CHAPTER XXV.

BURNSIDE'S CAMPAIGN—FREDERICKSBURG.

Barnes in Command.—His Plan for the Campaign.—His Merits and Demerits.—New Organization of the Army of the Potomac.—The Movement from Warren to Fredericksburg.—Delay in crossing the Rappahannock.—The Peninsula.—Fredericksburg threatened with Bombardment.—The Confederate Army reaches Fredericksburg.—The Position on the Rappahannock.—Barnes's Preparations for Cruising.—The Delay against Fredericksburg.—Lee's Plan of Operations.—Crossing the River, and Preparations for Attack.—Barnes's final Plan for two Assaults.—Franklin's Attack upon the Left.—Weitzel's Advance repulsed.—Gibbon advanced, and is repulsed.—The Confederate Pursuit checked by Birney.—The Moments of the Action.—The Confederate Position on the Right at Marye's Hill.—Its Strength.—Assailed by Sumner.—French and Hancock repulsed.—Hooker ordered to attack.—Humphrey's assault, and is driven back.—Close of the Battle.—The Numbers engaged.—Barnes proposes to renew the Battle the next day.—Is dissuaded by his Generals.—He misconceives the Rappahannock.—Effects of the Battle of Fredericksburg.—Condition of the Union Army.—Barnes designs a new Movement.—The proposed Casual Expedition.—The President forbids the Movement.—The Reasons for the Prohibition.—Franklin and Smith estimate Barnes's Plan, and propose another.—Cosby and Newton's Interview with the President.—Barnes and Halleck.—Barnes's third Plan.—The Mud Campaign.—Barnes's Order No. 8, dismissing Hooker and others.—The President refuses to sanction the Order.—Barnes resigns, and Hooker is placed in Command.—Sumner and Franklin relieved.—Death of Sumner.—Hooker takes Command.

This command of the Army of the Potomac was thrust into the unwilling hands of Barnarm. He had twice declined it, and would have done so now had it been left to his choice; but the order was peremptory, and he had no alternative but to obey. Yet, as if foreseeing the issue, he repeated to the messenger who brought the order and to members of his own staff what he had before said to the President and the Secretary of War, that he did not consider himself competent to take the command of so large an army, and, moreover, that from the place which his command had held during the campaign, he knew less than any other general of the position, numbers, and character of the several corps. Still, with the knowledge then possessed by the military authorities, the choice was the wisest that could have been made. No other general could hold an important separate command. His expedition to North Carolina had been successful. He had become entangled in none of those jealousies which impeded, or were thought to impede, the efficiency of the army. His personal and military character was unapproached and irreproachable. Burnside's modesty, contrasted with Hooker's vaunting self-assurance, decided the question of the generalship. He was taken at the high estimate which the administration placed upon him, rather than at the low one which he placed upon himself.

Barnes was required not only to take command of the army, but to state what he proposed to do with it. He had been from the first opposed to the movement made by McClellan upon Warren, and he argued that if any way was to go to Richmond by land, the only way was that by Fredericksburg. McClellan was half convinced of the truth of this, and on the day before he was superseded gave orders which placed the abandonment of his present line of operations. Two days after he had been placed in command, Burnside presented his plan.

Its essential features were that McClellan's design of attacking Lee should be given up, the movement toward Gordonvile abandoned, and then there should be "a rapid movement of the whole force to Fredericksburg with a view to a movement upon Richmond from that point." In favor of his plan he urged that if the Union army should move upon Culpepper and Gordonvile, and even fight a successful battle, the enemy would still have many lines of retreat, and would be able to reach Richmond with enough of force to render necessary another battle there. Should the enemy fall back without giving battle, the pursuit would be simply following up a retreating army well provided with provisions in its rear, while the pursuing army would have to rely for supplies upon a single long line of communication, liable to be cut at any point. But in moving by the way he proposed, the army would cover Washington until it reached Fredericksburg, where it would be on the shortest road to Richmond, the taking of which, he thought, "should be the great object of the campaign, as the fall of that place would tend more to cripple the rebel cause than almost any other military event, except the absolute breaking up of their army." The presence of a large army on the Fredericksburg line would render it impossible for the enemy to make any successful movement upon Washington. An invasion of Pennsylvania was not to be expected at that season of the year, and, even should a lodgment be made there by any force that could be spared, its destruction would be certain soon after winter set in. "Could the army before Richmond be beaten, and their capital taken," he added, "the loss of half a dozen of our towns and cities in the interior of Pennsylvania would be well offset.

This plan was undoubtedly a judicious one upon the assumption that the capture of Richmond was the main aim of the campaign. For an advance thinner by way of Gordonvile, the main base of supplies must be Alexander, involving transportation by land of so large an army as must be moved, which might be followed. For an advance by way of Fredericksburg, Aquia Creek, on the Potomac, would be the base to which supplies could be sent by water, leaving but 75 miles of land transportation, by a line much less exposed. The advantage of the Peninsular route are still greater. The base of supplies would be at Alexandria, at Point, Richmond. The main objection to this, that the army here would not be in a position to cover Washington, would be obviated by concentrating thence a force sufficient for its defense, which the great numerical preponderance of the Union troops rendered easy. In fact, there was no ground and around Washington, independent of Burnside's army in the field, a force very nearly equal to the whole Confederate Army of Northern Virginia.

