

DECISIVE TERRAIN: THE CIVIL WAR

The Civil War spilled into the Rappahannock valley in the Spring of 1862. In March of that year, Major General George B. McClellan moved his Army of the Potomac to the peninsula between the York and James Rivers. His intent was to capture Richmond and end the war. Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston hurried his army south to meet this threat. Into this void arrived a Union corps, under Major General Irvin McDowell, which occupied Falmouth in April.

The armies inevitably gravitated to the north-south corridor through Fredericksburg as it was the most direct route between the two warring capitals. The Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad also served as the logical conduit for the logistics necessary to sustain concentrated armies in the field.

McDowell's Federal force occupied Fredericksburg briefly, but was soon drawn to the west to help crush Major General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's forces in the Shenandoah Valley. During a 30-day period in May-June, Jackson outmarched and outfought his several adversaries there. He then brought his troops to Richmond to assist the renamed Army of Northern Virginia, under its new commander General Robert E. Lee. Together they would push McClellan back from Richmond's doorstep.

McDowell's corps was eventually merged into the newly created Army of Virginia commanded by Major General John Pope. In July, while Lee and McClellan faced each other on the Virginia Peninsula, elements of this new army probed toward Culpeper, Orange, and Madison Court Houses. Pope then advanced further south toward the Rapidan, planning to capture Gordonsville. Lee, in the meantime, had neutralized McClellan's massive force and sent Stonewall Jackson back to the Rappahannock Valley to counter Pope's movements. Of critical concern was the rail junction at Gordonsville which connected to Richmond via the Virginia Central Railroad. In August, after some initial sparring, Jackson attacked one of Pope's brigades, under Major General Nathaniel P. Banks, at Cedar Mountain.

Jackson was soon followed by the rest of Lee's forces and the Army of Northern Virginia soon opened what became the Second Manassas Campaign. The contending armies moved away from the Rappahannock basin, fought at Manassas and met again along Antietam Creek near Sharpsburg, Maryland. The Army of the Potomac, having absorbed Pope's Army of Virginia, moved south from Maryland in pursuit of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. The corridor of operations was once again along a rail corridor, the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. McClellan was extremely reluctant to bring on a battle, however, and on November 7th, President Abraham Lincoln appointed Major General Ambrose E. Burnside to command the Army of the Potomac.

Burnside soon abandoned the Union advance along the Orange & Alexandria. On 15 November, he began to move his operations to Fredericksburg where his troops could be supplied by ships at Aquia Landing and then by the U.S. Military Railroad, using the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac right of way to Fredericksburg. In December, Burnside forced a crossing of the Rappahannock at Fredericksburg and laid pontoon bridges at three locations. The subsequent battle proved catastrophic to Union forces, though, and a few days later the Army of the Potomac retreated from the wrecked town.

In January 1863, Burnside sought to redeem himself and ordered a march upstream to flank the Confederates out of their Fredericksburg position by crossing at Bank's Ford. This movement began on January 19th, but a cold rain soon turned the roads to mud and the Union advance stalled. The troops struggled to extract themselves from the quagmire, to the taunts of Confederate soldiers on the other side of the river, and this ill-fated movement soon collapsed. Burnside was relieved of command shortly thereafter and his successor, Major General Joseph T. Hooker, began the process of rebuilding the demoralized troops into a fighting force for further campaigns in the spring.

During the long winter months, the contending cavalry remained active. In February, Confederate Brigadier General Fitzhugh Lee raided Union cavalry outposts near Hartwood Church. Hooker authorized his cavalry commander Major General George Stoneman to respond, and in March one of Stoneman's divisions forced a crossing of the Rappahannock at Kelly's Ford to confront the southern horse soldiers at Culpeper Court House. During a fluid battle that rolled across the landscape, the Union cavalrymen held their own against General J.E.B. Stuart's superb Confederate horsemen. It was during this engagement that the young artilleryist John Pelham was mortally wounded.

While cavalry operations became increasingly aggressive, the Union Army worked to revise its logistics doctrine to enhance its capability to operate beyond a supply depot fed by a railroad. By carefully specifying the equipment and rations to be carried by wagons, by the troops themselves, as well as by mules, the Federals planned to increase their tactical mobility and range of operations. During the ensuing Chancellorsville Campaign, Hooker proved the utility of the new doctrine. In late April, he sent several corps far upstream to cross the Rappahannock River at Kelly's Ford. These units then swung south to cross the Rapidan at Germanna and Ely's Fords, placing a formidable Federal force on the same side of the River as Lee. Federal columns subsequently moved south along the River and uncovered U.S. Ford, across which additional troops poured. Another column advanced along River Road toward Bank's Ford.

While Hooker had been able to effectively rebuild the Army of the Potomac and

improve its operational capabilities, he mismanaged this potent force once he had brought it to battle. The capable Lee exploited this weakness and boldly maneuvered to destroy the invading force. His success in doing so is all the more impressive because he had only a portion of his army present. Confederate logistic constraints had forced Lee to detach two divisions of General James Longstreet's corps so they could find adequate subsistence near Suffolk. By the time the entire Army of Northern Virginia was on hand, Hooker had fled back across the Rappahannock.

Following his overwhelming though costly victory at Chancellorsville (casualties included Stonewall Jackson), Lee made plans to take his Army of Northern Virginia into Maryland and Pennsylvania. He sought to obtain supplies, horses, and transport outside of Virginia while also maneuvering for military gain. Hooker heard rumors that such an offensive was imminent and alerted his cavalry to the need for additional reconnaissance. The Army of the Potomac's mounted arm, now under the command of Major General Alfred Pleasonton, moved out of Falmouth on 8 June and headed upstream toward Culpeper. The next day, the blue-clad troopers splashed across both Beverly's and Kelly's Fords and initiated an action that became known as the Battle of Brandy Station. Once again, the Union horse soldiers held their own against Stuart's troopers. They also confirmed that the Confederates had abandoned their lines at Fredericksburg and were moving north. The scene of action again shifted away from the Rappahannock valley, this time to roads that eventually led to Gettysburg.

A new Union commander, Major General George G. Meade achieved victory at Gettysburg, but fighting in Virginia did not immediately resume. After Lee's retreat from Pennsylvania, the two armies paused to recover from their ordeal. Lee had moved back to Culpeper while Meade followed, but remained north of the Rappahannock. In September, however, Lee sent Longstreet with two divisions to Tennessee. Meade learned of this reduction in strength and soon advanced on Culpeper. Lee withdrew behind the Rapidan, but in early October two of Meade's corps were ordered to Chattanooga, Tennessee, following the Union defeat at Chickamauga (where Longstreet and his divisions had helped attain victory). Lee responded to the loss in Union strength by advancing back into Culpeper. Meade withdrew north, followed by Lee, but soundly thrashed one of Lee's corps at Bristoe Station on 14 October 1863. This brief campaign ended with Lee still north of the Rapidan, though south of the Rappahannock.

Meade renewed his offensive in order to retake the ground between the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers. On 7 November, he forced a crossing at Kelly's Ford and also neatly captured a Confederate detachment at Rappahannock Station, through a rare night assault. Lee crossed to the area south of the Rapidan.

Meade consolidated his gains and established a supply depot at Brandy Station. He

then maneuvered to turn Lee's flank in what would come to be called the Mine Run Campaign. On November 26, Meade crossed the Rapidan at Jacob's, Germanna, and Culpeper Mine Fords and turned his columns to the west. Lee countered by taking up a strong position along Mine Run and waiting for the Union columns to attack. Rather than engage in a frontal assault whose success appeared dubious, however, Meade had the moral fortitude to call off the attack, and seek battle another day.

Following this season of maneuver, the two armies settled into winter quarters. The Union Army maintained its massive supply depot at Brandy Station to support its encampments around Culpeper. The Orange and Alexandria Railroad served the Federal forces well that winter and the Army of the Potomac gained strength for 1864. Lee also maintained a rail supplied depot at Gordonsville, but the Confederate supply system could not meet his needs. Once again, Lee had to disperse his army so its components could find adequate subsistence. The danger of this necessity was that the Army of the Potomac could initiate action in the spring before the Army of Northern Virginia could concentrate. This eventuality had occurred at Chancellorsville and would occur again in the spring of 1864. Only the last minute arrival of Longstreet's Corps on May 6, 1864 would avert disaster to Lee's Army in the Wilderness.

During this winter, Ulysses S. Grant, newly promoted to lieutenant general, came east to assume command of all Union armies. He made his headquarters with Meade's Army of the Potomac. The Union Army's logistics capabilities had continued to evolve and Grant planned for Meade to cut loose from his supply base at Brandy Station when he once again took the field. Rather than advancing along a rail line, the Army of the Potomac would benefit from a series of temporary depots established as circumstances dictated. The first of these depots would be established at Fredericksburg, as Grant and Meade advanced on Spotsylvania Court House, following the Battle of the Wilderness. As operations moved south, other depots would be established along the coast, supported by the U.S. Navy. Previously established depots, such as Fredericksburg, would then be evacuated and abandoned. On May 4, 1864, the Army of the Potomac advanced out of Culpeper and crossed the Rapidan River at Germanna and Ely's Fords. At Germanna, Grant watched as his powerful columns crossed on several pontoon bridges and snaked into the Wilderness, initiating the last military campaign that would be fought in the Rappahannock valley.

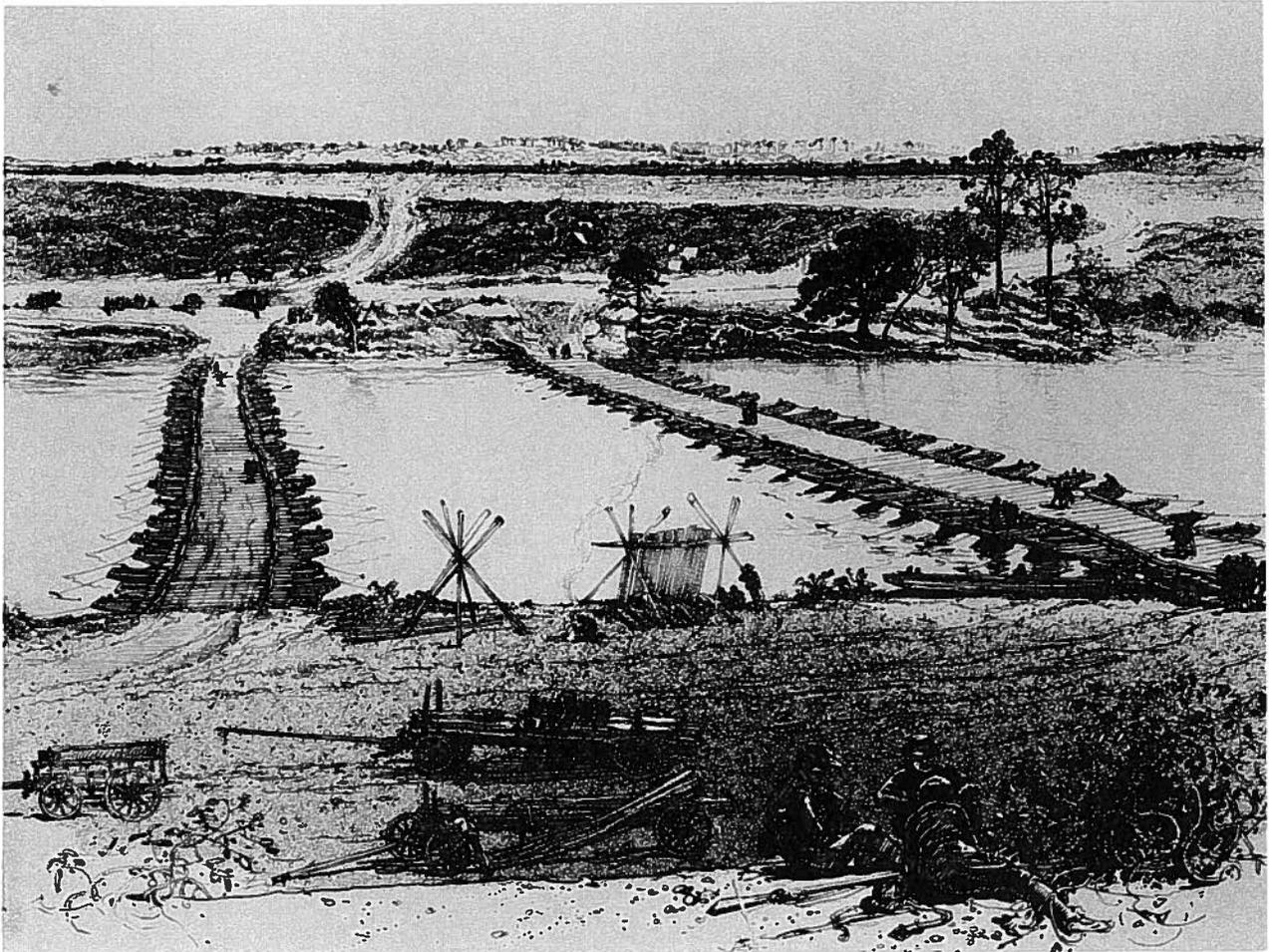
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- ▶ Boswell, James K. "Sketch of U.S. Ford..." April 1863.
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During the Civil War, military engineers readily bridged river barriers with pontoons. This operational capability had great implications for the campaigns fought in the Rappahannock valley. The scene here, from the American Heritage Century Collection, shows two such bridges downstream of Fredericksburg, during the Chancellorsville Campaign. Note the necessary approach roads that also had to be prepared to allow the rapid movement of men and materiel.

