

W.B. Franklin

# GEN. WILLIAM B. FRANKLIN

AND THE

## Operations of the Left Wing

AT THE

## BATTLE OF FREDERICKSBURG

DECEMBER 13, 1862

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BY JACOB L. GREENE

*Brevet Lieut.-Col. U. S. V.*



BELKNAP AND WARFIELD  
HARTFORD, CT.

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By JACOB L. GREENE

## PREFATORY

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THE origin of this paper was on this wise: Many years ago the writer came into such relations with General Franklin as to make him thoroughly aware of the extent of his possession of those qualities which make a man trustworthy under any test. This knowledge of the man led to a wondering curiosity as to the real basis of the charges against him by the Committee on the conduct of the war, of the prejudice which grew thereout and which affected the minds of many unfamiliar with the facts, or knowing them only partially and in distortion.

During the past winter the writer had occasion, in connection with another matter, to review the facts relating to the battle of Fredericksburg; and so clearly and indisputably in his own mind were the conclusions of this paper established, and so in harmony with the man's character were his actions on that day, that he could not repress the desire to set them forth in their orderly sequence of time and logical force. He was the more moved to this from the knowledge common to all who have passed through periods of war, that in every military misadventure the public is apt to believe there was some unpardonable fault, and in the hurry and rush of events, does not wait to learn fully and judge fairly, but is easily satisfied with any plausible statement bearing

the semblance of authority, and passes on to forget the old in the excitement of the new, but carrying in its mind a prejudice against the victim of the moment, fatal to justice in the present and a bar against patient hearing and fair judgment later. He knew something of the shadow of this prejudice on General Franklin's fame even among those who would have realized its injustice had they but stopped to consider the man as they knew him. And so, out of a deep personal regard, was born that which follows.

The immediate occasion of its preparation was this: Until his feeble health prevented, General Franklin was a punctual member of a small association called "The Hartford Monday Evening Club." This paper was recently written for that club. That will account for its introductory passages, which, under the circumstances and with this explanation, the writer prefers to leave unchanged.

Its reception by that club and by others knowing the facts, have suggested its possible use in more widely clearing away some unwarranted misapprehensions respecting him to whom it is most affectionately dedicated.

HARTFORD, June 19, 1900.

## GENERAL WILLIAM B. FRANKLIN AT FREDERICKSBURG.

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On the 13th day of December, 1862, the Army of the Potomac, under the command of Major-General Ambrose E. Burnside, fought the battle of Fredericksburg, and met defeat with the loss of over 12,000 men. Four months later the Congressional Committee on the conduct of the war uttered its opinion to the world that Major-General William B. Franklin was responsible for the loss of that battle in consequence of his disobedience to the orders of General Burnside. Probably no finding ever announced by that remarkable body occasioned more surprise; and none was ever more promptly and completely controverted; but it darkened the soul and marred the career of the man it falsely and infamously accused. The slow pen of history has cleared and will ever more surely clear his pure fame, and his name will stand secure among the posterities. But, for us whose lives have happily touched his through the long years since those eventful days, and to whom his rare intelligence, his dauntless heart and perfect truth and loyalty are as familiar as the constant stars, it is but a due tribute from our friendship and our faith in a manhood that we have never seen fail in any test, to read again

the story of that disastrous day, note his part and bearing therein, and the cause and the manner of that most cruel and wanton injustice: to learn how it came to be that the true patriot, the trained soldier, devoted to his profession, proud to bear its high obligations, and jealous of its honor, who won distinction on every field of action, whose wide knowledge, great skill, clear, sound judgment, and transparent sincerity made him the constant and trusted counsellor of every superior and the reliable lieutenant of every commander, who shared the brunt at Bull Run, who fought the rear-guard battles from the Chickahominy to the James, and held the pass of White Oak Swamp against half Lee's army on the critical day of Glendale, who won at Crampton's Gap "the completest victory gained up to that time by any part of the Army of the Potomac," — to learn how it came to be that this man was accused of that to which his every quality and act gave the absolute lie.

On assuming command of the Army of the Potomac, General Burnside had formed his army into three Grand Divisions, each consisting of two infantry corps and a division of cavalry. The First Grand Division, commanded by General E. V. Sumner, was composed of the 2d corps under General D. N. Couch, with Hancock, Howard, and French as division commanders, and the 9th corps under General Wilcox, with Burns, Sturgis, and Getty as division commanders. The Second Grand Division, commanded by General Joseph Hooker, was composed of the 3d corps under General Stoneman, with Birney, Sickles, and Whipple as division commanders, and the 5th corps under General But-

terfield, with Griffin, Sykes, and Humphreys as division commanders. The Third Grand Division, commanded by General William B. Franklin, was composed of the 1st corps under General Reynolds, with Doubleday, Gibbon, and Meade as division commanders, and the 6th corps under General W. F. Smith, with Brooks, Howe, and Newton as division commanders. Nearly every name in the long list was already distinguished for ability, bravery, intelligence, and efficiency.

When General Burnside took up his position on the northerly side of the Rappahannock opposite Fredericksburg, his Grand Divisions were stationed in the order of their numbering from right to left. Sumner's command fronted the town, and extending somewhat above, formed the right wing. Franklin's command fronted the heights below the town from about opposite Deep Run to Massaponax creek, and formed the left wing. Hooker's command occupied the ground between and in support of either wing. The ground on the north side of the river was high, and approached it so closely as to dominate the river plain on the southerly side until its boundary was reached in the line of heights starting from Taylor's opposite Beck's Island in a southwesterly bend of the river above, and stretching down in rear of Fredericksburg to Hamilton's on the Massaponax. The low ground in front of these heights, and on which Fredericksburg was situated, was so commanded by Burnside's numerous and well-placed artillery that it was an impracticable position for hostile troops, and available for their maneuvering only at certain and great loss.