2. Ibid., 633.
3. Ibid., 649.
4. The advantages of the Fredericksburg route, or rather a modification of it, taking the James River instead of the York, were brought forth a week later by Franklin and Sumner, and were endorsed by Mr. S. (Quartermaster General), an officer who made an official comparison of Fredericksburg with Fredericksburg, he estimated the hope of being able to winter there upon an easy base of supplies, and in the spring embarking his army for the James River. Not only is there no record of any proposal to be found in Burnside's written plan, but every recommendation implies the design of moving by the woodland route.
The fatal error in Burnside's plan was that it wholly misconceived the main object to be aimed at. The capture of Richmond would indeed have been in itself a great moral and moral loss to the Confederacy, but it would have been of far less moment than the destruction, or even the signal defeat of the army. That army was the head and front of the offending, and at this the blow should have been aimed. The President, with a keener insight into the case than any other man had yet attained, had written, "We must beat the enemy somewhere or fall finally. If we cannot beat him where he now is, we never can, he being again within the intrenchments of Richmond." This was as true now as it was a month before. It so happened that the Confederate commander had placed his army in such a position as to invite an attack. A little more than half of it was massed at Culpepper, a little less than half was lying three days' march away in the Valley of the Shenandoah. The Union army was massed only a few hours' march from the enemy, outnumbering him more than two to one. An attack in force could hardly have resulted otherwise than in a decisive victory. Burnside proposed deliberately to throw away the advantage thus thrust into his hands, and march directly away from his inferior foe, in quest of an object which, even if attained, was of wholly secondary consequence. The President, however, though with some reluctance, acceded to Burnside's plan, but with the significant intimation, "I think it will succeed if you move rapidly, otherwise not." While preparing for this movement, Burnside organized his forces into three "Grand Divisions"—Sumner being placed in command of the "Right," Hooker of the "Center," and Franklin of the "Left."  

Burnside began his movement from Warrenton to Fredericksburg on the 16th of November. He had proposed to make it by concentrating his force at Warrenton, as though he intended to attack Culpepper or Gordonsville. But Lee was not deceived. On the 17th he learned that Sumner had marched from Catlett's Station toward Falmouth, and that Federal gun-boats had entered Aquia Creek. This, he thought, "looked as if Fredericksburg was to be reoccupied," and he dispatched two divisions of infantry, with cavalry and artillery, to augment the small force which had held the town. Next day a bold dash by Stuart's cavalry upon Warrenton disclosed that the Federal army were gone, whereupon Longstreet's whole command was sent toward Fredericksburg, while Jackson was ordered from the Valley to rejoin the main army. Lee, having divined Burnside's movement, met it in just the manner in which one would suppose he would have done, but as it would seem, just in the way his opponent did not anticipate. There were five conceivable things to be done: To repulse down the Valley of the Shenandoah and again invade Maryland, and threaten Pennsylvania; to make a demonstration upon Washington, with the intent of recalling the march to Fredericksburg; to fall back at once upon the enemy, where he was, and await the issue of events; or to throw himself directly across the new line of advance proposed by Burnside. The first two movements Burnside had ruled out as impracticable or ruinous. For the third there was no immediate necessity; it could be done if need were, afterward as well as then. Burnside seems to have supposed that Lee would choose the fourth. As it happened, he chose the fifth course, which enabled him to carry out under auspices far more favorable than he could have dared to anticipate.  

Summer, with the advance of the Union army, reached Falmouth, opposite Fredericksburg, on the 17th. The design was that he should cross the Rappahanock at once, and seize the heights in the rear of Fredericksburg before Lee could reinforce the small force stationed there. The river at that point could not be forded by an army in mass, and the railroad and turnpike bridges which had spanned it were destroyed. Burnside had, as he supposed, made arrangements by which pontoon sufficient to span the stream would have been sent to him from Washington so as to meet him on his arrival. But none came for a week, during which time nothing could have been done to the plan of operations. Summer, indeed, who

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2. Burnside's Grand Division consisted of the 2d Corps, under Couch, lately Sumner's, and the 5th Corps, under Wadsworth, under Burnside. Hooker's Grand Division consisted of the 1st Corps, under Sumner, from the garrison of Washington, and the 5th Corps, formerly Titus's, under Porter; Hooker's Grand Division consisted of the 1st Corps, formerly Hooker's, under Burnside, and the 5th Corps, formerly Franklin's, under W. F. Smith. The 2d Corps, led by Burnside himself, was left at Harpers Ferry, under the charge of the 11th Corps, under Sigel, detached from the defense of Washington, was near Manassas Junction, the 3d Corps, under Franklin, was sent directly from a part of the troops of Major-General H沧 at Richmond. Among the commanders of "divisions," as distinguished from the "Grand Divisions," were Biever, Doubleday, French, Gilbert, Howard, Humphrey's, Monds, Newman, and others.
3. The fact, upon which so much hinges, was made the subject of strict secrecy. Each person immediately concerned endeavored to shift himself from the burden of the responsibility. Burnside says (Com. Rep., 645, 646): "My plan had been discussed by General Meade and General Meigs at my head-quarters at Warrenton on the night of the 15th or 16th, and, after discussing it fully there, I had written and wired the instructions which I now suppose, fully covered the case, and would secure the starting of the pontoon at once. I supposed, of course, that those parties of the plan which required to be attended to in Washington would have been carried out there. I understood that General Meade was to give the necessary orders and that the officers who should receive those orders were the ones responsible for the pontoon's coming here. I have carried out that part of the plan through the offices of my own; but, having just taken the command of an army with which I was unacquainted, it was evident that it was as much as I could attend to, with the sufficiency of my officers, to change its position from Warrenton to Fredericksburg."—Harbord says (2d, 679): "On my visit to General Burnside at Warrenton on the 15th of November, in speaking about the boats and things which he required from Washington, I told him that they were all subject to his orders. To prevent the ne
had been fired upon by a battery firing across the river, and had silenced it so easily to show that the enemy were there in only trifling force, was disposed to send a detachment by a ford which was practicable for the purpose; besides, he had had a little too much experience on the Peninsula of the tendency of getting astride a river to risk it here. So, having revoked the order, he sent a note to Burnside, asking whether he should take Fredericksburg before midnight. If he had shrunk from assaulting the town, it was almost the middle of December. Four weeks had passed since Burnside's plan had been sanctioned by the President; but the essential thing upon which he had based the probability of success—that the movement should be rapidly made—had failed. The faultiness of the whole scheme was now apparent. Burnside had shrunk from assailing the half of Lee's force which lay directly in front of him, to a distant position without and of no great natural strength. He was now confronted by the Confederate army, drawn up in a position almost unsailable by nature, strengthened by the labor of three unobstructed weeks, which could be assailed only by a movement which would have exposed his camps on the north side of the Rappahannock, and driven from his position, the pursuit would still encounter at every step of the way just the same obstructions which would have been met on the line which had been abandoned. If military considerations were alone in question, no further movement would have been made, and the army would have gone into winter quarters. But public feeling demanded a movement, and Burnside, sanctioned by his generals, resolved to take the offensive. The only question was where the intervening river should be crossed.

