

THE SOCIAL DISPATCH



Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park

The battlegrounds at Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania were central to the American Civil War. No place more vividly reflects the war's tragic cost in all its forms. A town was bombarded and looted. Small farms and large plantations were ruined. Refugees by the thousands were forced into the countryside. More than 85,000 soldiers were wounded and 15,000 more died. Most of the dead are buried in graves marked with only numbers, their identities unknown.



158 years ago, the town of Fredericksburg became a battlefield. Unusual to begin with because the fighting took place in the winter when the armies normally would have settled down until the spring, this battle was the first time these soldiers experienced building bridges while under fire, fighting in the streets of town and ultimately, it was a lopsided victory for the Confederate Army, inspiring them to keep fighting.

Virtual Scavenger Hunt

With your parent/guardian, use the park website <https://www.nps.gov/frsp/learn/historyculture/fburghist.htm> and navigate through the different parts of the battle to find the answers to these questions about the Battle of Fredericksburg:

On November 7, 1862, who did Ambrose E. Burnside replace as the leader of the Army of the Potomac?

Nearly 3,000 US soldiers fell trying to attack which Confederate held position?

One end of the battle was known as Marye's Heights, what part of the battlefield was Confederate Stonewall Jackson on?

When did the Union army leave the battlefield, ending the Fredericksburg battle?





Library of Congress action sketch of a soldier checking a pass outside of Fredericksburg, VA.

December 11th, 1862

We were aroused before day by General Lee's 'Signal guns,' but not knowing their special significance, we did not hurry ourselves, until Martha, our chamber maid, came in and said in a rather mournful tone "Miss Jane the Yankees are coming, they have got two pontoons nearly across the river."

Before we were half dressed the heavy guns of the enemy began to pour their shot and shell upon our ill-fated town, and we hastily gathered our remaining garments, and rushed into our basement for safety. On the first landing I remembered Julian, my sick boy, and turned back to seek him. I met him with his youngest brother, half dressed with his clothes upon his arm, and I tried to help him, but I was trembling so violently that I believe I was more indebted to him for assistance than he was to me.

We sought the room often used for a kitchen, and Susan made us a good fire. We drew around it, with our hearts earnestly seeking the protection of Heaven. Our Pastor Mr. Lacy was still with us, and commenced in solemn but tender accents, repeating the 27th Psalm. As we all knew it, we heartily responded to each verse. As the words "Tho an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear" were upon our lips, we startled from our seats by the crashing of glass and splintering of timber close beside us, and the first impulse was to rush to a dark closet near the wood cellar, which occupying a central position, had no windows and presented two thick walls towards the firing.

Documenting Life During a Crisis

During wars, military officers and national leaders write out orders and reports about troop movements, the number of casualties (wounded, missing and killed), and the outcome of battles. But these sources don't tell us how people felt about the war or what it was like to live through a battle.

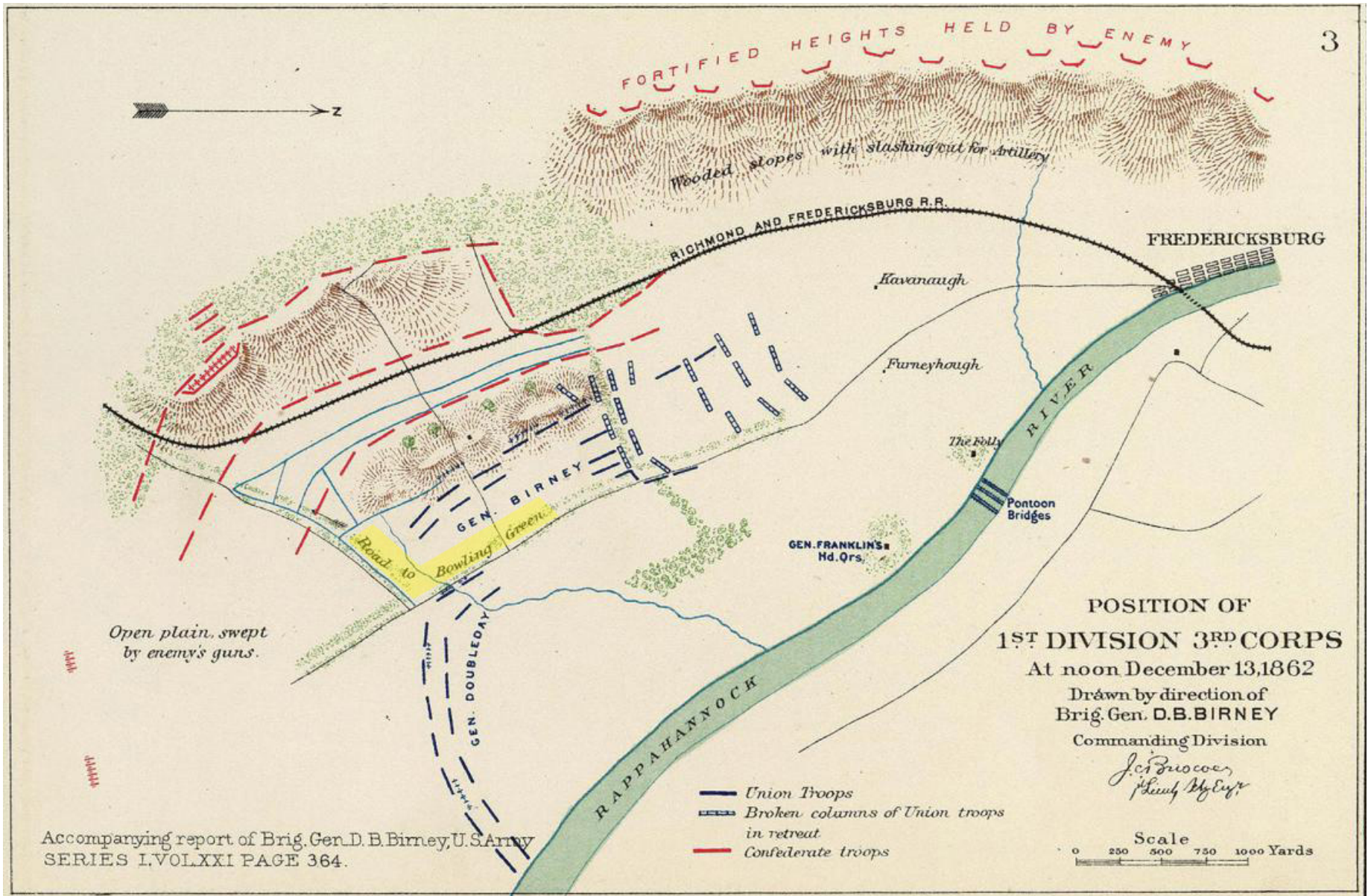
In order gain a better understanding of what it was really like to live through battles, historians look to civilians and how they wrote about the events. Diaries and personal letters offer people today a window into what it was like to experience a battle first-hand.