Consequently, the Army of Northern Virginia, under General Robert E. Lee, was disposed along the line of heights, which were generally wooded, and which, in turn, commanded the same river plain or plateau. From Lee's left, opposite Sumner and directly in rear of the town, ran the line of Longstreet's corps down to and across the ravine of Deep Run, a creek heading in these heights and entering the river about a mile below the town; thence to the Massaponax, with his right resting upon it, the heights were occupied by Jackson's corps in two strongly-posted lines, with a division in reserve. Along the Massaponax, in front of and at about a right angle with Jackson's right, were the three cavalry brigades of Stuart with Pelham's artillery. Hood's division, at the head of the Deep Run ravine, was the right of Longstreet's line, and at his right A. P. Hill's division formed the first line of Jackson's position, the divisions of Early and Taliaferro formed the second line, in rear of which D. H. Hill's division was in reserve. Stuart's line took in flank any approach to Jackson's position. Jackson's front was about a mile and a half long and his position very strong, as was that of the entire Confederate line. His artillery was so massed on his right and left as to command the front and flanks of any approach, and Hood's guns were so placed as to cover the same ground. The Confederate line was generally parallel with the river and at a distance of three-quarters of a mile to a mile and a half. Between it and the river below the town runs the old Richmond stage-road, and between this road and the Confederate lines ran the railroad which passed very close to Jackson's front.

The other roads from the town, known as the Plank and Telegraph roads, passed directly to the southwest from its rear through ravines or cuts in the line of heights; and here most careful and extensive preparations had been made to repel any attack. [So strong had the position been made that it was scarcely to be hoped that an enemy would make a direct assault, and so strong did it prove that only four brigades of Longstreet's corps, two at a time, were actually engaged in its defense.] The roads over the only practicable ground in this quarter led past or to and under Marye's heights, and here was the most complete preparation and here was the struggle. [The ground to the right of these roads was so cut up by deep canals and ditches as to be impracticable for deployment or maneuvering, and any column attempting to turn Lee's left would have filed along and close under the front of his entrenched lines and exposed to annihilation.]

→ Lee had in his entire line about 78,000 men. Burnside had about 113,000, though his nominal force was larger. Lee's position and preparation far more than equalized the disparity in any front attack.]

→ [After long delay, no little hesitation and indecision, Burnside decided to cross the river and fight Lee in his position instead of maneuvering him out of it.] Burnside stated that he expected to surprise the Confederates and to fall upon them before they were ready. He had formed a plan for crossing at Skinker's Neck, some ten or twelve miles below, and his movements had caused Lee to distribute Jackson's divisions in such wise as to observe and meet any such attempt, but never

at a distance of more than eighteen miles from the point which they occupied during the battle. Longstreet's corps had long been in position and had thoroughly prepared the heights in rear of the town, while A. P. Hill of Jackson's corps was holding those below. Stuart was watchful as usual. Secret movement was difficult; and to cross an army of such size over a river by bridges to be laid, openly before the eyes of a watchful and alert and swift moving enemy, and to dispose it for attack in full strength, all with such sudden speed as should enable the attack to be delivered before that enemy could call in "Jackson's Foot Cavalry," was an enterprise which must have been inspired more by the wish than by a reasonable hope. But that seems to have been the theory on which General Burnside determined to act.

On the 10th of December, General Burnside ordered his Grand Division commanders to have the heads of their columns at designated points at daylight on the 11th, ready to begin crossing on pontoon bridges to be then thrown across. Sumner was to cross immediately in front of the town; Hooker to remain on the north side, but in instant readiness. Franklin was to cross by two bridges about two miles below.

Before daylight on the 11th Franklin was at his post, and proceeded rapidly with his work. The first bridge was completed about three o'clock. The 6th corps under General Smith had the advance. He had crossed one division when Franklin was ordered to withdraw all but one brigade and wait. Sumner had been unable to cross. Barksdale's brigade had been

stationed under cover at the river's edge, and prevented Sumner's engineers from laying the pontoons. Burnside opened a furious bombardment on the town, but as the guns could not be depressed sufficiently to reach the Mississippi men, it did not aid the crossing. Then General Hunt suggested the boats, and the 7th Michigan, followed by the 19th and 20th Massachusetts, their long time comrades, and the 89th New York, rowed across in pontoons and drove the enemy away; the bridges were built, and Howard's division and one brigade of the 9th corps were sent across during the night, and occupied the town before daylight of the 12th. But Longstreet's signal guns had sounded at 3 o'clock on the morning of the 11th, and Jackson was already moving the rest of his divisions into place. During the day of the 12th Sumner crossed the rest of Couch's 2d corps into the town, and Wilcox's 9th corps was thrown across below and put in position above Deep Run.

At daylight on the 12th Franklin crossed his Grand Division; General Smith's 6th corps, having the advance, took position at the right of the line, resting on and with one division across Deep Run, and extending along the line of the old Richmond road. Reynolds' 1st corps took position at the left of the 6th, with its own left drawn back and resting on the river. Thirty-six guns formed the *tête du pont*. A strong line of skirmishers was thrown far forward, and General Franklin and his excellent corps commanders proceeded to a careful examination of their front and of the conditions of successful attack. The defensive preparations at Marye's heights had been made in full view of

our troops, and the statements of prisoners had confirmed the opinion of careful observers that successful advance in that direction would prove exceedingly difficult and costly, if not impossible.] These conditions were well known to Franklin and his corps commanders. Therefore they considered every aspect of a main attack delivered by the Left Grand Division. From his knowledge of the conditions confronting Sumner and his study of the position in his own front, General Franklin came to the clear conclusion that the probability of success lay in his own attack in strong force fully supported.] In this opinion Smith and Reynolds fully concurred.