The Rappahannock, with a general course from south to north, makes a sharp bend westward a mile above Fredericksburg, running between two lines of heights. Those on the north, known as Stafford Heights, slope steeply down to the river bank, with an elevation sufficient to command the valley across the river. On the south side, the hills just in the rear of Fredericksburg rise sharply something less than a mile from the river; then they trend away, in a semicircular form, until they sink down into the valley of the Massaponax, six miles below Fredericksburg, leaving an irregular broken valley, two miles broad at its widest point. This range of heights was partly covered with dense woods, was well branched, and afforded, with snipes and firs, rising southward by a succession of wooded ridges, each dominating the one below until lost in a wild wooded region soon to become famous under the name of the Wilderness. Upon the crests and along the sides of these wooded ridges Burnside's corps had been covering a front of about five miles. There was little need of artificial aid to the natural strength of the position; but artillery and rifle pits were dug and abatis constructed.

A fortnight passed, during which time the Union army lay upon the north bank of the Rappahannock, waiting for means to cross the stream, and for the accumulation of supplies at the Aquia Creek, and the means of transporting them from the Potomac to the Rappahannock. The Confederate army was meanwhile concentrating on the southern side to resist our advance. About this time that army was formally organized into two corps, under the immediate command of Longstreet and Jackson, who had each been raised to the rank of lieutenant general. Longstreet's corps consisted of the troops formerly belonging to his command. To Jackson was assigned, besides those which he had heretofore commanded, the division of D. H. Hill. The two corps were now of nearly equal force, that of Longstreet being perhaps slightly in excess.

creed of the commanding officer here reporting the order for the hours there, the order was drawn up on his table and signed by me directly to General Weverly. I sent General Weverly on my return, and he told me that he had received the order. I told him that in all these matters he was under General Burnside's direction; General Burnside's discretion was the only authority. I ordered him to execute that order to him. I gave no other order or direction in relation to the matter. There seems to have been an unaccountable misunderstanding as to the proper writer of the order which was addressed to General Weverly, of the Engineer Brigade. It read: "Call upon the chief quartermaster to transport all your pontoon trains to Aquia Creek." Weverly did not understand that order. He demanded instant execution. "Had the Engineer been made known to you in any manner," he said, "I could have directed the forms of service, service points, pontoons, and wagons. But as it is, I have no means of service, service points, pontoons, and wagons for instant service wherever I could find them. The pontoon trains, which are being brought up in a body, which, after all, could only have been carried by the authorities of the greenback partisans. It was on the 1st of Case of the order's authority and of a regiment train for the march transportation of an arm. If General Weverly had orders from General Burnside, he was re-

* 26th, 4th, 5th.

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posted so as to be in a position to support either Hill or Longstreet. Two shots in immediate succession were to be the signal giving notice for the whole of the Confederate force to concentrate upon any point that should be menaced in force.

Burnside had resolved to cross at a point known by the euphemous designation of Skinker's Neck, about twelve miles below Fredericksburg. The movements which were made for this purpose caused the enemy to concentrate much of his strength in that direction. The thought then occurred to him, if we can obtain this force there by ostentation, demonstrations, and to make the crossing at Fredericksburg. "I decided," he says, "to cross at Fredericksburg, because, in the first place, I felt satisfied that they did not expect us to cross here, but down below; and, in the next place, I felt satisfied that this was the place to fight the most decisive battle, because, if we could divide their forces by piercing their lines at one or two points, separating their left from their right, then a vigorous attack with the whole army would succeed in breaking their army in pieces." No conclusion could, as matters stood, be more sound, provided that the premises upon which it was based were sure. If it was certain that Lee's left would be behind Fredericksburg, and his right a dozen miles or more away, then an adequate force flung into the great gap would divide the Confederate army, and a vigorous assault upon its left might be expected to crush it when cut off from aid from the right. To carry out this plan, it was necessary that the river should be crossed and battle be waged and won in a single day. Failing this, the rest depends upon contingencies which no man could foresee.