Fredericksburg - When civil war broke out, Fredericksburg was destined to feel its full impact. Over the course of the war years, the town was occupied, looted, and shelled; its streets bloodied by intense combat; its buildings used as hospitals; and any available open ground dug up to accommodate graves. This section will remain focused on this project's scope however, and describe only the Civil War activity in and around the river-related mills and sites referenced in the section on **Mills and Other Industries**.

Because of its numerous water-powered industries, Fredericksburg had immediate significance to Confederate logistic needs. During the war's early months, local enterprises processed and produced many supplies, including blankets from the (Washington) Woolen Mills, for Confederate forces in Northern Virginia. As the Union waterborne invasion converged on the Richmond peninsula, however, Fredericksburg came under Federal occupation as Confederate forces moved south to confront this offensive. The employees of the Woolen Mills evacuated their machinery at this time, to prevent its loss.

Federal troops occupied Falmouth and Fredericksburg from April through August 1862, but then abandoned the town as other campaigns drew them elsewhere. By November of that year, though, the Army of the Potomac was back. In anticipation of a threatened crossing on 17 November 1862, some Mississippi troops were ordered to occupy the Bridgewater Mill and its millrace. These soldiers opened fire as the Union troops occupied the opposite shore, but no crossing developed. General Robert E. Lee used this time to concentrate his Army of Northern Virginia and prepare for battle. Not until 11 December 1862 did the Union army force the Rappahannock. Once across, the Union commander, Major General Ambrose E. Burnside, encountered the Fredericksburg Water Power Company's canal and on 13 December 1862, he funneled his attacks in Fredericksburg to a narrow front to avoid this barrier.

During this December battle, Federal signalmen apparently used the cupola of the Woolen Mills as a signal station. Federal infantry also loopholed this upper mill for musketry. The lower mill (Bridgewater) was not militarily useful to Union forces, but had been shelled by Union artillery while it was in use by Confederate pickets. The Paper Mill, located where a canal ditch branched off from the larger power canal, was also a prominent landmark in December 1862. It too was shelled from afar and eventually loopholed by occupying infantry pickets. Burnside thought he had avoided having to assault across a canal, but the canal ditch that extended south from the Paper Mill proved to be an unexpected obstacle. The account of a Union staff officer is instructive:

I well remember on the 12th of December... carrying a message to (Major General Ambrose) Burnside..., saying that so far as (Major General Darius Couch) could judge from the reports of citizens, contraband, and deserters, a deep trench or canal ran around the town, between it and the hills, which would prove

a serious obstacle to the passage of troops, and I never shall forget how indignantly and even angrily Burnside rejected the suggestion.

Bigelow, p. 388.

This millrace was apparently bridged at only three locations - Hanover Street, Prussia Street (Lafayette Boulevard), and the Fredericksburg and Valley Plank Road (William Street). To try to make this barrier more passable, Union troops closed the gate at the Paper Mill and opened its exit at a mill in the lower end of town. This effort had some effect, but the canal ditch remained a hazardous feature to overcome. A Connecticut soldier described his experience at one of the inevitable bottlenecks:

The command filed to right and moved out... one block... until the dreaded canal was reached and the bridge touched - then the storm burst upon them. The rebel gunners had the exact range.... as the regiment could go but slowly over the bridge the missiles did murderous work.

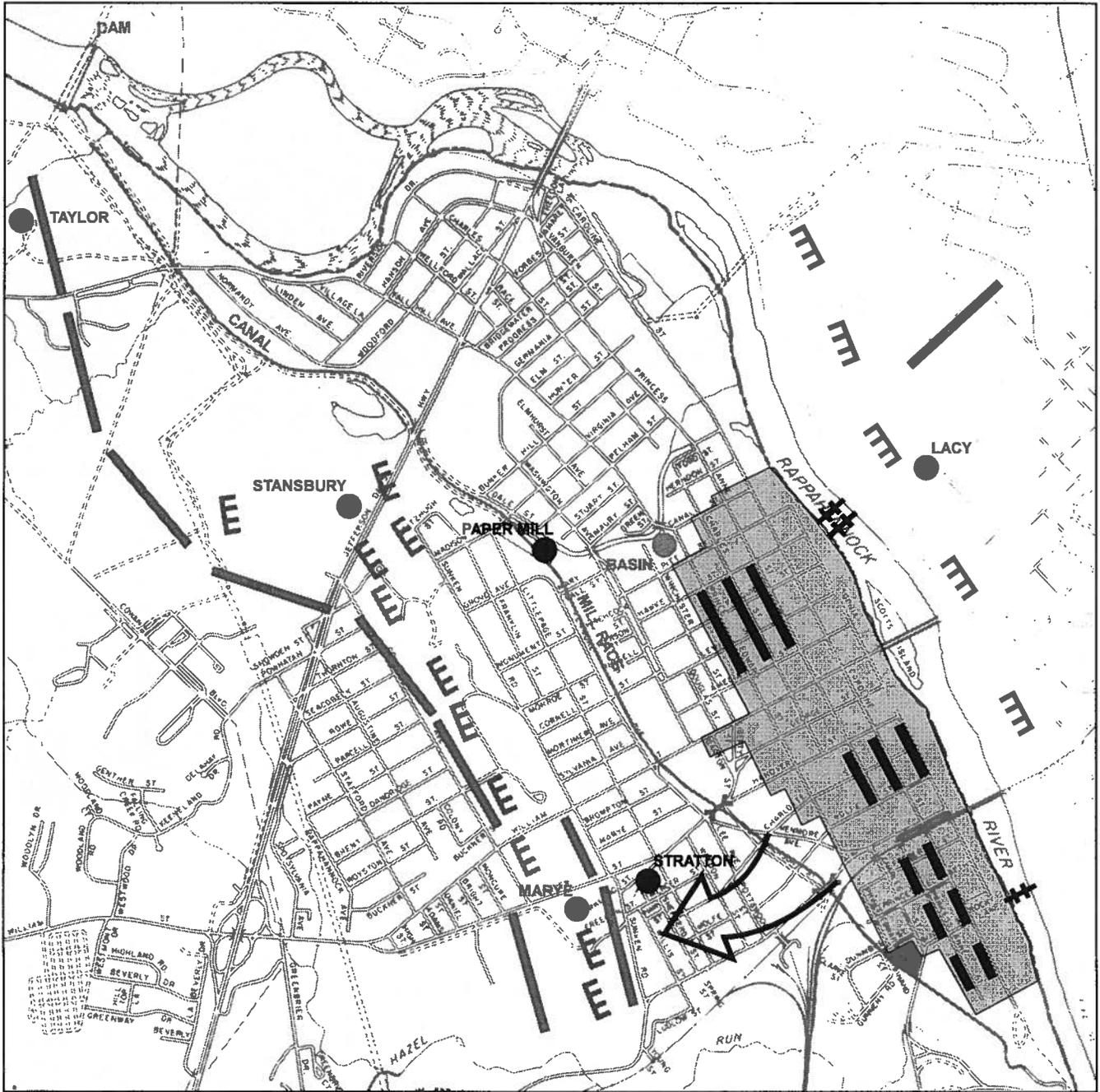
Stevens, Henry S.
Souvenir of Excursion to
Battlefield by the Society
of the Fourteenth
Connecticut Regiment.
Washington, 1893, p. 82.

In the Spring of 1863, during the Chancellorsville Campaign, Union forces left to operate at Fredericksburg encountered these same obstacles in seeking to attack the Confederate-held heights behind the town. The Union 6th Corps, Major General John Sedgwick commanding, attacked where the Union assaults in December had failed so miserably, but also attempted to cross the main power canal farther to the west. Major General Gouverneur K. Warren later described his actions of 3 May 1863 as a Federal column hurried forward:

I galloped to the front to reconnoiter for a point to assault. Our object then became apparent to the enemy (and a Confederate) gun was limbered up --- and sent at a run to command the nearest bridge over the second canal. Not a man or gun was at that moment there to resist us. I found the plank only taken up from the bridge, and, ... directed the pioneers to pull boards from the siding of the nearest house as rapidly as possible to replace the planks.

While this was being done, the single gun opened upon us with shrapnel.... Soon another gun was added to it, and before we could get ready to cross the bridge a regiment of the enemy's infantry filed into the rifle-pits at double quick time, and the opportunity was lost. General Gibbon had rapidly brought up artillery to reply to the enemy, but only to suffer itself without doing any damage in return, as those on the hill were completely sheltered by epaulments. General Gibbon also moved his other brigade rapidly to the right, to attempt the passage of the second canal by the bridge near Falmouth, but this movement was also anticipated by the enemy's infantry extending themselves to our right.

O.R. XXV, pt.1, p. 202.



Map 32. The 1862 Battle of Fredericksburg. The shaded area denotes the extent of the built environment at that time.

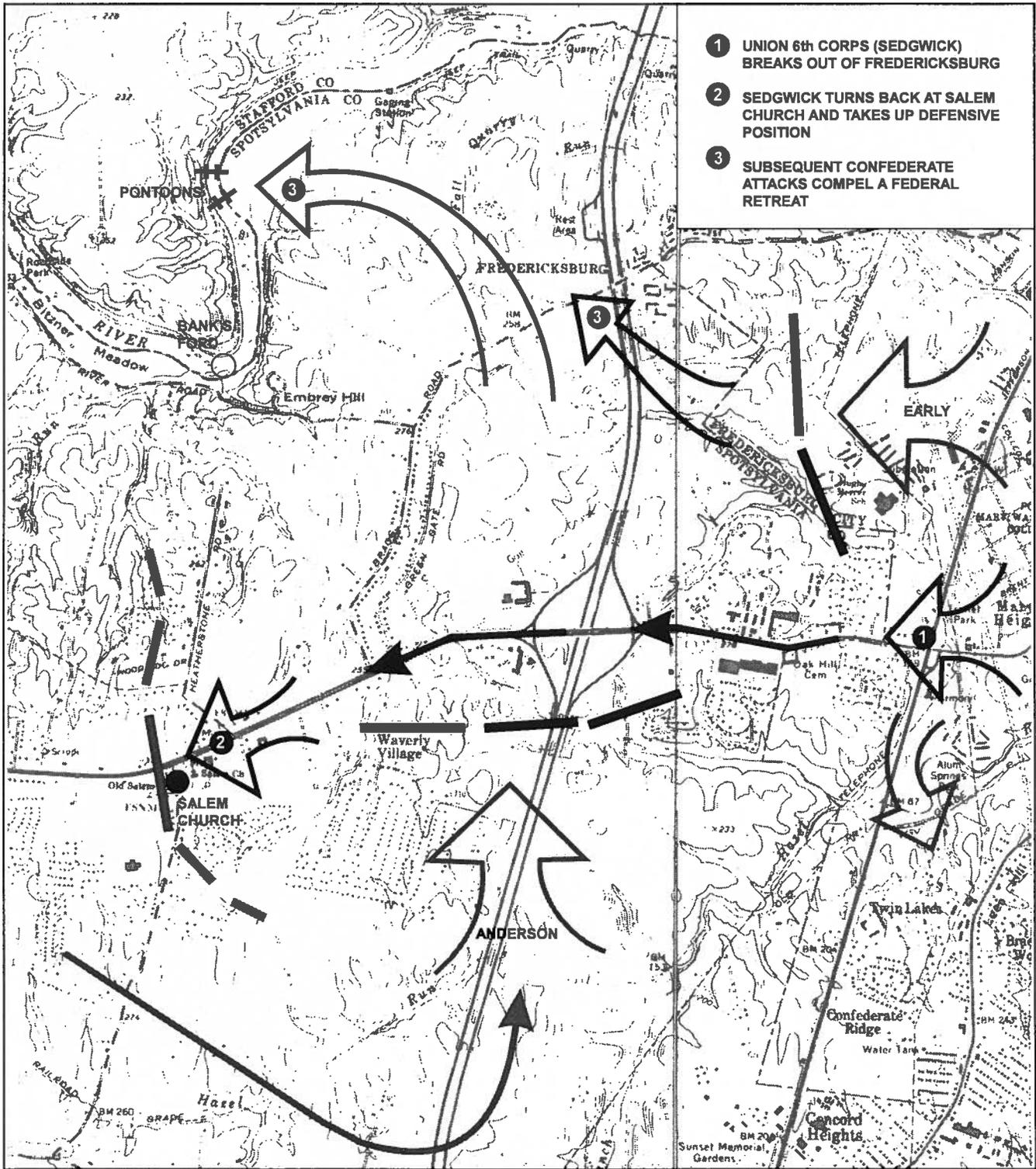
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The first bridge where General Gibbon tried to attack is where the Route 1 Bypass now crosses the Rappahannock Canal (which Warren called "the second canal"). A portion of a stone bridge abutment is still visible adjacent to, and upstream of, the modern bridge. Gibbon's demonstrations on the left, though unsuccessful, strained the Confederate's extended line. A renewed Federal assault on the thinned Confederate right was subsequently successful, and Sedgwick's corps broke out of Fredericksburg, and formed to march west toward Chancellorsville. Lee's Confederates countered Sedgwick's advancing column at Salem Church, however, and the Federals eventually withdrew across the Rappahannock at Scott's Ford, during the night of 4/5 May 1863.