While we aren't experiencing a war, the global pandemic we are living through has upended our lives and a lot is different than it was a year ago. Write about what your day-to-day life is like right now. Explain what has changed and how you feel about those changes. Give specific examples. Is there anything that you hope does not go back to the way it was before the pandemic? Explain why. Write about what is going on in the news and how it has affected you. Write about what your dreams are or what you hope will happen in the future. Save what you write and read it a year from now. Then write about how things have changed. Add drawings and doodles to your writing.

The journal entries on this page are from Jane Howison Beale, a mother who lived in Fredericksburg at the time of the Battle of Fredericksburg. She and her family stayed in their house while the US Army fired cannons at the town.

What aspects of Jane's experience do you think are important for people today to read about? Do you think Jane knew that someone would be reading her diary 158 years later?

Informed Decisions



When you and your family get ready to go on a trip, the adults probably do some planning ahead of time. Maybe they check the weather to know what kind of clothing to pack. Maybe they look at a map to make sure they know how to get to where you are going. Maybe they look up what time things will be happening before they leave so you can get there on time. They are making informed decisions, meaning they have knowledge about what to expect before they leave.

Informed decisions are also important for military officers so that they can make a plan of attack that will win them a victory. But what happens if information is wrong or not clear? Look at the words highlighted in yellow on the map. Based on those, does the Road to Bowling Green run parallel with the river or does it follow an angle toward the top of the map? Write your answer in the space below.

When General Burnside, the man in charge of the Union Army (the blue lines on the map) received this map, he thought the Bowling Green Road curved up towards the top of the map. So, he told General Franklin to have his troops ready to move up the road. The problem with that order is that the road didn't curve, it went towards the bottom left corner and away from the battle. Franklin knew which way the road went, so how do you think he felt when he got this order, and what do you think he did?

Redraw the map on the back of this page and label the Bowling Green Road correctly. With the corrected map, how should General Burnside have directed General Franklin to move his men in the battle?

Can Monuments Talk?

Even though monuments can't have a conversation with us, all monuments have something to say.

Every time a group of people decides to put up a monument, they do so for a specific reason. Sometimes it is hard to know what those reasons were just by looking at a monument, but if we study a monument carefully, we can begin to discover what it is that monument is supposed to say.



Below, you'll see two monuments that are located on the Fredericksburg Battlefield. Using the question prompts, think about what these monuments tell us about the Battle of Fredericksburg and the Civil War. Then, take your sleuthing skills to the streets and investigate some of the monuments in your hometown!

What do you see?

What do you see in this monument? Are there people? Pictures? Words? Symbols? List them below.

If there are people, who are they? What are they doing? How do they look?

If there are words or symbols, what do they tell you about the monument or what the monument is trying to depict?

What do you think this monument is trying to say?

Why do you think someone decided to put this monument on the Fredericksburg Battlefield?

GO EXPLORE!

Are there monuments somewhere in your community? Find one and describe it.

Using the skills you gained "talking" to the monuments at the battlefield, tell us what you think your monument is trying to say.