The 11th of December was fixed upon as the day for crossing the river. During the previous night nearly one hundred and fifty heavy guns were placed in position upon the crest of Stafford Heights, commanding a great part of the opposite valley. The intention was to throw three bridges across at Fredericksburg, and as many more at a point two or three miles below. Sumner's Grand Division was to cross by the upper bridges, Franklins by the lower, while Hooker's was to be held in reserve, ready, if the assault was successful, to spring upon the enemy in his retreat. It was supposed that the bridges could be built in two or three hours. Before dawn the pontoon boats were brought down to the river bank, and the work of laying the bridges was begun in the darkness. Two single shots broke the stillness which reigned through the Confederate lines. These were the signals for Longstreet's corps to concentrate upon the threatened point. Fredericksburg was held by only two regiments of sharpshooters, who were stationed in houses and rifle-pits, and behind walls on the river bank. In addition to the darkness of night, a dense fog filled the valley. The engineers had barely begun to lay the bridges when they were assailed by rifle-shots at short range from the opposite shore, and driven off with severe loss. Again and again they returned, and again and again were driven off. The two or three hours had stretched to six, and the narrow stream was only half spanned. And not another length could be laid under the fierce fire. Burnside now ordered that fire should be opened upon the town from his artillery which crowned the opposite crests. Nearly one hundred and fifty heavy guns at once opened fire into the pall of mist which still shrouded the scene. After two hours a column of rising smoke indicated that a part of the town was in flames, and another attempt was made to complete the bridges. This was repelled as the former ones had been, showing that almost ten thousand shot had failed to disable the sharpshooters from their cover. When the fog cleared at noon, it was found that the elevation at which the guns were placed was so great that few of them could be sufficiently depressed to bear upon the river front of the town. The day was fast wearing away, and nothing had been accomplished. The officers reported that the bridges could not be built. Burnside said that it must be done, and some means must be found to disable the sharpshooters. It was now decided that a detachment should cross in open pontoon boats and carry the town. Two regiments from Massachusetts and one from Michigan volunteered for the perilous work. They rushed down the bank and pushed the boats into the stream. A few strong strokes with the oars, and they were under shelter of the opposite bluffs, up which they dashed, and in a quarter of an hour carried the town. In half an hour more the bridges were finished, and, as evening was falling, Ooah's division was over and the first step in the enterprise fairly taken. Franklin had indeed met with scarcely a show of opposition. His artillery covered the opposite shore, and his bridges were ready before noon; but Burnside had resolved that the attack should be made in two separate columns, and Franklin was not suffered to cross until the other bridges were completed.

It was no part of Lee's plan seriously to oppose the passage of the river by the Federal force, or even to assail it when he over. He wisely chose to await its assault upon his strong position, to which his opponent would
have been plagued by crossing the river. He seems, indeed, to have been uncertain whether the movement in his front was a serious one, or merely a feint to cover an attack upon one of his flanks; for it was not until twenty-four or forty hours after the firing of the signal-guns that Jackson’s corps was brought up from its positions nearly a score of miles down the river.1 Could the bridges have been completed, as was expected, early on the morning of the 11th, and the attack made that day, Burnside would have encountered only half of the Confederate force, and the result of the action could hardly have failed to have been different.

The whole of the 12th was most unaccountably spent in crossing the river and deciding upon the order of the attack on the next day. It was found that the extreme Confederate right was protected by a canal, all the bridges crossing which had been destroyed; there was, besides, a sloughway and millpond, so that this point was unassailable; and an attack upon the right could only be made against the steep front of Mary’s Hill, rising in the rear of the town and presenting a front of a mile, then sloping off sharply to a ravine traversed by a small stream; thence the heights sweep away from the river, leaving a broken plain, its edges deeply indented by wooded spurs. This plain, about two miles broad, is traversed by the Richmond and Fredericksburg Railroad, which winds around the base of the heights, occasionally cutting through the extremities of the projecting spurs. Midway between the river and the road runs the old Richmond or Port Royal Road, often embanked and fringed with trees, offering shelter behind which the Union forces could be deployed. When the final arrangements had been made on both sides, the Confederate forces, 80,000 strong, were posted along the ridge of the range of hills, their advance line in places pushed forward to the wooded base, Jackson’s corps holding the right and Langston’s the left. The Union army, 100,000 strong, was posted along the Richmond Road, from Fredericksburg down; Couch’s corps, of Sumner’s division, in the town; then Wilson’s corps, forming the connection with Franklin’s Grand Division on the left.

The character of the ground unmistakably indicated that the main attack should be made by Franklin; for not only was the Confederate position here manifestly weaker, but the plain in front of it was spacious enough to give room to deploy his whole force; while to the right, in front of Sumner, the plain was so narrow that only a fragment of his force could at once be brought into action. If he assailed the strong position before him, it must be by successive blows, not by a single attack with his whole force. Franklin understood, on the afternoon of the 12th, that Burnside intended that he should make the attack with his Grand Division, to which had been added a part of Hooker’s. Hooker understood that there was to be a two-fold assault, at distinct points, the main one by Sumner, on the right.2 Burnside clearly proposed a twofold attack in force, that on the left to be the first. But when, on the morning of the 13th, Franklin received his order, it was so worded as to lead him and his generals to suppose that it meant he should make merely an armed reconnaissance of the enemy’s lines with but one of his eight divisions, to be supported by another, keeping the remainder in position for a different movement.3 Franklin was also informed that a column, consisting of a division or more, detached from Sumner’s corps, was to move against the heights in the rear of Fredericksburg. Thus, as the plan was framed, not more than four divisions, one quarter of the force which had crossed or was ready to cross the river, were to assail the positions held by the Confederates. We can only account for this by supposing that Burnside thought that the enemy in his front was really in considerable force, its bulk being still a score of miles away, and that not only had he crossed the Rappahannock at a point where he was not expected, but that during the eight hours and forty hours which had passed since the attempt was begun the enemy had not concentrated his strength in his front. Thus only can we explain the part assigned to Hooker, to spring upon the enemy on their retreat, and the order to Franklin to be in readiness to march down the Richmond Road, that being the direction which the retreating Confederates would naturally take. If this plan was correct, Hooker had been confirmed in it by the tripping opposition offered to his passage of the river. There was, indeed, nothing to show the neighborhood of a great hostile army. Hardly a reply had been made to his heavy bombardment; not dashed our power to cross, and I do not before we could have crossed had the enemy chosen to prevent it; and I know, from what I have seen since, that they could not have prevented our crossing at those two points if they had chosen. However, the crossing was successfully made, under cover of a fog, and, as far as I could see, was connected, as far as I could find, with the least possible number of men, with the loss of a very few men. Still, we were in such a position that, if the enemy had at any moment opened upon us with the guns they had bearing upon us, I think it probable that our whole force would have been scattared and that we should have been impossible to rally them. For some unaccountable reason they did not open their batteries.”