In the Spring of 1864, the armies clashed to the west and south, in the Wilderness and at Spotsylvania Court House. The Federal wounded from these fields were brought to many of the large buildings in Fredericksburg, including the mills, to receive medical attention before being transferred north. In May 1864, for instance, the Woolen Mills building served as a hospital for elements of the Union 5th Corps. Not all of the wounded soldiers were evacuated however. Following the war, the remains of 139 soldiers were disinterred from this mill tract alone, for transfer to the National Cemetery, atop Willis Hill. A fire in 1875 revealed another relic of the war - an artillery projectile that had remained hidden in the structure and which subsequently exploded from the heat.



The Woolen Mills in use as a Union hospital in 1864 (American Heritage Century Collection).



Map 33. The 1863 Battle of Fredericksburg.

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Bank's Ford - During military operations, rivers have always represented an obstacle - to be overcome by an attacking force or used as a barrier for defense. Bank's Ford took on great importance during the Civil War because it was the first place above Fredericksburg where the terrain gave way to allow a river crossing to be effected.

In *The U.S. Army War College Guide to the Battles of Chancellorsville and Fredericksburg*, Dr. Jay Luvaas points out that Bank's Ford was "decisive terrain" during military operations in this area. This term is defined by the U.S. Army as a position that has a significant impact on how a commander pursues his mission. During the Chancellorsville Campaign, General Robert E. Lee controlled Bank's Ford until 3 May 1863 and could operate without interference between his two wings. Major General Joseph T. Hooker, on the other hand, had to contend with more lengthy communications, from Fredericksburg, across United States Ford to the Chancellor House. As a result he found coordination of his divided forces cumbersome and sometimes ineffective.

The 1861 Military Dictionary describes where fords were typically located, what features were needed for the passage of troops, and what types of preparations might be necessary:

Fords are generally to be found above or below a bend, and often lie in lines diagonally across the river; small gravel forms the best bottom; and rock, on the contrary, the most dangerous, unless perfectly regular and not slippery.... The approaches should also be levelled, and where the soil is soft, rendered firm by covering them with fascines, etc., so that the troops may advance with a broad front, and rapidly mount the further bank.

Military Dictionary, pp. 309-310.

Bank's Ford is actually two crossing sites. The old ford occurred at the bend of the river, just below Bank's Dam which diverted water to Bank's Canal. A crossing farther downstream, at Scott's Mill was called Scott's Ferry. The ferry probably became necessary after a navigation dam (Taylor's) downriver raised the water level and made this crossing unfordable. After his debacle in Fredericksburg, Major General Ambrose E. Burnside sought to regain the initiative by using upriver crossings to outflank his opponents. He subsequently assigned troops to quietly prepare the approaches to both Bank's and United States Fords. A soldier in the 154th New York Volunteer Infantry (1st Brigade, 2nd Division, 11th Corps.) recounted his experience. Although the 154th worked at United States Ford, it illustrates the type of work necessary to prepare a crossing point:

We marched up the river eight or ten miles and laid on our arms to rest until daylight. The point at which we stopped was United States Ford.... From near our bivouac a gulch or gully ran diagonally down to the riverbank,... (our mission) was no less than the construction of a wagon road down the gulch to the river, and we were required to work as quietly as possible.

Army wagons brought tools and we cut the small trees into lengths about eight feet long, then digging out the side hill laid the logs across the roadway and thus made, put a light covering of dirt on top. This was called a corduroy road, one the army become quite accustomed to making, for whenever we struck low ground where it was necessary to move artillery or wagon trains, the corduroy had to be used as the quickest means of producing a solid foundation. After three days work we completed a pretty good road from the plateau above to the water's edge. We then returned to camp at Falmouth.

McKay, Charles W. "Three years or during the war." National Tribune Scrapbook, p. 125.

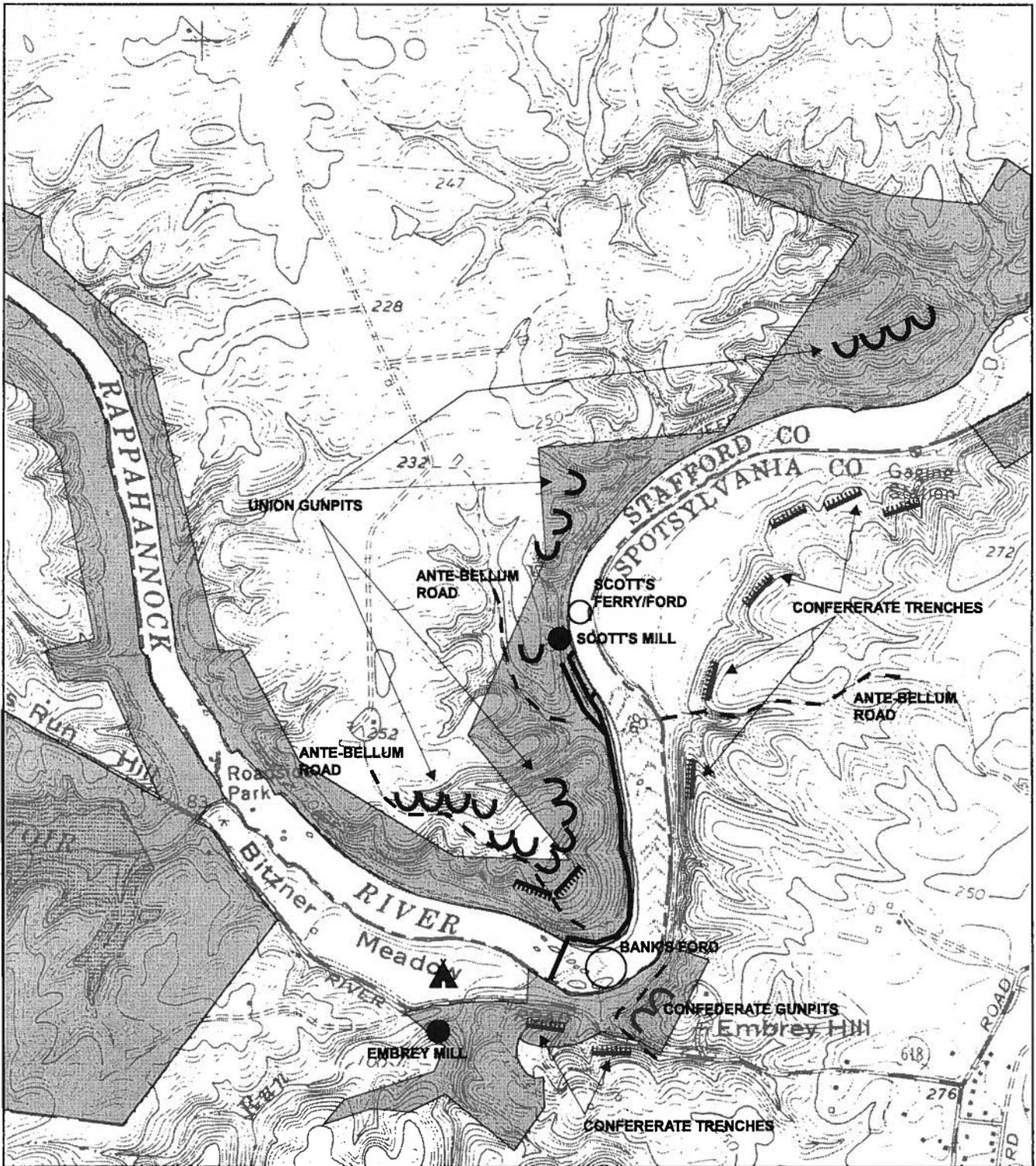
In January 1863, one month after his disastrous defeat at Fredericksburg, Burnside put his army on the road to Bank's Ford to try to get on Lee's flank. As units took up the march, though, the weather turned brutal. A cold rain pelted the blue columns, the roads quickly became impassable, adjoining fields flooded, and wagons and artillery sank to their axles. Advance elements of the Federal army reached the crossing but the Union force had literally ground to a halt in the mud. The Mud March, as it came to be known in the Army of the Potomac, never threatened Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Still, this Federal effort impressed upon the Confederate command the need to ensure the vulnerable fords remained well protected. On 28 January 1863 a Confederate infantryman of the 56th Virginia (Garnett's Brigade, Pickett's Division, Lonstreet's Corps) wrote his wife from the Bank's Ford area:

We have come up here for the purpose of throwing up breastworks as it is believed the Yankees intend trying to cross the river above Fredericksburg.... I am writing this under four little picket tents while the snow is pouring down in torrents but the ground is so wet that it dont stick much.

I Wrote You Word: The Poignant Letters of Private Holt. H.E. Howard, Inc. 1993, p. 124.

Both Union and Confederate troops threw up earthworks at Bank's Ford. The dates of construction are difficult to define, but the overall result was a series of infantry trenches and artillery epaulments to cover both crossings. River-oriented defensive positions, however, lose their utility if an opposing force is already across the river. At the onset of the Chancellorsville Campaign, Hooker launched his columns - consisting of the 5th, 11th and 12th Corps - on a wide swing to the west. These advance forces crossed the Rappahannock far upstream at Kelly's Ford and then swung down to cross the Rapidan at Germanna and Ely's Fords. A division of Major General George Meade's Union 5th Corps then uncovered United States Ford on 30 April 1863 and Union engineers immediately began building pontoon bridges. When completed, two divisions of the Union 2nd Corps poured across into Spotsylvania without having to follow the flanking column's lengthy route. The following day, Meade moved along the River Road toward Bank's Ford. He noted in his report:

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Map 34. Military Preparations at Bank's/Scott's Ford.

The next day (May 1),... the corps was put en route to take a position to uncover Bank's Ford,.... Griffin was ordered to move down the River or Mott road....

the column of Griffin and Humphreys proceeded on the River road, and had reached Decker's house, within view of Bank's Ford, without any opposition from the enemy, when the order of recall was received, and the column returned to Chancellorsville.

OR XXV pt. 1 p. 507.

That day, Hooker's offensive had run into Confederate resistance on the Plank Road and the Orange Turnpike. Though the Union 3rd Corps had crossed United States Ford that morning, adding to the growing concentration of Union strength at Chancellorsville, Hooker hesitated to force the issue. Lee had left a force at Fredericksburg to cover the Union presence there and turned to the area upriver where the bulk of the Union army was gathering. General T.J. "Stonewall" Jackson took command of the available Confederate units and moved to attack. His aggressive response caused Hooker to recall his offensive probes, including Meade's, then approaching Bank's Ford.

During the next few days Lee maintained control of Bank's Ford. As a consequence, he was able to shift forces, as needed between the Chancellorsville field and areas of developing action such as Salem Church and Fredericksburg. Brigadier General Cadmus M. Wilcox (commanding a brigade, McLaw's Division, Lonstreet's Corps) kept a watchful eye on this critical crossing:

orders came to return to Bank's Ford, and to hold it at all hazards, it being reported that the enemy were in force there and threatened to cross.

the brigade remained near Bank's Ford. Large bodies of the enemy's infantry and artillery were seen moving up on the opposite side of the river. Artillery was also heard in the direction of Chancellorsville. Strong pickets were kept up during the night near the ford.

OR XXV p.t 1. p. 855.

There is no question that the Federal command anticipated uncovering Bank's Ford in order to shorten its lines of communication. As Hooker's chief of staff wrote on 30 April to Major General G.K. Warren, then constructing pontoon bridges at United States Ford:

Until Banks' Ford is uncovered, the route by the United States Ford must be understood as our line of operations.

OR XXV, pt. 2, p. 305.

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Major General John Sedgwick, commanding the Union 6th Corps at Fredericksburg, also received notification that day of what the main army proposed to accomplish:

the army now at (Chancellorsville) will assume the initiative to-morrow morning and will advance along the line of the Plank road, uncovering what is called Bank's Ford, where bridges will be at once thrown across the river, which route will then become the shortest line of communication between the two wings of the army.

OR XXV, pt. 2, p. 306.