During that afternoon General Burnside came and examined the position with Franklin and the corps commanders. Franklin pointed out the reasons why the attack should be made from his front, and the favorable chances of success. It had been a frequent fault of commanders up to that time, that either through ignorance of the force necessary for a given piece of work, or a failure to ascertain the strength of a position, or the desire to expose to loss as small a number as possible, they had sent their men into action in dribbles, rendering their action feeble and ineffective, and incurring far greater losses than would have been suffered in a strong and successful attack. This was not a failing of Franklin's. He always carefully computed his problem and the force necessary for its certain solution, and when he struck, struck with his whole compacted strength. He now proposed that he should form his two corps for attack, and that Sickles' and Birney's divi-

sions from Hooker's Grand Division, being already near his bridges, should be sent over to support him and take care of the bridges. He would deliver his assault with about 40,000 men in one mighty thrust into Jackson's front; and he proposed to strike at daylight next morning. Burnside apparently assented to the plan. Franklin pointed out that his two corps must be relieved as soon as possible from their present positions in order to form the assaulting columns at the proper point; and that the relieving divisions should be put in position as soon as practicable. It was desirable to give to the proposed attack as much as possible of the element of suddenness, to take the place of the surprise which was no longer possible. It was therefore necessary that all movements should be made under cover of night, and the blow struck at the earliest possible moment in the morning. He therefore strongly urged that Burnside should then and there give him the orders, that not a moment might be lost in full preparation. This General Burnside declined to do until he should reach his headquarters and put his orders in writing. But he promised that the written orders should be in General Franklin's hands in two or three hours, or at any rate before midnight. Generals Reynolds and Smith were present, fully endorsing General Franklin's views and eager to do their part; and there was no doubt in the mind of either of the three that the orders definitely promised were to come. Franklin gave them their full preliminary instructions, sent word to Sickles and Birney of what was coming, and waited for his orders, "sleepless with anxiety," as well he might be with so great an operation

on his hands, for which so much preparation must be made in so short a time. No orders coming, he began asking for them over the field wire at his *tête du pont*, but without other response than the acknowledgment of the receipt of the messages and the assurance that orders were being prepared and would be sent as soon as ready. At midnight, there being not a moment more to lose if he were to attack as proposed, he sent an aid to Burnside's headquarters. He was told that the orders were being prepared and would be sent forthwith. At 3 A. M. he repeated his inquiry by the wire and received a like response. But sleeping men prepare no orders, and Franklin sat the night out without any other word.

At 7.30 on the morning of the 13th, there came to the waiting General a written order, by the hand of General Hardie, of General Burnside's staff, a competent and experienced officer, who remained with Franklin throughout the entire day, making frequent reports of every event in that part of the field.

Be it noted that Franklin's plan, submitted to and accepted by his chief, was a plan of battle. It took full account of what was in front of him; it suitably disposed a sufficient force for the blow, with its flanks guarded and its road kept open, and it had a definite and complete military result in immediate view as well as its future developments, the complete smashing and routing of Lee's right, thus placing his own wing in rear of the force back of the town which Sumner was confronting, and rendering its position untenable. It was the one possible operation on that ground. Its

success would have been decisive. Its failure threatened no overwhelming consequences, for the ground over which he must fall back was controlled by the artillery on Stafford heights.

No orders having been received, Franklin's troops still occupied the defensive and contracted position in which Burnside had left them the night before. And this was the order which General Hardie brought :

“HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF THE POTOMAC,  
December 13, 5.55 A. M.

Major-General FRANKLIN,  
Commanding Left Grand Division,  
Army of Potomac :

General Hardie will carry this dispatch to you and remain with you during the day. 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* at least, to pass below Smithfield, to seize, if possible, the heights near Captain Hamilton's, on this side of the Massaponax, taking care to keep it well supported, *and its line of retreat open*.

He has ordered another column of a division or more to be moved from General Sumner's command up the Plank road to its intersection with the Telegraph road, where they will divide, with a view to seizing the heights on both those roads. Holding these heights, with the heights near Captain Hamilton's, will, he hopes, compel the enemy to evacuate the whole ridge between these points.

He makes these moves by columns distant from each other, with the view of avoiding the possibility of a collision of our own forces, *which might occur in a general movement* during the fog. Copies of instructions given to Generals Sumner and Hooker will be forwarded to you by an orderly very soon.

*You will keep your whole command in readiness to move at once as soon as the fog lifts.* The watchword, which, if possible, should be given to every company, will be 'Scott.'

I have the honor to be, General, very respectfully,  
your obedient servant,

JOHN G. PARKE,

*Chief of Staff.*

General Smith has well pointed out, in commenting on this order, that, in military use, the word "seize" has a perfectly definite technical meaning. It means the taking of an unoccupied point, or one so weakly held as to require a small force for its occupation. For the taking of a point strongly held the word "carry" would be used. Both from his use of words in the orders to Sumner and Franklin and from the very limited force prescribed for the movements ordered, it seems an irresistible conclusion that General Burnside had no definite knowledge as to the location of his enemy's forces, still believed him unprepared, and still hoped to surprise him. He had made no examination whatever of Sumner's front.]

It is needless to say that this order did not direct the execution of Franklin's plan of battle, for which the necessary movements and dispositions of troops

would have occupied many hours, under the eyes of a watchful enemy and under the fire of his guns. In the next place, it was not a plan of battle, of a general engagement, at all. No "general movement" was to be made. A division from each wing was "to seize, if possible," two points four miles apart; and General Franklin, who was to launch one of these divisions, support it and keep its line of retreat open, was also to hold his *whole command in position* for a rapid movement down the old Richmond road. This part of the order preceded that directing the seizure of Hamilton's by a division. To be ready for the rapid movement was the fundamental condition to be constantly maintained. This precluded any idea of a general engagement of Franklin's wing. His Grand Division was not to fight as a body, but to march rapidly, and to be not in columns of attack, but in line ready to move down the road. He could obey the first part of his order only by giving to its contradictory second part a literal and strictly limited obedience. Contradictory orders can be harmonized sometimes if on the whole they disclose a plan of action which is itself a sufficient guide to action in competent hands. There was no such key here. There was to be no general movement for fear of a collision with our own men in the fog. Sumner was to seize the heights on the plank and telegraph roads, and Franklin that at Hamilton's with a division, which it was hoped would compel the enemy to evacuate the ridge between, which it certainly would not unless a great deal more than a

division occupied these distant points. It would have taken Franklin's entire command, firmly established at Hamilton's, to have compelled Jackson to evacuate the ridge. The attack by a division was utterly inadequate to the result hoped for, and the order for rapid movement precluded any more serious attack.