1 “It has been definitely ascertained that the enemy had crossed the Rappahannock in large force, and was moving our division as an advance on the line.” (J. M. Hill, in his official report, p. 487.)

2 “Just before sunrise on the 12th I received an order to march that night to Fredericksburg, as the Yankees were expected to attack General Lee that day. A portion of my command was twenty-two miles from that city, and the rest of them from eighteen to twenty” (D. H. Hill, ibid., 485.)

3 “A. P. Hill moved his division as early on the morning of the 12th. At the same time, Thomas, then in command of Jackson’s division, moved from his encampment. Early on the morning of the 13th, Breckinridge, division under Early, and A. P. Hill, with the division of D. H. Hill, was about three miles from the point where the line was to be made up the next day. The other divisions were very near the march, from their respective encampments, the troops of D. H. Hill being from fifteen to twenty miles distant from the point to which they were ordered” (Jackson, in his official report, p. 486.)

4 “General Burnside said [in the committee] that his favorite plan of attack was on the Telegraph road.” (H. N. Hooker, in his report, p. 486.)

5 “The enemy had cut a road along in the rear of the lines of heights where we made our attack, by means of which they committed the two wings of our army, and avoided a long descent through a bad country. I wanted to obtain possession of that new road, and that was my reason for moving my attack on the extreme left. I did not intend to make the attack on the right until that position had been taken, which I hoped would stagger the enemy and enable me then to propose to make a direct attack on their front, and drive them out of their works.” (Burnside, in his report, p. 486.)

6 Franklin, in his official report, p. 486. The order is given in full in Gen. Rep., p. 708. The essential portion is these: “The general commanding directs that you keep your whole command in position for a rapid movement down the old Richmond Road; and you will send out at once a division on the right to pass below the railroad bridge, to hold the heights on the right of the railroad, ridge and of the Massaponax, taking care to keep it well supported and the line of retreat open, . . . . You will keep your whole command ready to move on notice, as soon as the flag is hoisted.”
an enemy showed himself during that day or the next besides the few regiments which had been driven from Fredericksburg, and the scanty line of sharpshooters, hardly more than a picket-guard, scattered along the river bank, which could not be trusted to hold them. The right and left were badly cut off: he had been impressed into the Confederate service, of the strength of the enemy, of their positions and batteries, and that they regarded it as an impossibility that the heights could be carried; but Burnside clearly placed none in doubt.

The morning of Saturday, December 15, broke with a dense fog resting in the valley, shutting the two armies from all sight of each other. So dense was it that the Confederates could hear the word of command given to the flanks, while the Eleventh Corps, which was in reserve, was lost to view. Some of the Confederate pickets were frozen at their posts. About ten o'clock the fog lifted, and showed Franklin’s command in motion. He had placed a liberal construction upon the order to assault with at least one division, and had ordered A. P. Hill’s division, which was in reserve, to make a flanking movement to the front, while the divisions of Doubleday and Hill were to be moved to the left to dislodge the enemy. After an hour’s sharp cannonading Stuart’s guns were withdrawn, and Meade opened a fierce artillery fire upon the woods in his front. The Confederate batteries making no response, Meade pushed forward right against what proved to be a Hill division.

Jackson’s front line was composed of three brigades of A. P. Hill’s division, posted in the woods at Hamilton’s Crossing, the point which Franklin had been ordered to assault with a single division; the other three brigades forming a line along the military road, which winds along the foot of the hills, Wheat and Taliaferro were in reserve beyond the crest of the heights. A wide gap had been left between two of Hill’s front brigades, just behind a strip of boggy wood which was supposed to be impassable. By one of those accidents which sometimes change the face of a battle, Meade had advanced right upon this point, and his division thrust itself like a wedge through the unguarded opening, in the face of a fierce artillery fire now opened upon his column from the hithermost elicit batteries. This wedge, by sheer force, sent the remainder of the division back with the American flag in the woods. Doubleday’s division swept down the Gentle Lane and Archer, sweeping back the flanks of each, and gaining the second line along the military road. A part of Gregg’s brigade was thrown into confusion, but the remainder of the line stood firm, and checked the American advance. This had been separated from Gibbon’s division, which was to be its immediate support, and was enveloped, for it had pierced, not shattered, the first Confederate line, whose separated portions assailed each of its flanks, while its front was hemmed by the second line. It was a question of force whether the three brigades of A. P. Hill’s six, and they fell back in confusion over the ground which they had gained. Meanwhile Gibbon’s supporting division, after a brief delay, which to Meade seemed long as it came up on his right, and for a moment stunned the Confederate advance. But in the mean time the British works had been dug upon, and in the rear, bringing tidings that an “awful gap” had been left in the front line, through which the enemy were pouring, endangering not only the integrity of that line, but all the batteries. Early sent Lawton’s brigade into the gap, which was the Southern infantry, and which is never to be mistaken for the studied hurrals of the Yankeeros, closely followed by the remainder of the division. At the same time Hood, whose division of Longstreet’s corps was next to Jackson, and who had been ordered to pressure the point of contact, formed the American line. This united force swept back Gibbon’s division, as well as the shattered remains of Meade’s.

