unsuccessful attempts to dislodge the Confederates. This gave the Confederate Forces the advantage against the Union strike. 4. Troops: Strategically the Union Forces had the advantage with the number of troops under Gen Burnside's command at nearly 120, 000.

The Confederate Forces had the advantage as having set up their defensive positions and direct access through their supply routes to their headquarters in Richmond, Virginia. The Confederate Forces did lack military training in the ranks as well as standard issue items that would help in the success of their campaign. The Union Forces had a clear advantage as far as personnel, but Confederate Forces had an advantage for their ability to resupply the units. 5. Time: This historic Fredericksburg Campaign planned and executed over a two-month period in November - December of 1862.

This was during an extremely cold and harsh winter season. It reduced both the Union and Confederate forces from quiet movements, clear line of sight during pre-dawn hours (fog on the river), heavy snowfall, which restricted movements, thick terrain made of oak, maple, cedar, and highly thick entangled brush cause limited mobility, counter mobility and reduced eyes on the enemy. Therefore, even though the weather did not favor either side, it did not kept tactical goals of either side from being established.

The Battle After, the Battle of Bull Run both armies devoted the second half of 1861 and part of 1862 to make serious adjustments for more important battles to come. Procurement of supplies, training, recruiting new soldiers, and other military activities was the primary training mission of both armies. Neither force was in any particular hurry to conduct an offensive operation. An impatient President waited in the White House to see how his popular commanding officer will retrain and utilize his powerful forces.

Gen McClellan moved his forces in March 1862, via water, to the Virginia Peninsula between the York and James Rivers. The intent of this move was to take Richmond, Virginia. However, Johnston countered this plan by moving his Confederate soldiers overland in the same direction. Therefore, Gen McClellan staged his troops at Fort Monroe. At the same time, Stonewall Jackson began his Shenandoah Valley Campaign, wounded in battle General Johnston was succeeded by Robert E. Lee. On Oct. 6, the President instructed Gen McClellan to "cross the Potomac and give battle to the enemy, or drive him South.

Your army must now move," " he said, " while the roads are good. " Twenty-four days spent in correspondence before Gen McClellan obeyed the order of the president. Gen McClellan complained of a lack of men and supplies to make it prudent to move forward. At length, October had nearly passed by and Gen Lee's army thoroughly rested and reorganized, and communications with Richmond re-established, the Army of the Potomac began to cross the river (Oct. 26), 100, 000 strong. The Nationals led down the east side of the Blue

Ridge, but failed to strike the retreating Confederates over the mountain in flank or to get ahead of them; and Gen Lee pushed Gen Longstreet's troops over the Blue Ridge to Culpeper Courthouse, between the Army of the Potomac and Richmond, ready to dispute the advance of the Nationals. Quick and energetic movements were now necessary to sever and defeat, in detail, Gen Lee's army. (See Map 1) On Nov. 75, the President relieved Gen McClellan of command, and Gen Burnside took command of the Corps. A sense of responsibility made the latter commander exceedingly cautious.

Before he moved, he endeavored to get his 120,000 men well in hand. Gen Burnside determined Aquia Creek Landing as his resupply hub and main base for his assault. His overall decision was to, and he moved the army towards Fredericksburg down the Fredericksburg Route towards Fredericksburg. This allowed his forces to cover Washington and assure better protection of his lines of resupply and communication. On Nov. 150 Gen. Sumner led the movement from Warrenton down the left bank of the Rappahannock and covered almost 40 miles in two and one-half days to Falmouth.

By November 21, Gen Longstreet's Corps had arrived near Fredericksburg, and Gen Jackson's (which had been downstream along the Rappahannock to prevent crossings there) was following rapidly. Gen Lee at first anticipated that he would fight Gen Burnside northwest of Fredericksburg and that it might be necessary to drop back behind the North Anna River. However, when he saw how slowly Gen Burnside was moving, he directed all of his army toward Fredericksburg. The first pontoon bridges arrived at Falmouth

on November 25, much too late to enable the Army of the Potomac to cross the river without opposition.