Clearly there was but one construction to be put upon such orders under such conditions. They revealed no plan of battle, but widely separated attempts to seize points which might be the positions from which further action could be planned according to developments. This construction Franklin and his Generals at once and unanimously put upon the orders: they deemed the operations described as a mere "armed reconnoissance." The orders described nothing else and allowed no dispositions for anything else. In this construction General Hardie concurred.

It was 7.30 in the morning when General Hardie reported to General Franklin with the foregoing order.\* Meade's division of Reynolds' corps was nearest the designated point of attack, and he was at once ordered to the assault, supported by Gibbon's division on the right and Doubleday's on the left. Ten minutes after Hardie delivered his order, he wired his chief:

\* The copy of this order which General Hardie brought was his own; the copy for General Franklin followed by an orderly about an hour later. Immediately on his arrival General Hardie exhibited his copy to Franklin who read it, as did his corps commanders, Generals Smith and Reynolds, and proceeded instantly to its execution.

"HEADQUARTERS FRANKLIN'S GRAND DIVISION,  
December 13, 7.40 A. M.

GENERAL BURNSIDE —

General Meade's division is to make the movement from our left; but it is just reported that the enemy's skirmishers are advancing, indicating an attack upon our position on the left."

Stuart was up and doing.

From its bearing on the all-important question of the construction of the orders received by General Franklin, the phraseology of this report is to be carefully noted. It is not the *movement of our left*, as indicating a general or main attack, or even a change of general position. It is a "movement *from* our left." Its only suggestion is of a partial, tentative reaching out from a fixed position: a reconnoissance by a division.

A good deal of clearing away of fences and bridging of ditches for the passage of artillery had to be done, but at 9 o'clock General Hardie wired General Burnside:

"9 A. M.

General Meade just moved out. Doubleday supports him. Meade's skirmishers engaged, however, at once with enemy's skirmishers. Battery opening, on Meade probably, from position on old Richmond road."

His surmise was correct. Meade formed for the attack on a line parallel with the old Richmond road, with Doubleday in rear of his left. No sooner did he begin the advance than his skirmishers were briskly engaged, and Stuart's artillery, posted on the old Rich-

mond road, opened on his line, enfilading it, and his troops advanced to attack Meade in flank. This compelled a halt until Pelham's guns could be silenced and Doubleday's division could be deployed to the left, across the old Richmond road, to push back Stuart's forces and hold them so, which he promptly accomplished. Again Meade advanced, and now the artillery massed on Jackson's right and left, and Hood's guns to the left of Jackson's, opened on both his flanks and front. Evidently there was to be no "seizing" Hamilton's heights without a struggle. Our guns at once made it a duel, and after a long and severe contest silenced the enemy's batteries. The great display of strength by Jackson opposing Meade's advance and threatening Franklin's left, and the continuing necessity of keeping his whole command in readiness for the rapid movement, presented contingencies to be thoroughly guarded against, and so Sickles' and Birney's divisions from Stoneman's corps of Hooker's command were ordered over to be placed, if need be, in support of Reynolds' corps. At 11 o'clock Hardie wired Burnside:

" 11 o'clock, A. M.

Meade advanced half a mile and holds on. Infantry of enemy in woods in front of extreme left, also in front of Howe. No loss of great importance. General Vinton badly but not dangerously wounded."

Where there was so much artillery there was sure to be plenty of infantry, but as yet it was for the most part lying quiet in the woods on the heights, waiting its time. But before finishing this dispatch, events

caused a delay in its completion, and it was finished as follows :

“ Later — *Reynolds has been forced to develope his whole line [i. e., his entire corps].* An attack of some force of enemy's troops on our left seems probable, as far as can now be judged. *Stoneman has been directed to cross one division to support our left [Birney's].* Report of cavalry pickets from the other side of the river, that enemy's troops were moving down the river on this side during the latter part of the night. Howe's pickets reported movements in their front, same direction. Still they have a strong force well posted, with batteries there.”

That statement was presently fully proven, and the movements observed during the night were Jackson's divisions getting into position along a temporary road which Lee had made along the ridge for quick connection along his line.

When the enemy's batteries had been silenced, our artillery proceeded to shell the woods in Meade's front to prepare his attack ; and at 12 o'clock Hardie wired :

“ 12 o'clock, M.

Birney's division is now getting into position. That done, Reynolds will order Meade to advance. Batteries over the river are to shell the enemy's position in front of Reynolds' left. He thinks the effect will be to protect Meade's advance. A column of the enemy's infantry is passing along the crest of the hills from right to left as we look at it.”

Five minutes later Meade was again moving to the assault, and Hardie wired :

“ 12.05 P. M.

General Meade's line is advancing in the direction you prescribed this morning.”

There was no longer doubt of what was in front. Infantry and artillery opened at once on Meade, and he was hotly engaged. But he pressed on, crossed the railroad, entered the woods, broke through the first line, A. P. Hill's division, thrusting between the brigades of Lane and Archer, taking them in flank and forcing them to give way, and pushing on until he struck the second line of defence. Here he was strongly resisted, and the enemy began to envelop both his flanks with superior numbers, and Gibbon had failed to keep connection with his right or to effectively support, owing both to the difficult nature of the ground and his own heavy fighting. Both Meade and Gibbon were compelled to fall back. Birney's division relieved Meade, and Sickles' division relieved Gibbon, and Newton's division of Smith's corps was placed in support. Jackson reformed his broken lines and moved to the counter attack ; but was brought to a stand in front of Birney and Sickles ; but the fighting was severe until late in the afternoon.

General Hardie's dispatch at 12.05 P. M., last quoted, reported Meade's final advance to the assault. The events just summarized were successively reported by him as follows :

“ 1 o'clock, P. M.