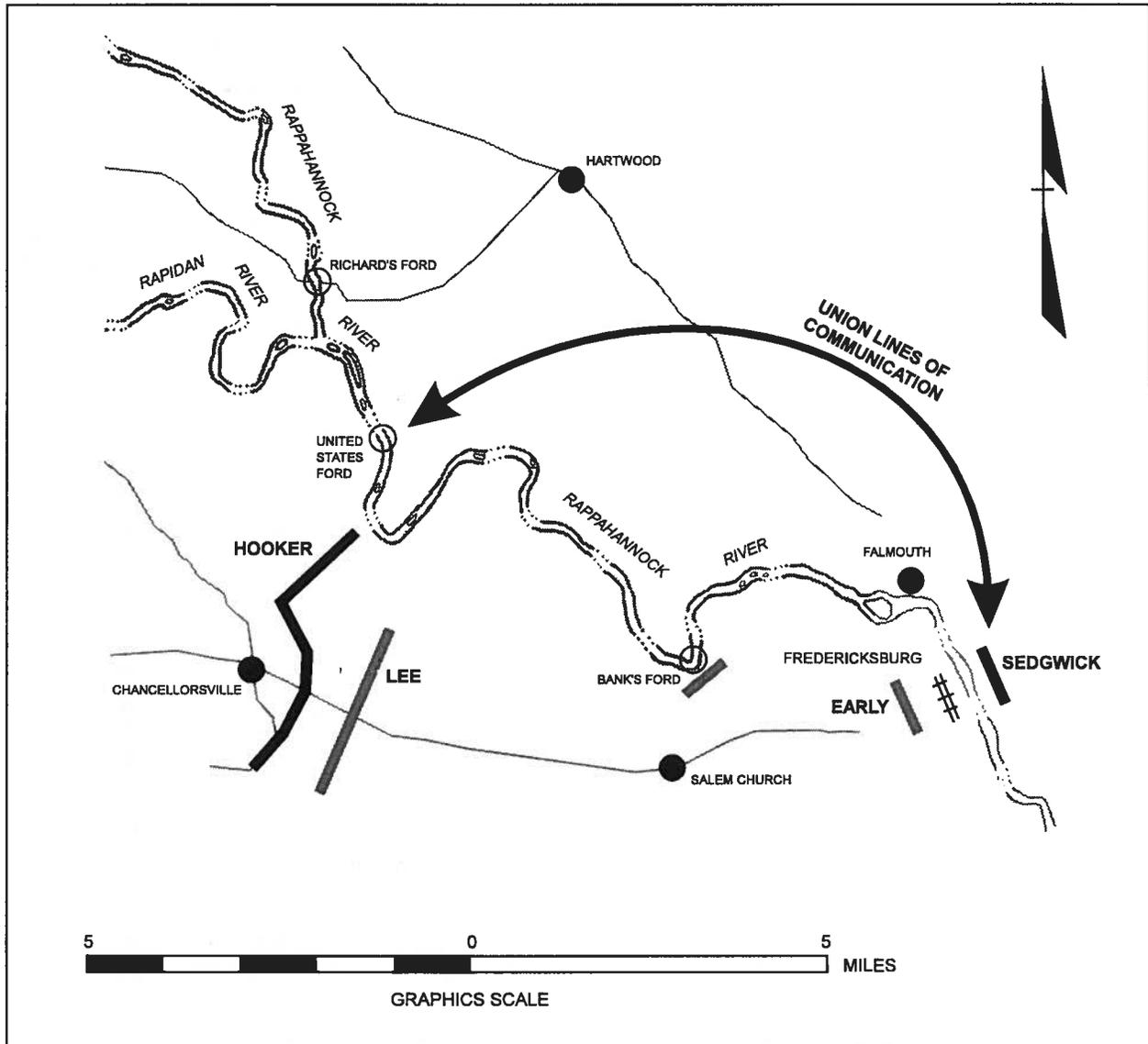
By May 1st, the Federals had moved a brigade of infantry, 32 cannon, and pontoon bridging equipment to the Stafford side of the Bank's/Scott's Ford area. As soon as a Union column uncovered the ford in Spotsylvania, the pontoon bridge could be laid. When confronted by Stonewall Jackson's determined Confederates, however, Hooker had gone over to the defensive and subsequently recalled the force moving along the River Road. On May 2nd, Major General Reynolds had been told he could cross his 1st Corps at Bank's, but was diverted upriver as Lee still controlled that crossing. The troops Wilcox observed moving upstream were the men of the Union 1st Corps marching toward the United States Ford crossing.

By 3 May 1863 Lee had flanked and devastated Hooker's right at Chancellorsville and forced the Army of the Potomac back against the Rappahannock River. Before he could renew his attacks, however, he received news that the Union 6th Corps had punched through General Jubal Early's small Confederate force left to cover that front and was moving west on the Plank Road. Wilcox had already decided there was no imminent Union threat at Bank's Ford and had committed his Alabama troops to delay the Federal column emerging from Fredericksburg. Lee thus gained time to detach several brigades at Chancellorsville and send them swinging down the Plank Road toward Fredericksburg. These additional troops consisting of four brigades under General Lafayette McLaws, joined Wilcox to halt the Federals at Salem Church.

The Federals observed the departure of the Confederate force at Bank's Ford and responded very quickly. As Union Brigadier General Henry J. Hunt wrote:

On the afternoon of the 3rd, he abandoned his rifle-pits opposite us. Major-General Sedgwick having carried the heights above Fredericksburg, and being then on the advance along the Chancellorsville road, I sent Major Doull across (swimming his horse) to communicate with General Sedgwick and report his progress. In the meantime General Benham laid the bridges, and I crossed to inspect the different works of the enemy.

OR XXV pt. 1, p. 248.



Map 35. Tactical Implications of Bank's Ford. As long as the Confederate army controlled Bank's Ford, Hooker's lines of communication were necessarily extended and cumbersome.

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While Bank's Ford was finally in the process of being bridged (at Scott's crossing), the disaster at Chancellorsville caused the federal command to divert critical equipment elsewhere. The Federal engineer, Brigadier General H.W. Benham, was directed to send the pontoons he planned to use for the second bridge at Bank's/Scott's up to United States Ford, to provide a third bridge there.

Sedgwick withdrew from Salem Church and established a defensive position closer to Fredericksburg. He reestablished his communications with Hooker across the single floating bridge at Bank's/Scott's Ford. On 4 May, the gathering Confederate force probed the Union lines while Federal engineers busily gathered the necessary equipment and finally laid a second pontoon bridge at Bank's/Scott's Ford.

On the Chancellorsville field, Hooker showed little inclination to move beyond his entrenchments to do battle. As a consequence, Lee detached General Richard H. Anderson and his division with impunity and ordered it to join Early and McLaws as they concentrated against Sedgwick's isolated corps. Skirmish fire punctuated the remainder of 4 May, as Confederate forces moved into position. Because a portion of Sedgwick's line straddled the Plank Road, these preparations took longer than anticipated as the troops maneuvered over rough terrain and along an unfinished railway. In addition, the deploying troops were extremely fatigued, having already been engaged at Chancellorsville and Salem Church. The Confederate assaults against the Union 6th Corps commenced late in the afternoon. The Federals held firm, for a while, but eventually pulled back in a retrograde movement toward their pontoon bridges at Scott's Ford.

A Rhode Island soldier in the 6th Corps recalled the crossing during the night of 4/5 May.

At dark we left our lines, and marching in mud up hill and down we reached the Rappahannock River sometime in the night. Pontoon bridges were laid and the troops passed over. Straw and earth was packed upon the bridges to deaden the sound of the wagons and artillery. Our Regiment was left to guard the rear and finally we crossed with the Rebels dropping shell onto the bridge in our rear. The connections on the other side of the bridge were out, and the boats floated over to the north side.

Rhodes, Robert H. ed.
All for the Union: The Civil
War Diary and Letters
of Elisha Hunt Rhodes. New York
1985, p. 107.

The side of Bank's/Scott's Ford controlled by the Federals still has numerous gun pits along the heights. These positions were established primarily during the Chancellorsville Campaign and some of them show up on B.L. Blackford's 1863 map.

The works oriented to the south, overlooking the old Bank's Ford were dug by elements of General Darius Couch's 2nd Corps during the night of 28 April, in anticipation of a crossing once Union columns had moved to uncover the ford from the Spotsylvania side of the river. The works directed toward the east were established to cover the withdrawal of General John Sedgwick's 6th Corps at Scott's Ford/Ferry.

Confederate earthworks also occur at both crossings and some of them are also shown on Jedediah Hotchkiss's Chancellorsville map. The positions along the bluffs overlooking Scott's Ford/Ferry are presently on private property, but some of these may be situated on property to be deeded to the City of Fredericksburg, through rezoning proffers. The Confederate trenches and gun pits covering Bank's Ford are already located within the City of Fredericksburg's riparian holdings. Of interest is a road trace to the north of River Road that climbs up Embrey Hill, overlooking Bank's Ford, and then descends toward the river on the opposite side. A small gun pit has been dug where the road passes over the nose of the hill and a section of the road on the opposite (river) side appears to have been converted to serve as Confederate rifle-pits. Further up the hill are two more gun pits overlooking the river.

Road traces leading to the old Bank's Ford can also be found south of River Road near the Embrey Mill (site) on Golin Run. On the Stafford side, there is also a road trace that descends to the ford from the plateau above. Road traces are also clearly evident on both sides of Scott's Ford/Ferry crossing. No doubt these were improved by Federal engineers on 4 May 1863 to prepare for the 6th Corps' withdrawal.

The preceding maps show the Civil War related resources that are within the City of Fredericksburg's riparian holdings.



This detail from a sketch by Civil War artist Alfred Waud shows the miserable conditions that characterized the Army of the Potomac's Mud March in January 1863. Note the frame of some sort of industrial building in the background. Original is in the Library of Congress.

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Hooker's Last Line - On 3 May 1863, as Major General John Sedgwick fought his way out of Fredericksburg, General Robert E. Lee closed in on the main force of the Army of the Potomac at Chancellorsville. During a day of intense fighting, Major General Joseph Hooker pulled back to a defensive position, its apex at the crossroads of the Bullock and Ely's Ford Roads (approximately 3/4 of a mile from Chancellorsville) and its ends anchored on the Rappahannock River. Federal communications were maintained across pontoon bridges at United States Ford.

An extensive series of earthworks that comprised Hooker's line is still evident today, coursing through the woods in Spotsylvania County. Both flanks extend into the City's riparian corridor. Hooker's right consisted of Major General John Reynolds' 1st Corps which took position along Hunting Run. The earthworks in this area are not very elaborate. On the crest of the first hill east of Hunting Run, where it enters the Rapidan, is a mining pit as well as ditches that extend up the hillside. This mining complex could have been readily occupied by Union troops. On the virtual crest of the ridge begin the military works. The northernmost line runs from the knoll on top of the ridge for 45 feet. The trench then continues, from a point 60 feet to the west, extending approximately 240 feet until it disappears into the fringe of a ravine. The second line of works is well defined, with easily recognizable traverses and a slightly refused southern terminus.

The line on this right flank is very simple compared with the works on the left flank, although this area includes additional resources of interest. Approximately 60 feet east of the southernmost end of the trench are several hut sites, marking a camp. The square, level depressions measure approximately 15x18 feet. The remainder of the hill has been bulldozed, however, and anything else has been obliterated.

The Union right flank, at Hunting Run, was held only briefly, by troops that had recently arrived on the Chancellorsville field. The left flank, at Scott's Mill, on the other hand, was occupied by a variety of units over several days. These troops spent considerable time improving their position, with the result that it became quite formidable. Elements of the Irish Brigade were probably the first to begin adapting the stone-lined millrace along Pipe Dam Run to protect a line of infantry. This work likely began late on 1 May or early 2 May. A physical connection to a parallel rifle pit that extends around the nose of the ridge confirms conversion of the millrace by soldiers. A second line of trenches extends along the crest of the ridge and is backed up by a line of 14 gun pits, evenly spaced and in excellent condition.

The sequence of events at this location was probably as follows. The Irish Brigade (2nd Brigade, 1st Division, 2nd Corps) took position late on 1 May and worked to prepare this area for defense through the 2nd. At the same time, the Pennsylvania troops of Brigadier General A.A. Humphrey's Division (3rd Division, 5th Corps) began work on an additional line of rifle pits. The artillery emplacements had to have been

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constructed by the gunners of a 30-gun provisional grand battery, commanded by Captain Alanson Randol, which occupied this height. Randol began assembling cannon here late on 1 May and remained in position until ordered to withdraw, on the night of 5 May.

On 2 May, General T. J. "Stonewall" Jackson conducted his famous flank march and exploded out of the Wilderness onto the hapless Union 11th Corps. On 3 May, Major General Carl Schurz's Division (3rd Division, 11th Corps) was ordered into this relatively quiet sector where his troops could recover from their ordeal on the 2nd. As Schurz wrote:

Early on the morning of May 3, I was ordered to relieve General Humphrey's division, on the extreme left of the army, near Scott's Mills. Nothing happened on my front except a little skirmishing.

OR XXV pt. 1, p. 657.

That night, the troops were shuffled once again and Brigadier General Alpheus Williams' Division (1st Division, 12th Corps) moved into these works. One of his brigade commanders, Brigadier General Joseph Knipe, wrote of another spasm of fortifying by his troops:

about dark (we) took up a position on the hill at Scott's dam, relieving a portion of the Eleventh Corps, and forming the extreme left of our line.