Gen Burnside still had an opportunity, however, because he was facing only half of Gen Lee's army, not yet dug in, and if he acted quickly, he might be able to attack Longstreet and defeat him before Jackson arrived. Once again, he squandered his opportunity. The bridges arrived at the end of the month, and by this time, Gen Jackson was present and Gen Longstreet was preparing strong defenses. Gen Burnside originally planned to use Gen McClellan's original plan of crossing his army east of Fredericksburg; 10 miles (16 km) downstream at Skinker's Neck, but Early's division arrived there and blocked him.

Therefore, So he Gen Burnside decided to cross directly at Fredericksburg. On December 9, he wrote to Halleck, " I think now the enemy will be more surprised by a crossing immediately in our front than any other part of the river. ... I'm convinced that a large force of the enemy is now concentrated at Port Royal, its left resting on Fredericksburg, which we hope to turn. " In addition to, his numerical advantage in troop strength, Gen Burnside also had the advantage of knowing his army could not be attacked effectively.

On the other side of the Rappahannock, 220 artillery pieces had been located on the ridge known as Stafford Heights to prevent Gen Lee's army from mounting any major counterattacks. (See Map 1) On the morning of December 11, Union Engineers began the construction of six pontoon bridges in preparation for the passage of Union Forces across the Rappahannock River. Two placed north of the Town Center, a third on the

southern end of town, and three further south near the confluence of the Rappahannock and Deep Run.

During the assembly of the pontoon bridges, Union Engineers came under punishing fire from the Confederate Forces primarily from the sharpshooters of the Mississippi Brigade commanded by Gen Barksdale. Gen Burnside then ordered his Union artillery batteries then to shell the city. The artillery fire lasted for an hour in terrific bombardment in hopes to drive the Confederate sharpshooters out of their positions. The bombardment failed to dampen the spirits of Barksdale's sharpshooters, as soon as the artillery fire ceased the musketeers popped out of the holes and resumed firing.

Thus, the first attempt to cross the river was a failure due to the Confederates' fires on federal engineers constructing pontoon bridges on the river. Gen Burnside's staff immediately began mission analysis on another plan to cross the river. Gen Hunt suggested the only solution to cross the river are volunteers to cross by ferry rowing in pontoons to secure the opposite side of the river a lay suppressive fire on Confederate sharpshooters to cover the bridge layers.

Because of a lack in confidence on his part, Gen Burnside he was confident and swift in issuing was slow in issuing his tactical instructions, instructions; the Union Army of the Potomac may have caught the Confederates unready to defend their positions properly. In addition to the failure of the first attempt to cross, there was additionally, a decrease in morale of the Union Forces Army of the Potomac and their senior command leadership due to

the hesitation of Gen Burnside's decision their overall commander on not just one critical occasion but several occasions.

Other occasions of indecisiveness and lack of initiative in dealing with the blunder of getting the pontoons transferred from Washington also attributed to the decrease in morale of not only the leadership but also the soldiers. Furthermore, the inability of Burnside to consider the advice, from Gen Halleck, was trying to give on where to cross the river showed the lack of communication from the field commander to Washington Headquarters. The Chief Engineer of the Army ordered his engineers in the following format (Stackpole, p122): (These were the actual orders that were issued) Engineers will place two pontoon bridges to be constructed at the site of old pontoon bridge, one of them to have approaches for artillery. One pontoon bridge at site of old canal-boat bridge; approaches for artillery. Additionally, we will place two pontoon bridges just below mouth of Deep Run, a mile below Fredericksburg one to have artillery approach. Major Spaulding to throw three upper ones: Major Magruder to throw the next, and Lieutenant Cross the lowest one. Bridge equipage, now at White Oak Church, to move up and go into park near Phillip's house by dark.

