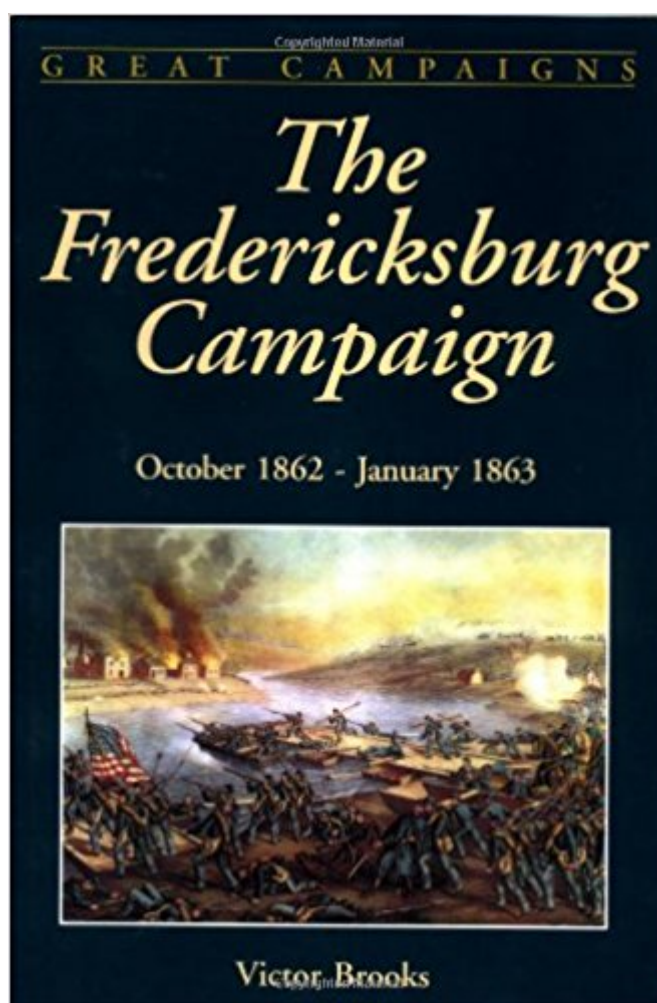


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The Fredericksburg Campaign : October 1862-January 1863 (Great Campaigns Series) (Great Campaigns Of The Civil War)



Synopsis

No other general on either side of the American Civil War had the opportunity to end the war in a single day that Union General Ambrose Burnside had on December 12, 1862. Burnside's plan to cross the Rappahannock River and surprise Robert E. Lee's overextended Army of Northern Virginia was a brilliant one, perhaps the boldest stroke conceived during the war. Unfortunately, the plan for a river crossing in winter was overly ambitious, and Burnside was one of the unluckiest generals of the war. Delays in the river crossing allowed the Confederates to occupy strong positions on a slope above the Rappahannock. What followed bore more resemblance to the doomed assaults of World War I than to a Civil War battle, as Burnside refused to call off the attack and fed more troops into the slaughter. James Longstreet's Confederates on the heights were more sorely pressed than was apparent to the Northerners, and feared they would run out of bullets before they had run out of targets. This tragic engagement is now best known for the gallant charge of the North's Irish Brigade and Joshua Chamberlain's somber account of his close brush with death. In the familiar Great Campaigns fashion, Victor Brooks' dramatic text is supplemented by sidebars on aspects of the campaign, a complete order of battle and specially commissioned maps.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Victor Brooks teaches at Villanova University and is the author of several books (available from Da Capo), including *The Normandy Campaign* and *The Boston Campaign*. He lives in Pennsylvania.