Fredericksburg National Cemetery

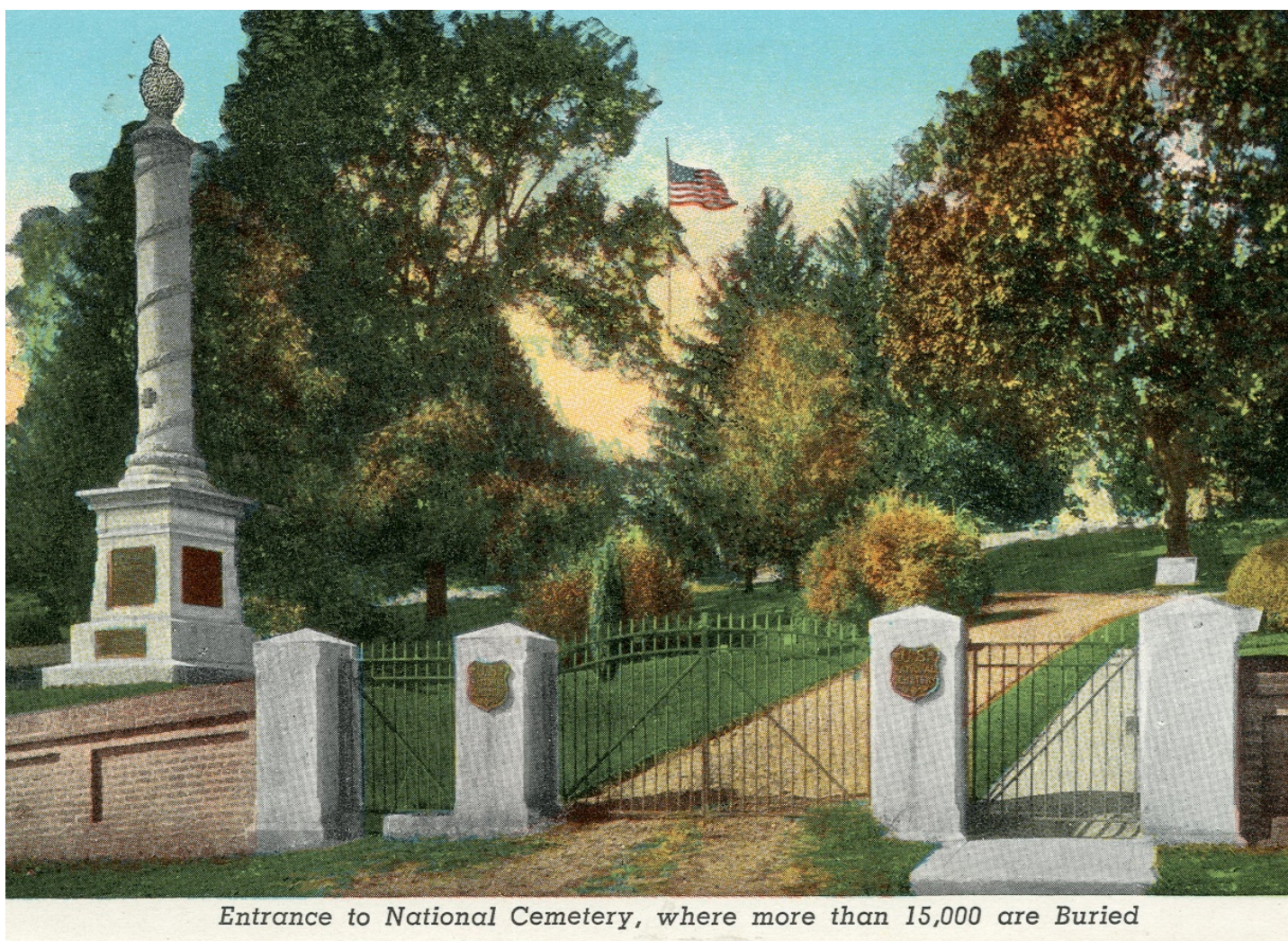
Did you know...

The federal government created the National Cemetery System after the Civil War.

When the Civil War was over, the U.S. government decided to create a system of National Cemeteries where they could bury the Union soldiers who had died. This required a lot of work because prior to the National Cemetery System's creation, there was no uniform policy for identifying and burying Union dead. Fredericksburg's National Cemetery contains Union soldiers who fell at the battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House, as well as those who died in the area in smaller engagements.

National Cemeteries were meant to be monuments to Union soldiers too.

These new cemeteries had something to say about the Civil War and the Union soldiers who died keeping the Union together. What symbols do you see in this image of Fredericksburg National Cemetery that tells you about what kind of monument the cemetery was meant to be?



Entrance to National Cemetery, where more than 15,000 are Buried

Thank you so much for reading our newspaper, "The Social Dispatch"! Now it is your turn to create your own newspaper to help you remember these unique times. You can make your newspaper a one-time issue or a recurring issue. We hope that you will share it with us!

We look forward to when we can all go back out and explore our National Parks with other people so that we can meet you in person!