At midnight trains to move down within 400 yards of river, and to move down and begin unloading a two in the morning. If enemy fire is kept down, bridges to be thrown as soon as are unloaded; if too hot, wait until artillery silences it" The battle opened south of the city at 8: 30 a. m. on December 13, when Maj. Gen. William Franklin ordered two of the divisions from the Left Grand Division to maneuver themselves through an unseen gap in Gen Jackson's defenses on the right and head towards Hamilton's Crossing. By 10

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a. m. , a thick fog began to lift, and the initially sluggish movements picked up speed.

Gen Meade's division of 4, 500 men formed the main attack, in direct support of Gen Meade's these movements the divisions of Gen Doubleday and Gen Gibbon. The Virginia Horse Artillery under Major John Pelham stalled the attack, and an artillery duel between Pelham and the Union artillery batteries lasted for approximately an hour. MAJ Pelham started his artillery attack with only two cannons—a 12-pounder Napoleon smoothbore and a rifled Blakely—but continued with only one after counter-battery fire disabled one of the cannons.

Gen Lee observed the action and commented about Pelham, age 24, " It is glorious to see such courage in one so young. " As Meade finally made traction, he ran into Brig. Gen. Maxcy Gregg's brigade, scattering it. Gen Gregg was shot and mortally wounded; he died two days later. To Gen Meade's right, Gen Gibbon's attack against the brigades of Brig. Gen. William Dorsey Pender and Edward L. Thomas made good progress, but Gen Meade and Gen Gibbon men became separated; by 1: 30 p. m. , a heavy Confederate counterattack pushed them back to the beachhead of the Rappahannock.

Because of the foggy conditions, Federal artillery could not provide much assistance because of the inability to discern between Union and Confederate Forces. Driven back and chased by the Confederate infantry, raised some concerns with Gen Burnside, his divisions may be trapped at the river. The Federal line strengthened with addition of Brig. Gen. Daniel E.

Sickles and Brig. Gen. David B. Birney divisions, and Stonewall Jackson's counterattack grounded to a halt. The focus of action moved north to Marye Heights. The initial assaults west of Fredericksburg began at 11 a. . as French's division two divisions from Gen Couch's Corps, Gen French's division and Gen Hancock's division, moved along the Plank Road, facing a steep-banked drainage ditch and a wide, open plain of 400 yards (370 m), dominated by Confederate infantry and artillery behind a sunken road and stone wall. Earlier, artilleryist Edward Porter Alexander, " A chicken could not live on that field when we open on it," had assured Gen Longstreet. The Union men attacking had to file d into columns over two small bridges across the drainage ditch, making them a massed target.

Attempts to shift the attack farther to the right failed because of swampy ground. As in the south, Union artillery was prevented by fog from effectively silencing the Confederate guns as from Stafford Heights Union guns were unable to reach the Confederate positions. Gen Burnside had anticipated this attack on the right would be merely supportive of his main effort on the left, but Franklin had stalled and resisted entreaties to continue, so Gen Burnside shifted his emphasis. After French's division was repulsed with heavy losses, Gen Burnside sent in the divisions of Gen Hancock and Gen Howard, which met a similar fate.

By this time, Gen Pickett's division and one of Gen Hood's brigades had marched north to reinforce Marye Heights. Gen Griffin's division renewed the attack at 3: 30 p. m. , followed by Gen Humphrey's division at 4 p. m. At dusk, Gen Getty's division assaulted from the east and was repulsed. Gen Burnside sent six Union Divisions in, virtually one brigade at a time, for <https://assignbuster.com/battle-of-frediericksburg-analysis/>

sixteen individual charges, all of which failed, costing them from 6,000 to 8,000 casualties. Watching the carnage from the center of his line, a position now known as Lee's Hill, Gen Lee quoted as saying, "It is well that war is so terrible, or we should grow too fond of it. The action on the heights also included the charge of the Irish Brigade, which lost 50% of its strength in the battle but advanced further up the heights than any other Union Brigade. Confederate losses at Marye Heights totaled around 1,200. The falling of darkness and the pleas of Gen Burnside's subordinates were enough to put an end to the attacks. Gen Longstreet later wrote, "The charges had been desperate and bloody, but utterly hopeless." Thousands of Union soldiers spent the cold December night on the fields leading to the Heights, unable to move or assist the wounded because of Confederate fire.