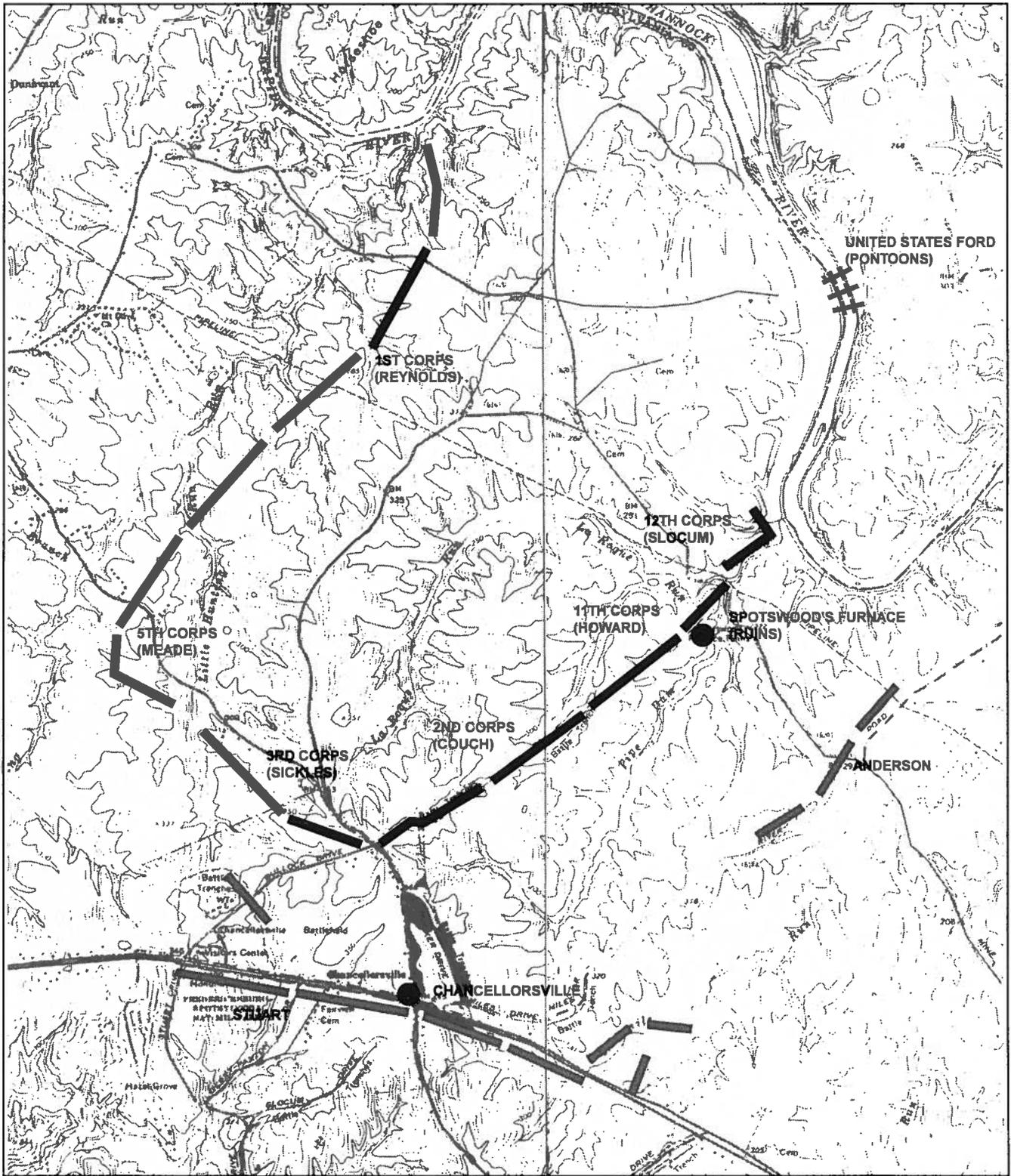
This position we occupied during May 4 and 5, the men being constantly employed in constructing traverses for our artillery and throwing up rifle-pits.

On the morning of the 6th instant, I received orders to recross the river....

OR XXV, pt. 1, p. 688.

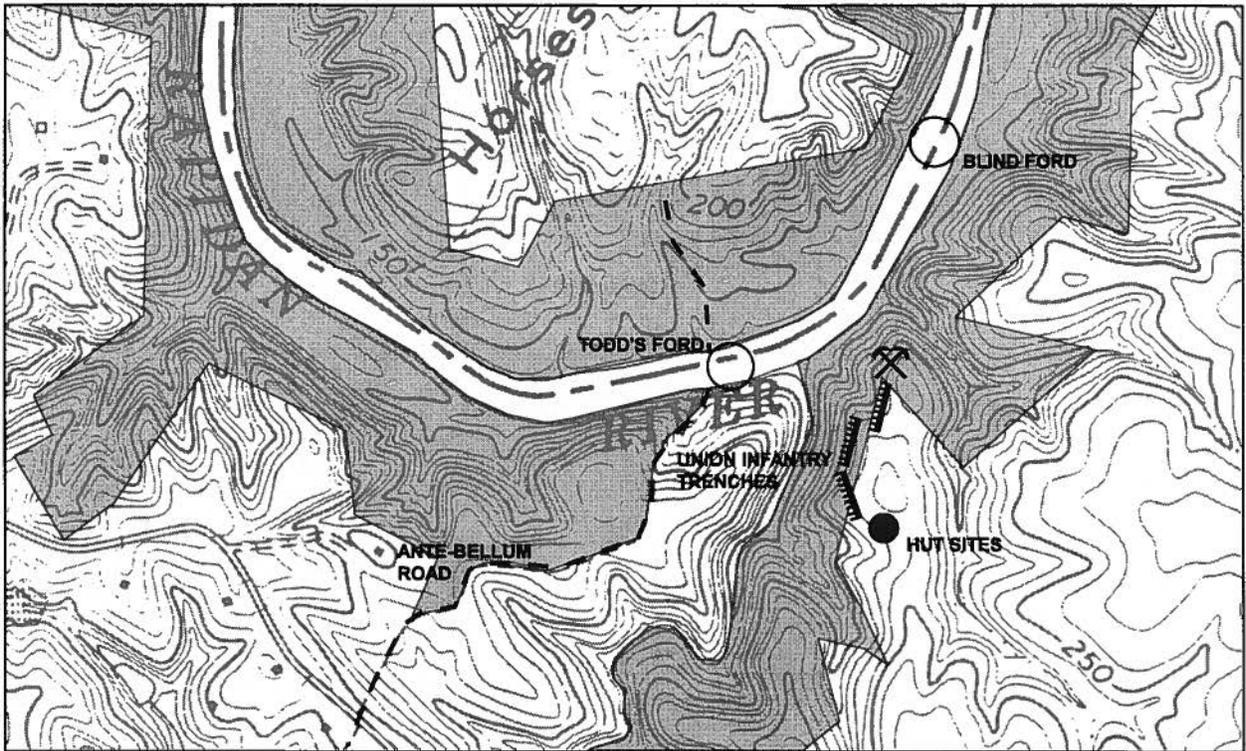
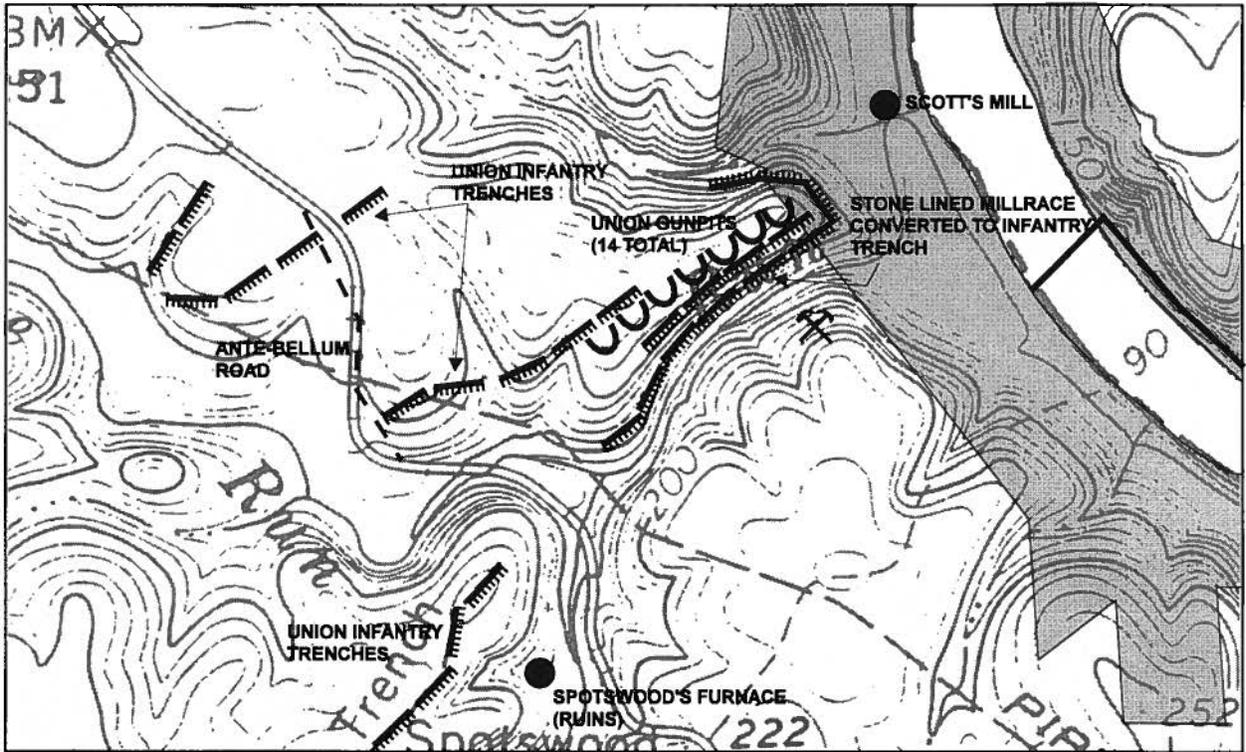
An account by a Colonel Charles S. Wainwright provides an interesting postscript to the Battle of Chancellorsville. This artillery officer observed elements of the 11th Corps, after they had been so roughly handled during Jackson's flank attack. Rather than seeing a demoralized body of men, they exhibited an integrity and professionalism that may be attributable to the many European officers within its command structure. Colonel Wainwright wrote about his ride with Major General O.O. Howard along the 11th Corps lines on 4 May:

(The 11th Corps) seemed to be all here in line now; their organization in no way disturbed. While I was with Howard I noticed one thing I have not seen in any other command in our army: a division staff officer rode up and reported that a certain order had been carried out. In these really essential military points our army is very remiss. Staff officers generally do not even consider it necessary



Map 36. Hooker's Last Line.

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Map 37. Anchoring The Union Flanks.

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to report that they have delivered an order with which they have been sent; much less do the subordinate commanders report when the order has been executed; so that the General cannot know with certainty how things stand.

Nevins, Allan, ed. A Diary of Battle:
The Personal Journals of Colonel
Charles S. Wainwright 1861-1865.
New York, 1962, p. 195.

The entrenchments of Hooker's last line are instructive in many respects, but only the extreme flanks are within the City of Fredericksburg's riparian holdings.

E.P. Alexander's Overlook - On the 4th and 5th of May, portions of Major General Joseph T. Hooker's army held their defensive lines while other elements withdrew across pontoon bridges at United States Ford. By then, General Robert E. Lee had shifted his forces to try to destroy the Union 6th Corps at Fredericksburg. Consequently, the front along Hooker's last line remained relatively quiet. Brigadier General Alpheus Williams, (commanding 1st Division, 12th Corps), wrote:

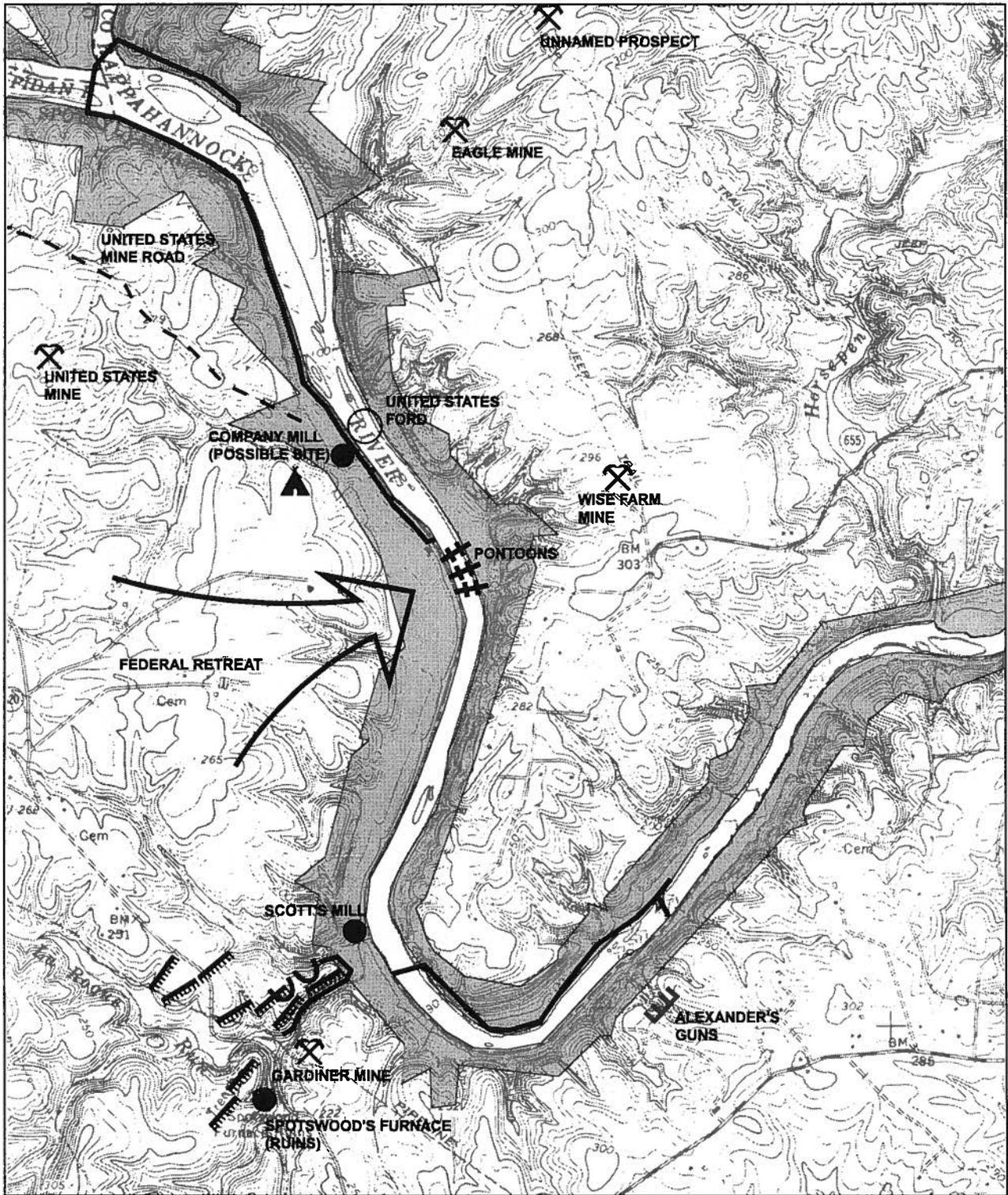
May 4th: Another warm, sunshiny day. The men were put at work strengthening the rifle pits, partly made before, and making traverses for our artillery guns, of which we had sixteen pieces on the two bluffs.... Nothing was seen of the enemy except a few cavalry and infantry pickets, with which ours exchanged occasional shots.