Enemy opened a battery on Reynolds, enfilading Meade. Reynolds has opened all his batteries on it ;

no report yet. Reynolds hotly engaged at this moment ; will report in a few minutes again."

The hostile lines had come to grips, and Meade was pushing on. Fifteen minutes later Hardie wired :

" 1.15 o'clock P. M.

Heavy engagements of infantry. Enemy in force where battery is. Meade is assaulting the hill ; will report in a few minutes again."

Ten minutes later he wired again :

" 1.25 o'clock P. M.

Meade is in the woods in his front ; seems to be able to hold on. Reynolds will push Gibbon in if necessary. The battery and woods referred to must be near Hamilton's house. The infantry fire is prolonged and quite heavy. Things look well enough. Men in fine spirits."

Fifteen minutes later he reported :

" 1.40 P. M.

Meade having carried a portion of the enemy's position in the woods, we have three hundred prisoners. Enemy's batteries on extreme left retired. Tough work ; men fight well. Gibbon has advanced to Meade's right ; men fight well, driving the enemy. Meade has suffered severely. Doubleday to Meade's left not engaged."

This dispatch was sent at the moment of the height of Meade's success, and when having suffered heavy losses, and finding himself in danger of being enveloped, and unable to "seize" the heights, he was compelled to use that line of retreat which Franklin had been ordered

to keep open, with Jackson's line pressing the counter charge. At a quarter past two, he had to report :

“ 2¼ o'clock P. M.

Gibbon and Meade driven back from the woods. Newton (from Smith's corps) gone forward. Jackson's corps of the enemy attacks on the left. General Gibbon slightly wounded. General Bayard mortally wounded by a shell. [Bayard fell by Franklin's side.] Things do not look well on Reynolds' front, still we'll have new troops in soon.”

Birney and Sickles had formed their divisions in the positions from which Meade and Gibbon had advanced to the final assault, and as these battered troops fell back, the fresh divisions stood immovable against Jackson's attack, which was prolonged, and finally drove him back to the woods.

During all this time Brooks' and Howe's divisions, of Smith's 6th corps, were under severe artillery fire, with infantry fighting with Law's command, and constant heavy skirmishing.

Bearing in mind the situation at the left at quarter past two, with a command ordered to be in constant readiness for a rapid movement on the road, in presumed furtherance of some plan of action unknown to the commander of the left wing, turn for a moment to the right where Couch, French, Hancock, Howard, Humphreys, Getty, Sykes, and “Fighting Joe Hooker” essayed to “seize” Marye's Heights.

On the morning of the 13th, General Sumner had been ordered by General Burnside to send a division, supported by a second, strongly flanked with skirmish-

ers, along the direction of the Plank and Telegraph roads to seize the heights in rear of the town. He directed Couch with his 2d corps to execute the order. Placing Howard's division to the right to prevent an attempt to occupy the upper part of the town, Couch ordered French to form his division for the advance and Hancock to follow. At ten o'clock all was ready, and by eleven the advance began. The ground was much cut up by canals and ditches, and made a very difficult field of operation. At 12 o'clock French became fully engaged. At one, French and Hancock were ordered to storm the heights over the ground so covered by the enemy's guns that his chief of artillery said of it, "I will rake it as with a fine-tooth comb. A chicken can't live on that field when I open fire on it." Along its front, close under the heights, ran the sunken road with its stone wall facing our men, filled with infantry in four ranks, the front rank firing and stepping to the rear to load while the next took its place. The men went as far as men could go, and stopped only at the point beyond which none could live. Howard's division took up the assault and made the same great endeavor. Sturgis' division of the 9th corps made the assault from the left to find the same dead-line.\*

\* A strong side light on General Burnside's physical and mental condition and his consequent fitness or unfitness at the time to either plan or conduct a great military undertaking involving a serious engagement, is afforded by the statements of one of his staff, who writes:— "[For some days previous to the battle Burnside showed evidences of great nervous exhaustion, and on the day of the battle, during the most serious hours of the fight, he was obliged to give up to this feeling and retire for a time.] In a foot-note to this paragraph he says:—"About midday of the 13th the author was at general headquarters at the Phil-

And now Hooker was ordered to the work with Butterfield's 5th corps, with Griffin, Sykes, and Humphreys' divisions. He rode to the front, examined the ground, conferred with the gallant veterans who had left so many of their devoted men upon it, and sent a staff officer to report that, in his judgment, successful assault was impossible, and to ask that the order might be recalled. Burnside insisted. Then Hooker did one of the bravest acts of his brave life. He took his reputation in his hand and rode back to Burnside and urged him to countermand his orders. Burnside simply said, "Those heights must be carried this afternoon"; and Hooker returned, and sent in his divisions as ordered, the gallant Humphreys charging last, with the bayonet only and without a shot, leading his men on foot, maintaining the impossible effort until Hooker felt, to use his own words, that he had lost "about as many men as he was ordered to sacrifice."

The repulse of Meade, already described, occurred at just the same time as that of Couch's last assaults; and while Meade and Gibbon were falling back and Birney and Sickles were moving to meet Jackson's rush, and up on the right Hooker was preparing the last desperate attack, at 2.25 P. M., General Franklin received his

lips House, and while waiting there went up into the attic, where a view of the battle raging on the other side of the river could be had. While absorbed in watching the panorama stretched out before me, I heard a step, and on looking around saw General Burnside. He said that he was so 'dead with sleep that he had come up there for a quiet nap,' and his appearance confirmed his remark. I left at once, and did not see him again during the day, as I crossed the river immediately afterwards."

first communication from General Burnside since the order by the hand of General Hardie at 7.30 in the morning. This was a written order stating that the "*instructions of the morning were so far modified as to require an advance upon the heights immediately in my front.*"

General Hardie at once wired :

" 2.25 P. M.

Despatch received. Franklin will do his best."

About 3 o'clock, General Franklin received a verbal message from General Burnside by a staff officer, "that General Sumner's troops were being hard pressed, with a request to make a diversion in his favor if I could. To this I responded that I would do my best." At this moment Jackson had been stopped, and Hardy reported :

" 3 o'clock P. M.