The consequences of the wording of Burnside’s order, and Franklin’s understanding of Meade’s order, held his Grand Division in a position for a “rapid advance down the Richmond Road,” and so, with the exception of Meade and Gibbon, it was stretched along the road, the nearest part being a full mile from the scene of conflict, and most of it much further, for Doubleday’s division, which was to have directly supported the attack, had gone so far to the left as to be beyond reach. But, fortunately, Stone’s corps of Hooker’s Grand Division had begun to cross the river opposite the place of the fight. Burney’s division of that corps, which led, had been ordered to follow Meade when he advanced; but the order was temporarily set aside as the march was made in a hot sun, which was opening upon them. He had begun to do this when he was told to push forward to aid Meade, whose division was flying back in all direc-

1 Hooker, in _Rev. Res.,_ 607.
2 Ibid., in _Lea’s Hist.,_ 429.
3 Ibid., in _Lea’s Hist.,_ 497.
5 Ibid., in _Lea’s Hist.,_ 497.
6 Ibid., in _Lea’s Hist.,_ 460.
7 General Gibbon’s division on my right, which I understood was to have advanced simultaneously with my own, did not advance till I was driven back. It was advanced until it came within shooting distance of the Confederate line, which it held in check for a time. The division was held at bay for some ten or twenty minutes, during which time my division fought a brisk action on your right and front, which was the first time I had ordered to advance. Meade’s line was not beyond my view, and I ordered the attack directly to the front, being myself the first to advance.
8 General Gibbon’s division was posted to my right, which I understood was to have advanced simultaneously with my own, but did not advance till I was driven back. It was advanced until it came within shooting distance of the Confederate line, which it held in check for a time. The division was held at bay for some ten or twenty minutes, during which time my division fought a brisk action on your right and front, which was the first time I had ordered to advance. Meade’s line was not beyond my view, and I ordered the attack directly to the front, being myself the first to advance.
9 My line of battle was the same as that described by Meade in _Rev. Res._ The division was held at bay for some ten or twenty minutes, during which time my division fought a brisk action on your right and front, which was the first time I had ordered to advance. Meade’s line was not beyond my view, and I ordered the attack directly to the front, being myself the first to advance.
10 Concord and the division was held at bay for some ten or twenty minutes, during which time my division fought a brisk action on your right and front, which was the first time I had ordered to advance. Meade’s line was not beyond my view, and I ordered the attack directly to the front, being myself the first to advance.
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the battle of Chancellorville; the other, the "Telegraph Road," bending southwardly, and leading to Richmond, in which, hidden from view, lay the few regiments forming the advance line of the Confederate force, command-
ed by Cobb; but he having been killed early in the day, the command was given to Kemper, whose brigade was thrust forward into and near the sunken road.

No sooner had the Federal columns moved in dense masses out of the deep ravine, through which some suppose that the Reppahanock once flowed, and emerged upon the narrow plain at the foot of Berry's Hill, than they came within range of the Confederate artillery posted on the crest.

Every gun opened upon them with terrible effect, making great gaps that could be seen at the distance of a mile. The light guns of the Confederates, in this close range, were better than though they had been howitzers, for they could be worked more rapidly. French's division, in the advance, pressed on in the face of the artillery fire, closing up the great gaps plowed through their ranks, and had crossed half of the narrow space toward the foot of the hill, when they were met by a sheet of fire in their front, from an invisible foe. It came from the Confederate infantry hidden in the road "out of the side of the hill," not a man of whom was visible above the smooth slope. The heads of the advancing column melted away before this solid wall of fire, delivered from ranks four deep like a snow-bank before a jet of steam.

French's division recoiled before this fierce fire, and streamed back over the narrow plain across which they had advanced, leaving almost half their number behind. Hancock came close after; with French's remaining men, pushed straight on, disregarding the hot artillery fire from the heights; but no sooner did they come within musket-range of the sunken road than a solid sheet of lead poured upon them.

The front which was to be carried was so narrow that scarcely more than a brigade could bear upon it at once. Brigade dashed in after brigade, each taking the place of one which had been swept back so rapidly that it seemed, from the Union lines in the plain, but a single assault, lasting three hours, but, as seen from the Confederate positions on the hill, it seemed a succession of waves dashed against the rocky wall at its base. But it was not a question of numbers. Had twice as many men been brought up the result would have been the same, only the loss would have been twice as great. Nor was it a question of bravery, for, never, not even when, seven months later, the Confederates in their turn slammed and were shattered against the steeps at Gettysburg, was an assault made with more desperate and unavailing valor. The main stress of the assault had been borne by divisions of French and Hancock. They had pressed across the narrow plain, about 10,000 strong, and lost fully 4000 in killed and wounded.

Burnside had watched the action from the heights across the Reppahanock. Two full hours had passed, and nothing seemed gained. Assault after assault had been made by divisions which had "never turned their backs to the enemy." The regiments which he had expected to see crowning the crest had been repelled from the base. "That crest must be taken tonight," he exclaimed, and directed Hooker to cross and attack upon the Telegraph Road—the very position against which French and Hancock had been "butting all day long." Of Hooker's six divisions, two, and these, he said, "were my favorite divisions, for the one was that which I had col-
cuted myself, and the other was that which Kearney had commanded, and of these I knew more than of any others in my command," had been sent to the left to support Franklin. Another division had been sent across to the upper end of Fredericksburg to support Howard, and still another down to support Sturgis, both of whom had been pushed forward to aid French and Howard. Hooker had then but two divisions left with which to act; they were that of Humphreys, composed of new men, and Syler's regulars, who had fought at Bull Run and Cold Harbor, at Malvern and Grovetown. Hooker rode forward across the river to consult with his gen-
crals who had been engaged in the attack. He saw Couch and Wilcox, French and Hancock. With a single exception, they were all of opinion that no attack could be successfully made there. Hooker examined the posi-
tion himself, and sent to Burnside an aid with a message dissolving from a new assault. The messenger returned with orders that an attempt must be made. Hooker then rode back, and in person repeated his urgency.
against an attack. But Burnside was inflexible, and insisted that it should be made.