Early in the morning some artillery had opened fire from a high point formed by a short bend of the river.... It turned out afterwards that they had the range of our train camp on the other side of the river, and pretty effectually stampeded all our non-combatant staff and made several wounded officers, who could only move on litters the day before, take to their legs with the speed of a scared Indian.

Quaife, Milo M., ed. From the Cannon's Mouth: The Civil War Letters of General Alpheus S. Williams. Detroit, 1959, p. 200.

The Confederate guns Williams heard were those of the capable Edward Porter Alexander. Colonel Alexander was General James Longstreet's Chief of Artillery, but was then acting directly under Lee, as Longstreet was not on the Chancellorsville field. During the Battle of Fredericksburg, he had commanded the guns that devastated the Union assault columns. After Hooker retreated into the defensive works that constituted his last line, Alexander sought a way to bring artillery to bear on the Union flank that rested on the river at Scott's Mill:

The next day, Tuesday, May 5th, I received orders to go & reconnoiter the place where the enemy's left flank rested on the river below U.S. Ford, & to move my battalion up to that vicinity. Gen. Lee intended to attack Hooker in his intrenchments the next day, & wanted me if possible to get a bit of enfilade fire upon his line.... I found locations for some half dozen guns, which would have an oblique fire on his line, but it had been too well located to give us a chance for effective enfilade. And when I saw how the enemy had been throwing up dirt & strengthening himself; & reflected how easy it was in that Wilderness thicket to make a line impregnable by abatis in front, it made me very unhappy to think of seeing our infantry sent to charge such a tremendous force in those intrenchments.... as soon as it was dark enough to hide me, I was on the ground where the pits were to be, with a hundred of my men; & we set to work to build them.... Before daylight we had all the pits ready for occupation, & we moved in the guns, & the ammunition chests, & sent off the horses. As it became light enough to see we were putting on the last touches, when, suddenly, there was a volley fired at us by a battery, not on the line we had made ready to attack, but on the opposite side of the river, on our right flank, & not over six hundred yards off.



Map 38. E. P. Alexander's Overlook.

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And that volley was followed by others until there were two or three batteries apparently making it warm for us. As I did not know exactly what it meant I would not reply at all at first, but just made everybody keep under cover in the pits, & went off to our infantry line on the left to find out what was the matter.

Ah! What good news it was! The enemy had gone! During the night he had vacated his lines! He had crossed the river, & was on his way back to his encampments! The campaign was over! There was to be no bloody assault on those strong intrenchments. The guns which were firing at my pits were guns placed to protect the retreat of his wagon trains at a point where the road on the north side might have been shelled from our side.... I took some two or three of my batteries to a point whence I could reach the enemy's position, but without being in sight, & for about ten minutes I gave him a hot fire as a retaliation for his fire on my pits.... I also found a place where I could see his wagon trains passing, over a mile away, on the other side, & I also found the Washington, Georgia, company of artillery, Lane's, who had a Whitworth rifle & I put it to practising on the wagons, & made them go at a gallop.

Alexander, pp. 214-215.

The bluffs where E.P. Alexander placed his guns still affords a commanding view, but have been much altered. Residential development is pushing up close to the city's riparian property. A single gun pit may remain on the edge of a ravine just below the bend in the river. No other traces of this Confederate position appear to be extant.

United States Ford - On 27 April 1863, Major General Joseph T. Hooker launched three corps upriver from Fredericksburg on a wide swing to cross both the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers and bring them in behind General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. To distract the Confederates from this turning movement, two divisions of Major General Darius Couch's 2nd Corps moved to Bank's Ford while Federal pioneer troops repaired the road to United States Ford, a crossing site approximately 1½ miles below the confluence of the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers. By 30 April, the Union flanking columns had crossed the Rappahannock at Kelly's Ford, the Rapidan at Germanna and Ely's Fords, and elements of Major General George G. Meade's Corps had uncovered United States Ford. Major General Gouverneur K. Warren, waiting on the opposite bank, described his preparations at the proposed military crossing point, approximately 1/4 mile below the peacetime ford. The speed with which the Federal engineers were able to bring their pontoon bridging equipment down to the river was no doubt due to the military road building that had occurred in preparation for the Army of the Potomac's brief campaign in January:

On the morning of the 30th, I reconnoitered the approaches to the crossing-place, and found that to make any one of them practicable was a difficult undertaking. General Couch detailed 500 men under my direction, and this force went to work in earnest, (preparing roads) right down to the bank of the river. The mist in the morning so obscured the view that we could not ascertain whether the enemy, who had occupied the opposite bank on the preceding night, had withdrawn or not;.... about 9 a.m. the appearance of some cavalymen from General Meade's column showed us that he had, and that the grand flanking movement had succeeded. The work on the road was pushed with all possible dispatch, the men working with the greatest spirit, and by 1 p.m. was made practicable for artillery and pontoon wagons.

By 3 p.m. the (first) bridge) was laid and (two divisions of) the Second Corps (were) crossing the river. The road up the opposite bank was soon completed, and great was the enthusiasm of the men as they found we had turned these formidable intrenchments without losing a man....

OR XXV, pt. 1, pp. 196-197.

The Confederate entrenchments that Federal troops marched over unopposed had been constructed earlier that year by General A.R. Wright's Georgia Brigade (Anderson's Division, Longstreet's Corps). During January and February 1863, these troops endured harsh weather, short rations, and otherwise miserable working conditions as Federal cavalry on the opposite shore observed their work:

Jan. 23d. - On picket at U.S. Ford. Could see the enemy entrenching; a long line of rifle-pits extended the entire length of the hillside, and field-pieces were being placed in the rear to rake our point of crossing.

History of the Sixth New York Cavalry,
Worcester, Mass. 1908, p. 90.



Map 39. Opening Moves of the Chancellorsville Campaign. The Union army's wide swing to the west effectively flanked the Confederate army's Rappahannock River defenses.

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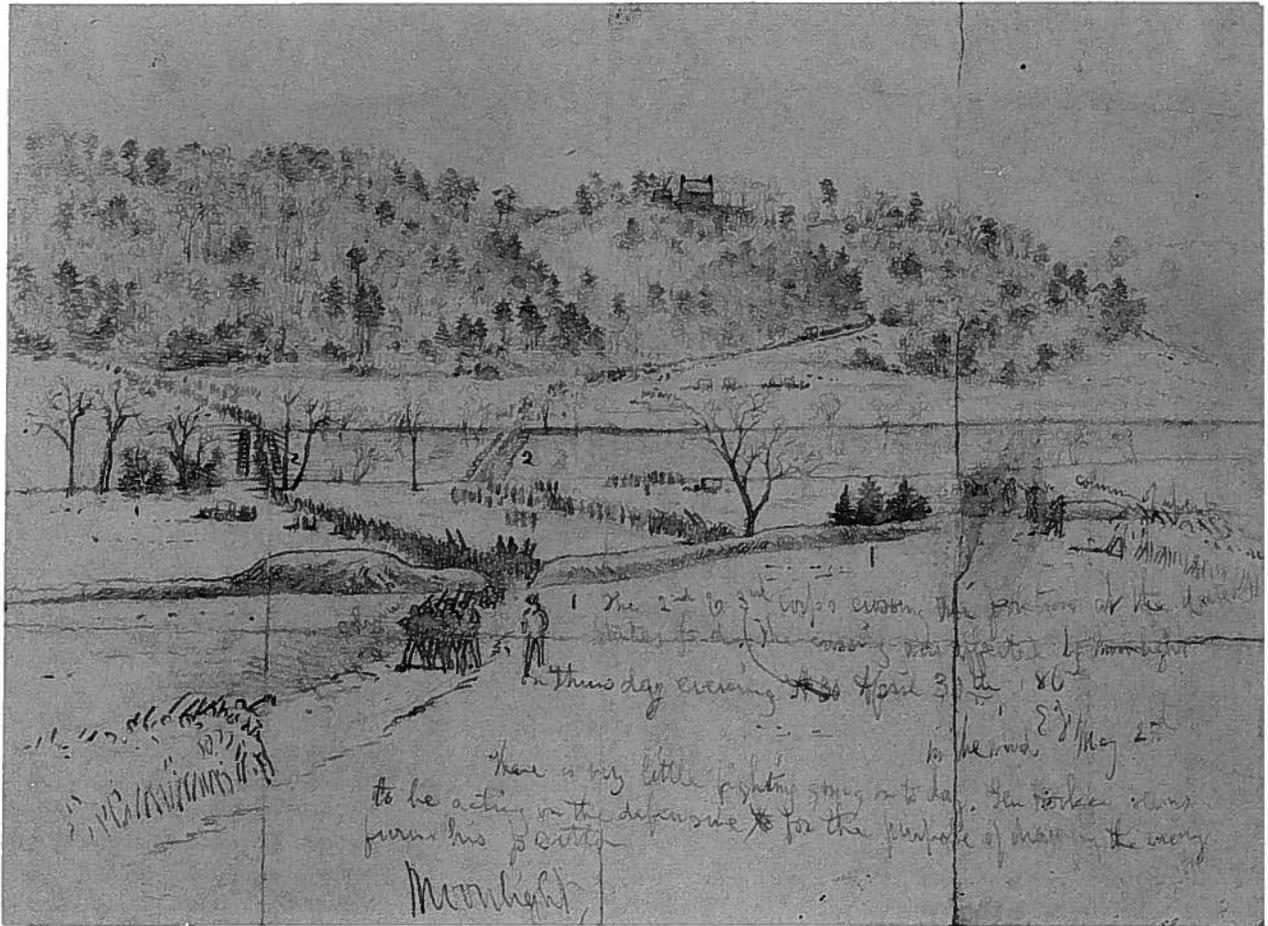
The resulting line of entrenchments is impressive, although additional work could have been accomplished between subsequent campaigns. A set of trenches, still visible, extends along the hills fronting the river starting at a creek above Lock 8 of the Rappahannock Navigation, which is just below the point where the U.S. Mine Ford Road crossed the canal. The trenches extend southeast for approximately 3,000 feet. They are unusual in that there are several very large traverses at intervals along their length. The continuity of the trench is maintained around the base of these large mounds of earth, to their rear. These features would appear to have precluded an enfilade fire by artillery from the heights in Stafford. Some of the described artillery lunettes remain extant although these were dug behind the infantry works, closer to the upland plateau. Many of them appear to have disappeared as the land reverted from military to agricultural uses.

Also evident are the roads that Federal pioneer troops prepared, to effect as rapid a crossing as possible. The road Warren cut on the Stafford shore remains visible in places although it was much altered during installation of a transcontinental oil pipeline. The original ford road, to the south of the above-referenced military road, is intact as it climbs out of the floodplain to the plateau above. It is a dramatic cut into the shale that may have provided an almost naturally macadamized surface. On the Spotsylvania shore there is a washed out ditch along a dirt road that leads to the pontoon crossing point. This feature is likely the location of the old military road. This area is also where Union pioneers leveled a portion of the Confederate works to allow rapid passage by the advancing army. As a Union soldier recounted:

The fifty-seventh (New York Infantry) began the 29th day of April by levelling the rebel breastworks on the west side of the ford.

Cole, Jacob Henry. Under Five Commanders. Patterson, N.J. 1906, p. 136.