Reynolds seems to be holding his own. Things look somewhat better."

The work of the day so far had fully demonstrated that there was a heavy force of infantry and artillery along Franklin's entire front, with three brigades of cavalry with artillery up against his left under Doubleday, whose report shows a hard and successful day's work. Every part of his line had been under more or less pressure, and when Meade and Gibbon had undertaken to penetrate, not only had they been repulsed with great loss, but the enemy had come promptly on after, and was being held back only by steady fighting. In consequence of the orders under which he had been

until now required to act, his command was strung out from across Deep Run to near the Massaponax. Two of his divisions had suffered severely and could be called upon again only in case of absolute necessity. Two more had had heavy fighting, though not yet exhausted. Four brigades of Lee's had abundantly sufficed to take care of Marye's heights ; he had had to move no troops up from his right, and was rather in a position to strengthen Jackson's hand if need be. To attack the heights in his immediate front, and which stretched along its entire length, Franklin must either advance his line as it stood against a strong position with a nearly equal number of men behind breastworks, which would have been slaughter, or, to mass his troops so as to attack strongly and with any hope of success at any given point, which meant long delay for the necessary movements, he must strip his line elsewhere, which would have given the enemy his chance to break through, take him in rear, and reach his bridges. And he knew he could not effectively attack without at least as strong a column as that which he had at first proposed to his commander.

Meantime, Jackson from his position of advantage, determined to make a general assault on Franklin. D. H. Hill's division of infantry was moved from the right rear and formed across the Old Richmond road, adding his force to Stuart's already confronting Doubleday. Law on his left engaged Howe and Brooks ; and at 3.40 Hardie wired :

“ 3.40 P. M.

Gibbon's and Meade's divisions are badly used up,

and I fear another advance on the enemy on our left cannot be made this afternoon. Doubleday's division will replace Meade as soon as it can be collected, and if it be done in time of course another attack will be made. The enemy are in force in the woods on our left towards Hamilton's, and are threatening the safety of that portion of our line. They seem to have detached a portion of their force to our front, where Howe and Brooks are now engaged. Brooks has some prisoners and is down to the railroad. Just as soon as the left is safe, our forces here will be prepared for a front attack, but it may be too late this afternoon. Indeed, we are engaged in front anyhow. Notwithstanding the unpleasant items I relate, the morale generally of the troops is good."

The short winter day was near ending. When Jackson had made ready, he opened his attack, advancing his artillery and infantry. Franklin's batteries, joined by De Russy's across the river, opened a tremendous fire, his lines were again adjusted and firm, the hour was very late, and Jackson wisely withdrew to his entrenchments. It was this beginning of an assault which General Hardie reported in his last dispatch :

"4.30 o'clock P. M.

The enemy is still in force on our left and front. An attack on our batteries in front has been repulsed, a new attack has just been opened on our left, but the left is safe, though it is too late to advance either to the left or front."

The last charge of Hooker's divisions against Marye's

Heights had spent itself before the impossible stone wall. Fredericksburg was done. [Over 12,500 of our men were killed, wounded, and missing. Franklin's part of the loss was 4,962; but Jackson had paid with 5,364.]

On the right the attempt to "seize" the heights with a division had developed into a succession of desperate assaults with fearful loss, ending in complete repulse. On the left, where there was room to maneuver and to mass a sufficient force for successful attack, and with the men to accomplish it had the necessary orders been allowed in time, the whole force was held in line until late in the winter day, under orders for a rapid movement which never came, confronted in all its length by a nearly equal and strongly posted force prepared and eager to grasp any advantage, while the movement of a division from the left had resulted in the exhaustion of two divisions, with the enemy held in check only by the help of two additional divisions from Stoneman's corps.

→ [The order given Franklin paralyzed his line for a strong offensive; and the tentative action ordered and the force ordered for it were insufficient to ensure aught but defeat.] But it was all as ordered.

→ After the troops had recrossed the river, General Burnside said to General W. F. Smith "that he had it in mind to relieve Sumner from command, place Hooker in arrest, and Franklin in command of the army." [In a little later interview with both Smith and Reynolds, he said: "I made a mistake in my order to Franklin; I should have directed him to carry the hill at Hamilton's at all hazards." That is to say, he should have ordered

Franklin to carry out his own plan, in which Smith and Reynolds fully concurred, and given him the means to do so and the time to prepare. In a still later interview, he said the mistake was in Franklin's not getting the order soon enough. That he started it at 4 o'clock, but Hardie delayed for breakfast. The order was dated by General Parke at 5.55. This was but the beginning of afterthoughts.

Throughout the six weeks following, General Burnside continued to give General Franklin his entire confidence; and so far from blaming or suggesting any failure to correctly interpret or execute his orders, assured him that he was the only general officer who held up his hands. And in the movement which he planned to initiate by turning Fredericksburg above, and which ended in the "Mud Campaign," Franklin in command of his Grand Division was assigned his due important part. That campaign ended, the army sat down to wait.

All hope of successful action in the near future being now gone, the consciousness of distrust and the demoralization of his army seems to have made General Burnside's position intolerable to himself, and he took a step so extraordinary as to indicate a state of mind near desperation.\* For six weeks he had accepted the re-

[\* It is well known, and it is due to General Burnside to say, that he accepted the command of the Army of the Potomac with great reluctance, after having previously declined it, and was fully sensible of his own incapacity for such a responsibility.] Very early on the morning after he took over the command his chief of staff, General Parke, signaled to General Franklin, whose headquarters were five miles away, to come at once to General Burnside. Franklin found Burnside still in bed and

sponsibility for the ill-planned, ill-handled, desperate attack at Fredericksburg, and recognized the undoubted ability and faithfulness of his subordinates and the magnificent courage and steadiness of his troops. He had repeatedly assured Franklin of his confidence and his gratitude for his soldierly loyalty. Suddenly all was changed. His first act after the Mud Campaign was the preparation of an order dismissing from the army Generals Hooker, Brooks, Cochrane, and Newton, and relieving from command Generals Franklin, W. F. Smith, Sturgis, Ferrero, and Colonel Taylor. This he took in person to the President, and demanded its approval or the acceptance of his resignation. He made no charges of incompetency, disobedience, or failure in duty, but only a lack of confidence in himself. His order was not approved, but his resignation was accepted and Hooker placed in command. Sumner and

greatly depressed. He dwelt upon his own unfitness and Franklin's fitness for the chief command, and shed tears over the difficulties of his position. Franklin soothed and encouraged him in every way possible, and when they were ready to ride along the lines sent one of his own staff officers ahead with instructions to different commanding officers that on Burnside's approach the troops should make demonstrations of welcome. These instructions were carried out, and the new commander was vigorously cheered wherever he passed, and presently recovered his spirits.