The short December day was verging to a close before Hooker was prepared to attack. He thought that the assault had not been sufficiently conducted, and proposed to break through a wall sufficiently large for a forlorn hope. He had already begun to form for an advance from every gun at his command. It made no more impression than if it had been poured upon "the side of a mountain of rock;" indeed, the wall was broken, which formed the real Confederate defense, could not be touched by any fire from the plain. Just as sunset Hooker ordered Humphreys’s division to form an assault on that flank. Kershaw’s line of battle was thrown aside, and the men were directed "to make the assault with empty muskets, for there was no time there to load and fire." At the word, they rushed forward with loud shrill, charging straight for the stone wall. As it happened, the Confederate artillery was stationed and posted on the crest of Mary’s Hill, had exhausted its ammunition, and was passing to the rear, while other guns were coming forward to supply their places.

Humphry’s men thus escaped the terrible artillery fire which had staggered French and Hancock, and the head of the column gained a few yards—possibly real—beyond the point attained by those who had gone before, and had then been buried back by the musketry fire from the sunken road. Here they met, as those who had gone before had met, the solid sheet of lead, winged in its course, and turned, as they had done from that first fire.

Of the 4000 men whom Humphry’s led up to that hidden defense, almost a half were stricken down in a quarter of an hour, for so brief had been the time between their rush and their repulse. Had Humphry’s succeeded in his assault, Hooker had proposed to support him by Sykes; but the assault had signalized failed; and, says Hooker, gravely, "finding that I had lost as many men as my orders required me to lose, I suspended the attack, and directed that the men should hold for the advance line between Franklin and the enemy, a ditch that runs along between the enemy’s intrenchment and the city, and which would afford a shelter for the men.

The Confederate army lay on their arms that night, fully expecting that the battle would be renewed the next day. The attack had been made by so small a portion of the Union forces, and had been repulsed, especially on the right, by so small a portion of the Confederate force, that Lee could not believe it to be the final attempt, and resolved to await its renewal in his strong position, rather than run the risk of attacking in turn. Burnside had crossed the river with 166,000 men. About 20,000 of these were with Franklin on the left; of these, about 17,000 had been fairly put into action. Against these Jackson had brought in about 20,000, being half of his own corps, and a brigade of Hooker’s division of Longstreet’s corps. Hooker and Sumner, on the Union left, had 48,000; of these, 15,000 had been thrown against the stone wall. Actually opposed to them were not more than 5000 of Longstreet’s corps, though the whole, 40,000 strong, exclusive of Hook, had been brought in by a direct attack, which would be considered too great a risk by the Confederate generals, and which had not been seriously engaged, was to renew the heights by a direct attack, conducted just as that had been which had been so disproportionately repulsed. He thought that these regiments, “coming quickly after one another, would be able to carry the stone wall, which was directly in their front, forcing the enemy into their next line, and, by going in with them, they would not be able to fire upon us to any great extent.”

And so the order was given. With Sumner, to receive an order was to set about its execution, and before crossing the ford the order was renewed.

Then, when all was ready for the desperate attempt, the veteran soldier felt at liberty to remonstrate. “General,” he said, “I hope you will desist from this attack. I do not know of any general officer who approves of it, and I think it will prove disastrous to the army.” Burnside could not but hesitate when such advice was given by one “who was always in favor of an advance when it was possible.” He kept the column formed, but suspended the order for advance until he could consult with his generals. One and all of the commanders of corps and divisions on the right—were against the attempt. He sent for Franklin from the left, and his opinion was the same. So, after hours of thought, Burnside resolved that he would not venture the attack, which he himself at the time believed would have been successful, and that he soon went to the contrary. Night had almost come when he informed his officers that he had determined to cross the river with the bulk of the army, but to leave enough to hold Fredericksburg itself, and to protect the bridges, which were to remain, in case he should want to cross again. But upon the representations of Hooker and Sumner, two—men into whose confidence Sumner alone, of all the council, was still necessary, who was still in favor of holding on to Fredericksburg. He thought this might have been done by a single division, provided the batteries across the river were rightly posted, and so the order of the affair would have presented a better appearance.

1 Hooker, in Cas. Rep., 661; Burnside, ibid., 729. Both generals agree precisely as to facts. Burnside, however, considered this delay on the part of Hooker as “loss of time, and a preparation on the part of his officers for a failure, inasmuch as it was his duty to attack when ordered.”

2 Lee’s Rep., II., 322.

3 Hooker says (Cas. Rep., 661): “The head of General Humphreys’s column advanced within perhaps fifteen to twenty yards of the stone wall, which was the advanced position which the whole held, and then they were thrown back as quickly as they had advanced. Probably the whole of the advance and the retiring did not occupy fifteen minutes. They left behind, as was reported to us, 1700 of their number out of about 4000.” McClellan, describing the flight as it appeared after the close of the action, says (Lee’s Rep., II., 447): “The body of one man, exposed to fire from the guns within seventy yards of the stone wall, was found lying with his head and one arm buried under the ground, and with the other arm extended upward and thrown out as if straining to get at the enemy, who were stationed at increased distances, until the main mass of the dead by they shivered over the ground as something over one hundred yards off, according to the varying place where our men would allow the enemy’s cavalry to approach before opening fire, and beyond which no organized body of men was able to pass.”

4 Cas. Rep., 668. This ditch is what is called in the Confederate Reports a “ravine.”

5 As Hooker tells it, he was the third man killed, and perhaps one of the last. But the story is that he was shot in the shoulder, and from his own account he says that he was not repulsed the enemy would have offered no other opposition, which, in view of the exigencies of his position and the extent of his force, seemed to be comparatively insignificant. Believing, therefore, that he would attack on, it was not deemed expedient to him the advantage of this position, and expose the troops to the fire of his inaccessible batteries beyond the river by advancing against him. But we were necessarily ignorant of the extent to which he had suffered.