The Federal columns did not use the peacetime U.S. Mine Ford Road, as that road bottlenecked at the bridge over the Rappahannock navigation canal. The Federal engineers had avoided the canal obstacle by placing their pontoons just below Lock 6, that section's downriver terminus. In anticipation of such an eventuality, though, the Confederates had prepared additional works on the crest of this hill, consisting of a line approximately 1,400 feet long. This trench is anchored on a hill above the Rappahannock by an extremely well preserved gunpit whose embrasure points directly to United States Ford. Another gunpit along this trench is located adjacent to the U.S. Mine Ford Road and pointed down its approach from the river. The infantry trench continues on the other side of the road and wraps around to parallel this approach, creating a killing zone. Within these works is a pit from the old U.S. Gold Mine operation.



This sketch by Civil War artist Edwin Forbes shows Federal troops crossing the Rappahannock River on pontoons at United States Ford. The view is looking toward Stafford County. Note the two approach roads and the Confederate earthworks that have been flattened to allow troops to pass. The notes read, in part, "The 2nd & 3rd Corps crossing the pontoons at the United States ford. The crossing was effected by moonlight, Thursday evening, April 30th, 1863." Original in the Library of Congress.

Later on 30 April, General Hooker and his staff crossed the Rappahannock at United States Ford and joined the gathering Union host at Chancellorsville. He ordered Major General Daniel Sickles to detach his 3rd Corps from the Fredericksburg front and join the main force of the Army of the Potomac. This corps crossed the United States Ford pontoons on the morning of 1 May and brought the Union concentration at Chancellorsville to nearly five corps. As the campaign unfolded, Hooker also ordered Major General John Reynolds' 1st Corps to march from Fredericksburg to join the main force as well. On 2 May, while Reynolds' troops tramped west on the north side of the Rappahannock, General T. J. "Stonewall" Jackson flanked the Army of the Potomac and sent the Union 11th Corps reeling back to Hooker's headquarters. As Jackson's assault lost momentum, due to darkness and the tangled vegetation that had grown up on the countryside previously denuded by Spotswood's iron industry, the Union 1st Corps reached United States Ford and crossed into Spotsylvania.

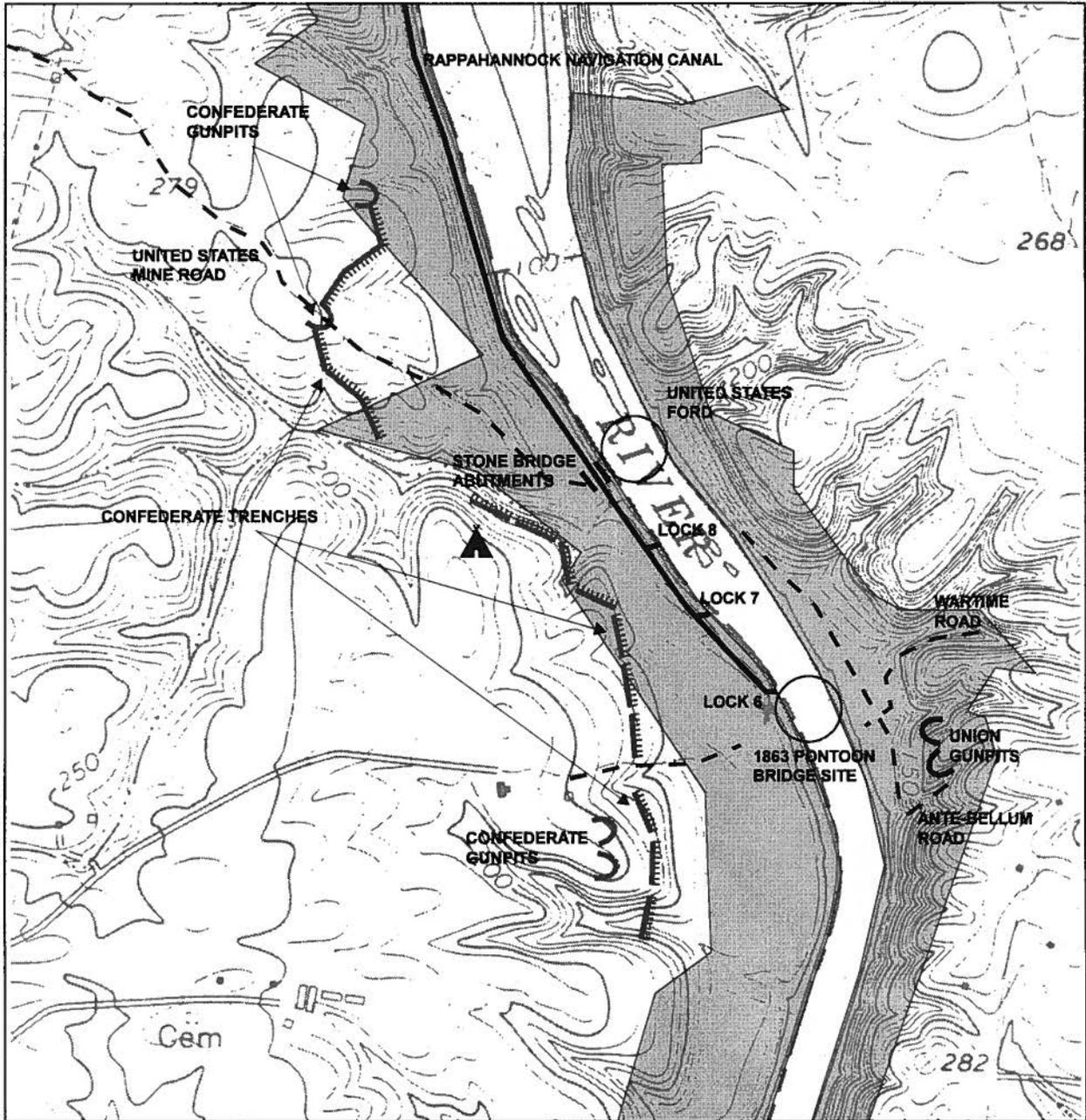
Though the Army of the Potomac outnumbered Lee's available forces and occupied a strong position, Hooker was a beaten man. He pulled his lines back to a defensive position, maintaining United States Ford as his escape route. Logistics were becoming an issue, because the supplies the Union forces had brought with them were nearly used up. The three corps that had constituted Hooker's flanking column, for instance, had departed the Fredericksburg area on 27 April with supplies for eight days. Through its improved logistics doctrine, the Union army had attained an improved mobility and increased its range of operations, but resupply still remained necessary. As Major General Dan Butterfield, acting as the Army of the Potomac's chief of staff, reminded Hooker on 2 May:

Supplies of Howard's Slocum's, and Meade's infantry expire a.m. of Monday (4 May), unless replenished from their trains.

OR XXV, pt. 2, p. 354.

The critical supply trains were subsequently brought to the north side of the United States Ford crossing and brought into the army's area of operations, as needed.

Although the Army of the Potomac remained a formidable force, Hooker decided to withdraw from the south side of the Rappahannock. He had called on Major General John Sedgwick and his 6th Corps to come to the aid of his five corps at Chancellorsville, but Sedgwick's efforts had been unsuccessful. By 5 May, the 6th Corps had recrossed the river at Bank's/Scott's Ford. Hooker ordered a withdrawal from Chancellorsville and the Army of the Potomac proceeded to collapse its line as the troops crossed the pontoon bridges to the north side of the river.



Map 40. Military Preparations at United States Ford.

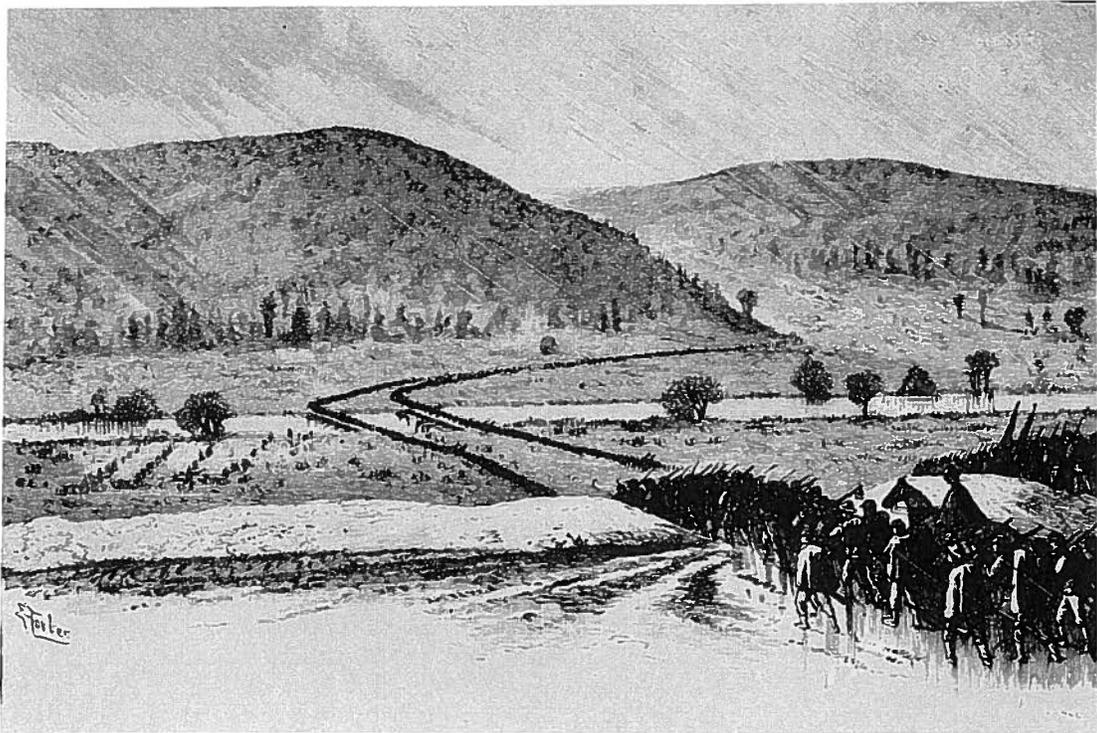
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A final, grim episode at United States Ford illustrates how brutal the war had become by 1864. As armies maneuvered, far-ranging cavalry often operated at their fringes, seeking intelligence and maintaining security. A Virginia cavalryman recounted an episode that occurred during the opening weeks of Lieutenant General U.S. Grant's Wilderness/Spotsylvania Court House Campaign:

I went down into Stafford - while the Yankees were fighting on the Spottsylvania side. On this expedition I reached the United States Ford where I had once done picket duty - the year before. The Yankees had a picket there, and with some dozen other scouts with whom I met in my wanderings it was agreed that we should cross the river in a boat and capture those pickets.... three or four trips of the boat put us across. Each man had a double barreled shot gun charged with buckshot, and a pistol or two to boot, and we were confident of cleaning up our supposed three dozen adversaries before they got awake. Going well back into the hills - we went clear around the objects of our attack and approached them from above. We got into the bed of the old Canal and quietly crept down until we were abreast of the picket camp - which was situated on a little plateau between the canal and the river.... I being familiar with the ground - took one man and passed down beyond the camp to take possession of the road by which the Yankees would have to escape if they tried. It was agreed that the main body of our party would spring over the canal bank and rushing on the camp demand its surrender. If the surrender was made without firing, we would take them all prisoners and quietly cross the river again - but if a shot was fired we were to kill them all. This was rendered necessary by the proximity of a cavalry camp up on the hill - and the difficulty anticipated in recrossing the river which was swollen.... our men... leaped into the camp and called for a surrender. No doubt all the Yankees would have complied and some of them did. But we had a cold blooded fellow with us by the name of R__ who had done service with General Walker in Nicaragua.... He... killed the first Yankee he came to. Another remonstrated that the man had surrendered - whereupon R__ shot him also. A fusilade ensued in which all the Yankees except two were killed, but the whole party turned out to be only thirteen.... The sentinel tried to escape down the road I was guarding. I shot at him and he went down. Another Yankee came running down the same way. I fired my other barrel at him (and) he fell on his hands and knees. I drew my pistol but he was finished by some one else before I could use it.

Unpublished manuscript, 1891.
Memoirs of J.Z.H. Scott.
Courtesy of National Park Service.

In Spotsylvania County, the City of Fredericksburg's riparian holdings include the Rappahannock navigation canal, a portion of the U.S. Mine Ford Road, large sections of Confederate entrenchments, and the 1864 massacre site. In Stafford County, the City of Fredericksburg owns a significant portion of both the ante-bellum and the war-time roads rising out of the floodplain, one altered by the pipeline but the other intact and quite vivid.



The Union Army of the Potomac in retreat, crossing the Rappahannock at United States Ford (as depicted in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*). Note the flattened Confederate earthworks, the rain, and the road that snakes around the hill on the Stafford shore.

Richard's Ford - This Rappahannock crossing, approximately one mile above the confluence, was never as important to military operations as the United States Ford, or Ely's and Germanna Fords. Still, it could have provided an avenue for major troop movements and was guarded accordingly. Lieutenant Lemuel B. Norton, a Federal signal officer, described it as "Formerly a ferry now forded at low water, slackwater navigation having changed the character."

Military activity at Richard's Ford first occurred in December 1862. At that time, a Federal reconnaissance, under Colonel James Barnes (commanding 1st Division, 5th Corps), was undertaken as a diversion for a cavalry raid. Although the raid was later aborted, the Union column forced the river on the morning of 31 December 1862, scattered a detachment of the First South Carolina Cavalry, and advanced into Culpeper County. A Union infantryman later wrote of the rather harsh conditions:

The ford was waist deep. There was much splashing and floundering in the hurry to reach the other side, the intense cold accelerating progress.... The troops were scarcely out of the water, before all their clothing was frozen stiff and became a weight to carry.