The armies remained in position throughout the day on December 14, when Gen Burnside briefly considered leading his old IX Corps in one final attack on Marye Heights, but with the suggestions of many of his officers, he reconsidered and abandoned his campaign sending his troops to northern bank of the Rappahannock River. That afternoon, Burnside asked Lee for a truce to attend to his wounded, which Lee graciously granted. The next day the Federal forces retreated across the river, and the campaign ended.

SIGNIFICANCE 1.

Short Term: The Battle at Fredericksburg clearly showed how disastrous the Union Army Tactics were; President Abraham Lincoln relieved Gen Burnside of command a month after this battle. 2. Long Term: This was a major victory for the Army of Northern Virginia and costly to the Army of the Potomac. Many believe that Gen Lee lost his best chances to destroy the Gen
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Burnside's forces at Fredericksburg. Overall, the loss broke the morale of the Army of the Potomac and showed a weakness in the indecisiveness and lack of imagination in part of Gen Burnside. ANALYSIS

Gen Burnside failed to achieve the tenant of Initiative and his overall objective of destroying the enemy forces securing the town of Fredericksburg because he violated the Principle of Security and the Battle Operating System of Intelligence. The bulk of his forces fought to cross the river and very few were concerned with providing suppressive fire for the unit crossing. Gen Lee's forces upon making contact with what he believed to be the enemies fleeing main force at Devil's Swamp, he committed himself to battle without pausing to use his cavalry to reconnoiter the country.

Gen Lee used his CCavalry Troops conducted rereconnaissancecon'd to the east and west of the Rappahannock marshy lowlandsRiver;, an action that gave him an extreme advantage into witnessing the movement of Gen Burnside's forceswhich might have permitted him to cross unmolested at a point up or downstream from the swamp. Thus, outflanking Culpepper and forcing him to withdraw without an opportunity to spring his cleverly crafted trap. The use of the terrain also gave Gen Lee a clear advantage as the Rappahannock River and extended entrenchments gave Gen Burnside's forces great difficulty.

For his part, Brigadier CulpepperGen Lee effectively adhered to the Principles of Maneuver, Mass, and Economy of Force. Through the Tenant of Synchronization, these factors combined to create the culminating Principle

of Surprise. Outnumbered and outgunned, he realized that he could not achieve his objective of ascertaining Morgan's Gen Burnside's force and denying it control of the rail and road junction, as well as Yearlingvilletown of Fredericksburg, by engaging in a conventional battle on anything approaching even terms he used unconventional tactics to achieve his goal.

He possessed a clear understanding of what he had to accomplish and how he had to do so. He Gen Lee employed Maneuver and Mass of critical combat power at the decisive time and place while making effective use of both the weak and strong points of the units he led. By marring Morgan in the swampsstalling Burnside's movement across the river, he placed his enemy in a position of disadvantage. He shifted the battle to one where he positioned his massed combat power into a fixed enemy whose only option was to sink and die discontinue its efforts of seizing the town of Fredericksburg and retreat to the north side of the Rappahannock River.

Culpepper Gen Lee exercised effective Synchronization and Economy of Force, deftly controlling the movements and fires of the disparate elements of his force in accordance with the elements of an intelligently conceived and workable plan of action in order to bring about the desired combat power at the decisive point. His employment of his cavalry, guerrillas, and militia reflected a thorough thought process of utilizing each element in a precisely orchestrated maneuver exact orchestration to achieve the desired effect of ousting the Army of the Potomac from the town of Fredericksburg back to the northern banks of the Rappahannock River. uring Morgan's troops into the killing field of overwhelming force. His exploitation of Union Forces weaknesses in decisive movement and execution of a sound plan

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display Gen Lee's his Seminole scouts' superior knowledge of critical terrain features while denying the enemy the opportunity to effectively reconnoiter the same ground gave the critical element of Surprise once the battle was opened in accordance with the time, place and circumstances of his own choosing. Stackpole, Edward J.

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