After the battle General Burnside summoned his grand division and corps commanders to discuss plans for further action. To them he proposed that he should take personal command of the Ninth Corps—his old command—and lead it the next day to the assault of Marye's Heights. The remonstrances of his generals, however, prevailed. After the conference General Sumner stated to several of those present that the men had lost all confidence in General Burnside's ability to lead the army.

Franklin, being his seniors in rank, were relieved of their commands.\*

Soon after the battle of Fredericksburg, the Committee on the Conduct of the War began investigating the causes of defeat. Six days after the battle General Burnside wrote General Halleck, describing his plan of action as it was fought: "I discovered that he (the enemy) did not anticipate the crossing of our whole force at Fredericksburg, and I hoped, by rapidly throwing the whole command over at that place, to separate

\* During the interval between the Mud Campaign and General Burnside's relief from command, there occurred one of the most singular incidents of a period nowise lacking in the startling and inexplicable. It is detailed fully in the published correspondence between Generals Franklin, Halleck, Smith, and Brooks. The substance of it is this: Early in January, 1863, General Burnside visited Washington, and on his return to the army, stated to a large number of his general officers that he had seen the President and had verbally recommended to him the acceptance of his (Burnside's) resignation, and the removal of Stanton and Halleck for the reason that all three had lost the confidence of the country; that following this conversation he returned to his hotel and put his propositions in a letter addressed to the President and which he placed in his hands; that the President said that he could not think of accepting his resignation, and asked him if he had any objection to going to Secretary Stanton and General Halleck and making his statements in their presence; that he replied in the negative and that they then went together to the War Department and saw the Secretary and the General-in-Chief, and he reiterated his statements to them without response on their part; that he had also made the same statement to the then Assistant Secretary of War, Mr. Tucker.

The emphatic and comprehensive denials of Secretary Stanton and General Halleck, the entire absence from the correspondence, papers, and memoranda of Mr. Lincoln, and the fact that he never alluded to any such incident in anything ever written or said by him to those in closest and most constant personal and official touch through all his after life are proof conclusive that General Burnside's story voiced nothing more than a possible desire which he never ventured to gratify.

by a vigorous attack the forces of the enemy on the river below *from the forces behind and on the crest in rear of the town*, in which case we could fight him with great advantage in our favor. For this we had to gain a height on the extreme right of the crest which commanded a new road lately made by the enemy." This "height on the extreme right of the crest" was Marye's Heights. This plan would fully account for his making the main assault at Marye's Heights. Its purpose was to "separate" Lee's left in rear of the town from his right below it, and then fight it to advantage.\*

Gen B  
Plan

The only plan disclosed in the orders to Sumner and Franklin was the hope expressed that seizure of Marye's with a division by Sumner and of Hamilton's with a division by Franklin would "compel the enemy to evacuate the whole ridge between these points." If he formed the plan set forth to Halleck, it must have been done after the battle began.

But to the Committee on the Conduct of the War General Burnside said: "The enemy had cut a road along in the rear of the line of heights where we made our attack, by means of which they connected the two

\* In a note to the author written after reading this paper, General W. F. Smith says:—"Burnside told me of his change of plan from Skinker's Neck back to Fredericksburg, and showed me what splendid positions he had for his reserve artillery, 'which had never had a chance during the war.' I said, 'you can force a passage at almost any point, but look at those hills, Marye's Heights.' Burnside said, 'I know where Lee's forces are, and I will take those hills by surprise before Lee can occupy them.' Forty-eight hours elapsed before we moved, and yet the same movements were made as if for a surprise."

General Smith also says:—"Couch protested against a front attack and recommended a turning movement on Lee's left."

wings of their army and avoided a long detour around through a bad country. . . . I wanted to obtain possession of that new road, and that was my reason for making an attack on the extreme left. *I did not intend to make the attack on the right until that position had been taken*, which I supposed would stagger the enemy, cutting their line in two, and then I proposed to make a direct attack on their front and drive them out of their works." This is another plan of action, and one requiring for its accomplishment just the sort of attack which Franklin had begged to be allowed to make and been denied, instead of an attempt to "seize" a point with one division, with its road out kept carefully open. General Burnside says that he held Sumner's command in position until after eleven o'clock in the hope that Franklin would make such an impression on the enemy as would enable Sumner to carry his point of assault; and that when he ordered Sumner to attack, he supposed "that General Franklin's attack on the left would have been made before General Sumner's men would be engaged, and would have caused the enemy to weaken his forces in front of Sumner, and I therefore hoped to break through their lines at this point. It subsequently appeared that this attack had not been made at the time General Sumner moved." General Palfrey well says: "There is one short and painful criticism to be made upon this statement. It cannot be true." The reports from General Hardie to his chief, which I have given in their order, kept General Burnside constantly and fully informed of everything transpiring in Franklin's part of the field, and he knew the

significance of every item of the information. He knew how promptly the movement was begun, each check it received, and each step of its slow and hard advance to the final defeat, and the difficult resistance which filled out the rest of the day.\*