6 Lee’s Rep., II., 43.

was warranted by its losses. "There is a great deal too much crowing: there is not sufficient confidence," he said; but he still thought that "with in a few days, with sufficient exertion, the army will again be in excellent condition."18


17. He telegraphed to the Secretary of War that "at no time during the past week was I more satisfied with the conduct of the army upon the field then I have been since the beginning of the war," 19 whatever that beginning may have been. Yet in the same message he reported that "the army is now in the highest spirits," 19 which may have been due to the recent victory at Fredericksburg.


18 The President, in a letter to Secretary of War, dated December 10, 1862, wrote: "The President was delaying upon this letter, General Comman and Cochrane went up to Washington, and laid before him what they considered the condition of the army. They told him that it was the general opinion of officers and men that it would be a dangerous and ruinous folly to cross the Rappahannock, that they knew they could not succeed, and that they would be destroyed by the enemy. The President thereupon gave the order prohibiting any movement of which he was not previously informed. Burnside urged that the movement should be made. The President refused his request until he had consulted with his military advisers. The general returned to his camp, where he wrote a letter asking for distinct authority from Halleck to cross the river. He knew, he wrote, that there was hardly an officer holding any important command who would favor the movement, but he was confident that it would be made, and would look forward to the event with a great deal of pleasure. The President thereupon gave the order prohibiting any movement of which he was not previously informed. Burnside urged that the movement should be made. The President refused his request until he had consulted with his military advisers. The general returned to his camp, where he wrote a letter asking for distinct authority from Halleck to cross the river. He knew, he wrote, that there was hardly an officer holding any important command who would favor the movement, but he was confident that it would be made, and would look forward to the event with a great deal of pleasure. The President thereupon gave the order prohibiting any movement of which he was not previously informed. Burnside urged that the movement should be made. The President refused his request until he had consulted with his military advisers. The general returned to his camp, where he wrote a letter asking for distinct authority from Halleck to cross the river. He knew, he wrote, that there was hardly an officer holding any important command who would favor the movement, but he was confident that it would be made, and would look forward to the event with a great deal of pleasure.

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Burnside's campaign—Fredericksburg.

January, 1863.

Burnside's campaign.

It was now the 20th of January. After the friendly storm, under whose cover the Union army had safely recrossed the Rappahannock, there had ensued a period of cold weather. The roads were as good as the best Virginia roads can be. Burnside gave the final order to move in a hopeful spirit.

"The commanding general," he said, "announces to the Army of the Potomac that they are about to meet the enemy once more. The late brave and successful services of which I [Sumner] have heard, have given the enemy the Rappahannock, and the auspicious moment seems to have arrived to strike a great and mortal blow to the rebellion, and to gain that decisive victory which is due to the country."

The movement had been ordered early in the day. The reserve corps under Hooker had marched up the river by parallel roads, screened from the observation of the enemy by the intervening heights, and encamped near the fords where the crossing was to be effected, while Sumner's corps moved down the river bank to make the proposed feint, and Sigel's Franklin should be relieved from their commands. Burnside was satisfied—unequivocally. But he had promised to make the real attempt above Fredericksburg by a feint, and once having marched up the army, he could not accept his resignation. The truth was, that while Burnside's own opinion had been that he was not fitted for the command of so large an army, he had yet shown so much capacity for a less onerous command, and had, in his mind, so much authority in such matters, as to cause him to think that the nation could not spare him. He still wished to resign; but the President, after careful consideration, required his attention; and, moreover, he said, if all general officers whom it was found necessary to relieve should resign, it would be better for the army to have a man in the command as it was, than lose him from the applications of his friends.

"Trust," replied the President; "for there is no reason why you can have as much time as you please for your private business, but we cannot accept your resignation." Several commands were proposed to him. He could have the department of South Carolina, or the departments of South Carolina and North Carolina. The President decided to relieve Burnside from the command of the Army of the Potomac, and place Hooker in command, making also some important changes in other respects, principal among which were that Sumner and Fitz-John Porter were made the general-in-chief, and Sigel was ordered to the Department of Virginia.

Burnside had for weeks been aware that his entire plan of operations was denounced by some of his leading generals. While he would not charge them with any wilful disobedience of orders, he thought that they manifested an spirit which was not calculated to promote the success of the operations. He now resolved to get rid of persons whom he regarded as of no use, and to make some strong appeals to the army. He drew up a formal order dismissing from the service Hooker, the commander of a grand division under Hooker, commanding the army divisions, with Smith, Sturgis, and Ferrero, commanding army divisions, and Colonel Taylor, the acting adjutant general of Sumner's grand division. This sweeping order was drawn up with the knowledge of but two men besides the general, and was ordered to be issued. But one of these confidants, "a cool, sensible man, and a firm friend" of Burnside, intimated that while the order was just and should be issued, it transcended in some points the authority of the general. He could not dismiss an officer or hang a deserter without the express concurrence of the President; nor, moreover, by publishing the order, he would force the President to take sides in the military dispute. He sanctioned the order, his administration would incur the hostility of many influential men, friends of the dismissed officers; if he refused to sign the order, he would be impeached, and forced to resign his commanding general. Still Burnside was firmly convinced he could not retain the command unless he issued the order, with the assurance that it would be signed. Accordingly he went to Washington with the order in one hand and the resignation in the other. He told the President, "If you will say to me, 'You may take the responsibility of issuing the order, and I will sustain it,' I will take that responsibility; this is the only way by which the Army of the Potomac, otherwise here is my resignation; accept it, and here is the reason why I do not sign it as far as I am concerned." The President hesitated. He must consult his advisers. "If you consult my body," replied Burnside, "you will not sign the order." And so it proved. After deliberating for a day, the President decided to relieve Burnside from the command of the Army of the Potomac, and place Hooker in command, making also some important changes in other respects, principal among which were that Sumner and Fitz-John Porter were made the general-in-chief, and Sigel was ordered to the Department of Virginia.