This title in the GREAT CAMPAIGNS series released in 2000, is still the best introduction for the Campaign and Battle of Fredericksburg, Virginia, fought on December 13, 1862. Concise and to the point (245 pages text/252 pages total), easy to read and understand, the book describes the events that took place in the Eastern Theater of The American Civil War from October 1862 - January 1863 between the United States Army of the Potomac led by Major General Ambrose E. Burnside, and the Confederate States Army of Northern Virginia commanded by Robert E. Lee. The text is complimented by 26 informative sidebars that give short bios for the generals of both armies and more detailed information on different aspects of the troops involved, both sides governments and the town of Fredericksburg. Five good maps help the reader follow the campaign, initial positions of both sides forces after the Union forces crossed the Rappahannock river (Dec 11 -12), the Union assault on the Confederate right at Prospect Hill and the Union assaults on Marye's Heights (Dec 13), and Burnside's ill fated Mud March (Jan 1863). Also included are a Guide for the Interested Reader for further reading and an Order of Battle for both armies. More than fifty photos and illustrations compliment the text. The book puts equal amounts of blame on the tardy Union pontoon train, Burnside's ambiguous written attack orders, and Union Major General William Franklin's understrength attack on the Confederate position on Prospect Hill. On the negative side, the book has no Notes and no Bibliography. Also, the book could have used maps detailing the Union bridging of the Rappahannock in front of Fredericksburg (Dec 11) and the Confederate defense of the town and the impromptu Union amphibious assault to clear out the defenders. More detailed maps of the various Union assaults during the battle would also be an improvement. Overall, this is a great book to begin learning about this Civil War battle and the personalities involved.

With Christmas season soon approaching, thoughts of home and a warm cozy spot by the fire may have surpassed any thoughts of war. Longing perhaps for a slice of Mother's homemade pie or a brief letter from home describing the latest events, men, many cold, hungry, and miserable went about their duties awaiting orders from their commanders. This terrible conflict showed no sign of ending and with the onset of colder weather, men dug in around Fredericksburg and waited. Both armies watching for signs of advance, until that fateful moment when General Ambrose E. Burnside, the unluckiest commander of the Civil War, took charge and laid forth a plan to cross the Rappahannock. This complex plan if followed accordingly, would surprise General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and bring a swift end to the escalating conflict. However, crossing the river in the midst of winter became a logistical nightmare and the delaying actions caused by the weather allowed Lee's troops to occupy strong positions overlooking the town such as Marye's

Heights. Union men were sent into battle as if lambs led to the slaughter. Lead flew through the air like hoards of locusts during a plague, mowing down men where they stood. Bodies piled up and the living took refuge behind walls of once living flesh. Thumps of bullets could be heard as they entered the bloody makeshift walls as those clinging to life on the "killing ground" cried out for help. Burnside sent wave after wave of men to their death and even tried to rally his commanders by claiming he would personally lead men to the fight and win the day! He was finally persuaded to call off the attack with many of his troops lying on the cold bloody earth for the night. The cries of the dying intermixed with the hoarse prayers of those passing from this earth. As one begins reading this work you begin to realize that more editing was needed before publication. The opening chapter of the book does a pretty good job of detailing the aftermath of Antietam. It gives a good account of the 118th Pennsylvania and their slaughter at Shepherdstown, and how the Rebel forces pushed them back across the Potomac. However, the 118th was not there - it was the 116th Pennsylvania, better known as the Corn Regiment from Philadelphia. This is not to say that the entire book is filled with errors, the detail and research that went into battle statistics were in good order but to miss the proper labeling of the regiment so early in the work is somewhat disturbing. Thorough editing would have picked up that key fact; alas it was not done. The author does a good job in bringing the details of battle to light and carries the reader through the book at a nice pace without dulling the facts or swamping the reader with too much military tactics. The maps are easy to follow and the sidebars on the commanders are informative. I found the book to be enjoyable, but would like to see the book re-edited and hopefully brought back out in amended form. As is, it's adequate for those interested in the Fredericksburg Campaign and will do fine as a secondary source to primary source material.

This book is the most informative and comprehensive book on the Battle of Fredericksburg, the bloody Bunker Hill of the American Civil War. A must have for any Civil War Library.

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