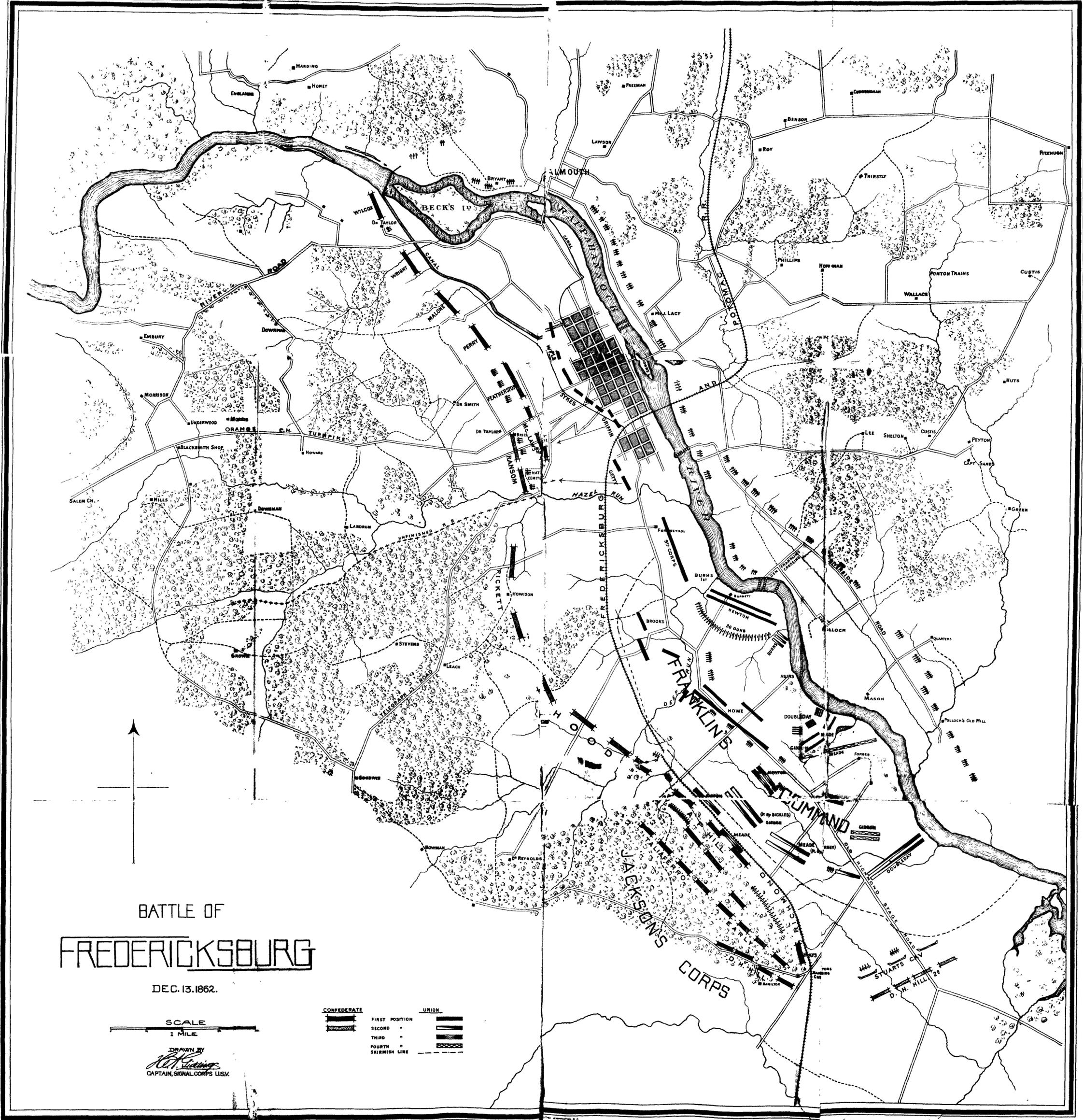
\* It is worth while to analyze the several conceptions of possible and of actual action entertained by General Burnside at different points of time, before, during, and after the battle, and which were harmonized neither by the battle itself, nor by his orders or subsequent narrations.

First, a surprise: He expected to take Marye's Heights before Lee could occupy them. Doing this with his right wing, placing his left wing below as he did, he would have been in such a position that each Sumner and Franklin could have taken in flank any attack made on the other, with Hooker free to add weight to either blow.

Second, the actual tentative scheme developed in his orders to Sumner and Franklin, each to "seize" with a division, if possible, points on the extreme right and left, so as to shake out whatever force might lie between. These orders, in presence of so great an army as Lee's and so commanded, could have been based on nothing else than the hope of a more or less complete surprise, or, at worst, an encounter with an enemy so unprepared and so illy disposed as to offer no considerable resistance. These orders met only one possible condition: that either Lee was not on those heights at all, or he had not had time to occupy them in sufficient strength properly disposed.

Third, the plan outlined to General Halleck, which involves the clear recognition of Lee's whole force in the positions it actually occupied, and the purpose, by gaining Marye's Heights, to cut his line in two at that point, defeating each section in detail afterward. This plan would seem to have occurred to him after the attempts "to seize" right and left had failed. Nothing else can account for his sending six divisions successively against Marye's Heights with such appalling loss in each from the outset, and especially for his orders to Hooker in spite of the latter's protest, after a personal examination of the ground and a conference with French and Hancock in sight of their dead and wounded: ground on which Burnside had never set foot.

Fourth, the plan stated to the Committee on the Conduct of the War: that he did not intend to attack on the right until Franklin had attacked on the left, "which I supposed would stagger the enemy, cutting their line in two, and then I proposed to make a direct attack on their front and drive them out of their works." This was not what was



# BATTLE OF FREDERICKSBURG

DEC. 13, 1862.



DRAWN BY  
*W. H. S. ...*  
CAPTAIN, SIGNAL CORPS U.S.A.

CONFEDERATE		UNION	
	FIRST POSITION		UNION
	SECOND "		UNION
	THIRD "		UNION
	FOURTH "		UNION
	SKIRMISH LINE		UNION