Smith, J.L. History of the 118th Pennsylvania Volunteers. Philadelphia, 1905, p. 154.

When the ford had been secured, Colonel Barnes left a brigade on the Stafford side and headed toward Ellis's Ford with the remainder of his force. He was accompanied by a detachment of the Third Pennsylvania Cavalry and a regiment of Berdan's United States Sharpshooters. The Sharpshooters had covered the crossing from the heights overlooking the ford and it was probably their fire that wounded a member of the Richards household (described in **Water Power: Mills and Other Industries**).

The Federal column reached Ellis's Ford later that day. The Pennsylvania cavalry approached another detachment of the First South Carolina Cavalry from behind, their attention having been diverted by a Federal force on the opposite side of the river. Caught between two fires, the South Carolinians fled and the Federal force forded the Rappahannock into Fauquier County (OR XXI, pp. 742-744).

During the Chancellorsville Campaign (April/May 1863), Major General George G. Meade's 5th Corps marched from Kelly's Ford on the Rappahannock to Ely's Ford on the Rapidan, as part of Major General Joseph T. Hooker's initial flank movement. When this force reached Richardsville, a squadron of cavalry was detached to both Ellis' and Richard's Fords to ensure the column's flank remained secure. At Richard's Ford, the Union cavalry surprised the Confederate pickets there and captured approximately three dozen soldiers (OR XXV, pt. 1, p. 506).

The Chancellorsville Campaign came to an end as Hooker withdrew to the north side of the Rappahannock. Flank security remained important, though, and units were

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detailed to cover the crossings to the west of the line of retreat at United States Ford. Major General John Reynolds was ordered to send a regiment of infantry and a battery of guns to the Stafford side of Richard's Ford. Further, they were to entrench. Federal cavalry was also dispatched to guard and obstruct all possible river crossings as far upstream as Rappahannock Station (Remington).

Evidence of a military presence at Richard's Ford consists of the Federal rifle pits along the forward slope of the ridge just north of the old road, on the Stafford side of the river. This trench is approximately 350 feet long and was probably constructed by Reynolds' 1st Corps troops (based on their orders). Berdan's Sharpshooters make no reference to digging and during their foray in December had used natural cover instead. Farther back along an old road trace is another short trench, on the south side of the road (approximately 70 feet long).

These works could also have been dug by soldiers of the 146th New York Infantry (3rd Brigade, 2nd Division, 5th Corps). During the period between the Battle of Chancellorsville and the opening of what would become the Gettysburg Campaign, these troops picketed the Rappahannock River in this area. As one of its members wrote:

our life at Richard's Ford was extremely wearing. While we were in camp we were kept busy building redoubts, rifle pits, and abatis, and were ready, at five minutes' notice, to repel any attack against the ford or to march to any point on the river. Each man was compelled to be out on picket duty every other day because of the great distance our regiment was patrolling. The pickets would lie back in the woods the greater part of the day, coming down to the river front at night. It rained frequently, rendering picket work doubly discomforting....

Brainard, Mary Genevieve Green, e.d.
Campaign of the One Hundred and
Forty-Sixth Regiment New York State
Volunteers. New York, 1915, p. 95.

Another incident occurred after the Gettysburg Campaign when elements of the Union 2nd Corps were detached to cover the river fords. The 148th Pennsylvania Infantry stood picket at Richard's Ford when it was attacked by Confederate cavalry in September 1863. As one of its members remembered:

September 1st: It was midnight; the 148th at Richardson's Ford, lay soundly sleeping in bivouac, with a heavy picket guard at the crossing supported by a strong reserve....

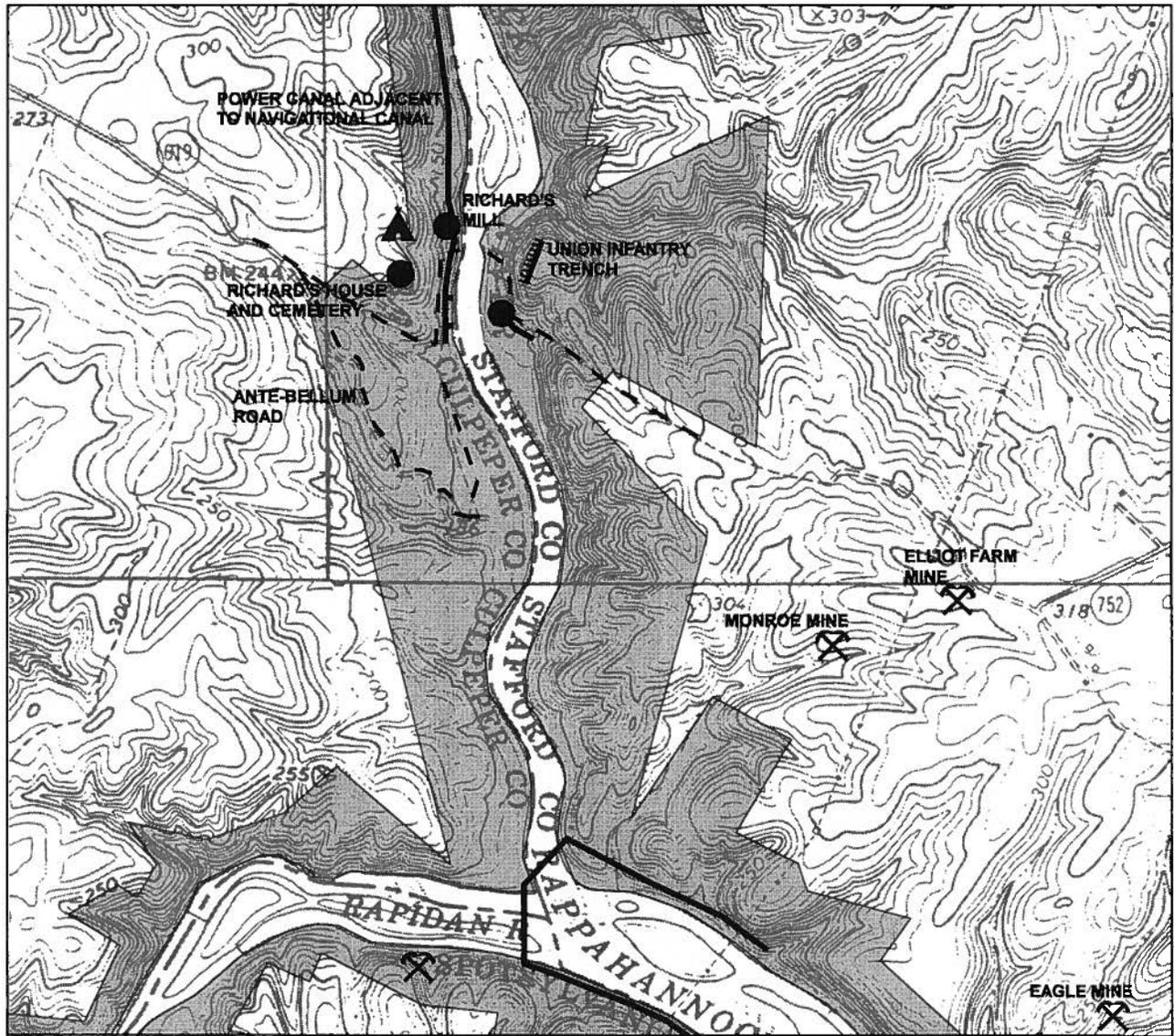
Suddenly, a volley of small arms was fired into our pickets from across the river, killing one of our men. Simultaneously a considerable force of Confederate cavalry dashed across the ford. In less than five minutes the 148th was in battle order and moving rapidly forward...; but they remained not to fight; they had galloped into the country east of us.

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Muffly, Joseph Wendel, ed. The
Story of our Regiment. A History
of the 148th Pennsylvania Volunteers.
Des Moines, 1904, p. 478.

Confederate cavalry reports for this period describe raids to disrupt Federal communications and to capture remounts. The Confederate horsemen the Pennsylvania infantrymen encountered briefly on 1 September 1863 were likely engaged in such pursuits.

The Civil War earthworks at Richard's Ford as well as the ante-bellum roads are within the City of Fredericksburg's riparian holdings.



Map 41. Military Preparations at Richard's Ford/Ferry.

Embrey's Ford - Embrey's Ford is located approximately one mile above Richard's Ford, between Powell's Dam and Lock 13 at the end of the Deep Run Canal. On the south side of the Rappahannock, in Culpeper County, the riverbank consists of steep cliffs. There is evidence of a road trace that travels out of the bottom, to the west of the cliffs. On the north side of the river, in Stafford County, the road trace extends up a ravine to the east of the bend in the river. This road also parallels the north bank of the mill canal. A stone retaining wall can be seen where the road crosses a small tributary.

Farther to the east, the canal ends where the river turns to the south, but the road continues to the east and zig-zags up the ridge. At a T-intersection, a clearly defined ante-bellum road continues to the southeast toward Richland Run. This road has been subjected to use by four-wheel drive recreational vehicles. Such activity has resulted in the straightening out of bends in the original road, leaving portions of the historic road intact. As a consequence, sections of the old road remain quite evident even as others have been obliterated.

Lieutenant Lemuel B. Norton, a signal officer in the Union Army of the Potomac, carefully described each of the Rappahannock and Rapidan River fords. He had an entry for "Embury's Old Ford," but left out any description, suggesting it may no longer have been a viable crossing. At that time, Powell's Dam may have still backed up the river at this location, precluding its use. There is also no evidence of Civil War earthworks, to support picket posts. The road trace on the upland plateau could have been used by military detachments travelling to Richard's or United States Fords from points farther upriver, although there were better and more direct routes through Hartwood.

The Embrey's Ford area is within the City of Fredericksburg's riparian holdings.

Deep Run - The area along Deep Run, which separates Stafford County from Fauquier County, was picketed by Federal units during the winter of 1862/63 to cover the western approaches to the Army of the Potomac's encampments around Fredericksburg. B.L. Blackford's 1863 map labels Deep Run as "Deep Creek." Blackford also shows the road that roughly corresponds to Route 17 as "Marsh Road." The road branching north northwest (Route 612), from Hartwood, was called the "Falmouth and Warrenton Road."

In November 1862, when Major General Ambrose E. Burnside brought his army along the Rappahannock, from Culpeper to Fredericksburg, he sent a brigade of cavalry to guard against any Confederate crossing that could threaten his right flank. Brigadier General Alfred Pleasonton established his headquarters on the west side of Deep Run. On 21 November, he reported his observations to army headquarters.

There has been no signs of the enemy in our rear, and only a few cavalry pickets at the fords. On several of the roads leading to the fords the enemy has felled timber across, showing they feared us more than we have thought....

The road from Hartwood to this place is now almost impassable for wagons, and it is absolutely necessary to remove this command nearer to a depot of supply.... This creek (Deep Run), I am told, is swimming after heavy rains, so I shall cross it as soon as I can. I do not think it is necessary to keep pickets at the fords above this creek; a strong picket here is sufficient.

OR XXI, pp. 781-782.

The critical need for pickets to remain alert was driven home a week later. On the night of 28 November 1862, Brigadier General Wade Hampton crossed to the north side of the Rappahannock, with just over 200 Confederate cavalymen, to probe the Union force. He noted the Union pickets extended to Deep Run but brought his column through the woods between the two roads (Marsh Road and the Falmouth and Warrenton Road) that crossed Deep Run and converged on Hartwood. Hampton successfully eluded the Federal cavalry pickets and surprised and captured their reserve squadron near Hartwood. He returned along both roads and captured the respective picket forces at Deep Run from behind. With 92 prisoners and about 100 horses, the jubilant Confederates returned to the south side of the Rappahannock.

Upon taking command of the Army of the Potomac, Major General Joseph Hooker reorganized the cavalry in an effort to mold it into a powerful striking force. In February 1863, he created an independent cavalry corps, under the command of Brigadier General George Stoneman. He sought to make it into a more effective force and one that would no longer be embarrassed by Confederate raids such as Hampton's of the previous November. The new organization was tested almost immediately when Brigadier General Fitzhugh Lee crossed the Rappahannock at Kelly's Ford on 24 February with a force of 400 cavalymen. He drove in the Union

pickets the next day and attacked the main force at Hartwood Church. Stoneman directed two Union cavalry columns to close in on the Confederate raiding force, trying to cut it off at Deep Run, but Lee's horse soldiers made good their escape.

The Fourth Virginia Cavalry (Lee's Brigade), posted in Spotsylvania County, crossed the Rappahannock at United States Ford during Fitz Lee's foray, to provide the raiders a potential escape route, if needed. As one of its members recalled after the war:

I had no idea that we would be compelled to ford the river on such a cold night (I learned better afterward), but after sitting on our horses, shivering with the cold for an hour, an order was given: "Fall in by fours: march," and into the water we plunged up to over our saddle skirts. About a mile beyond we charged a Yankee picket post and ran them back to the old Berea church....

We remained on that side of the river all day and night, and many of us were on picket duty at night.... from the sound of cannon a few miles above us, we knew that a cavalry fight had taken place.

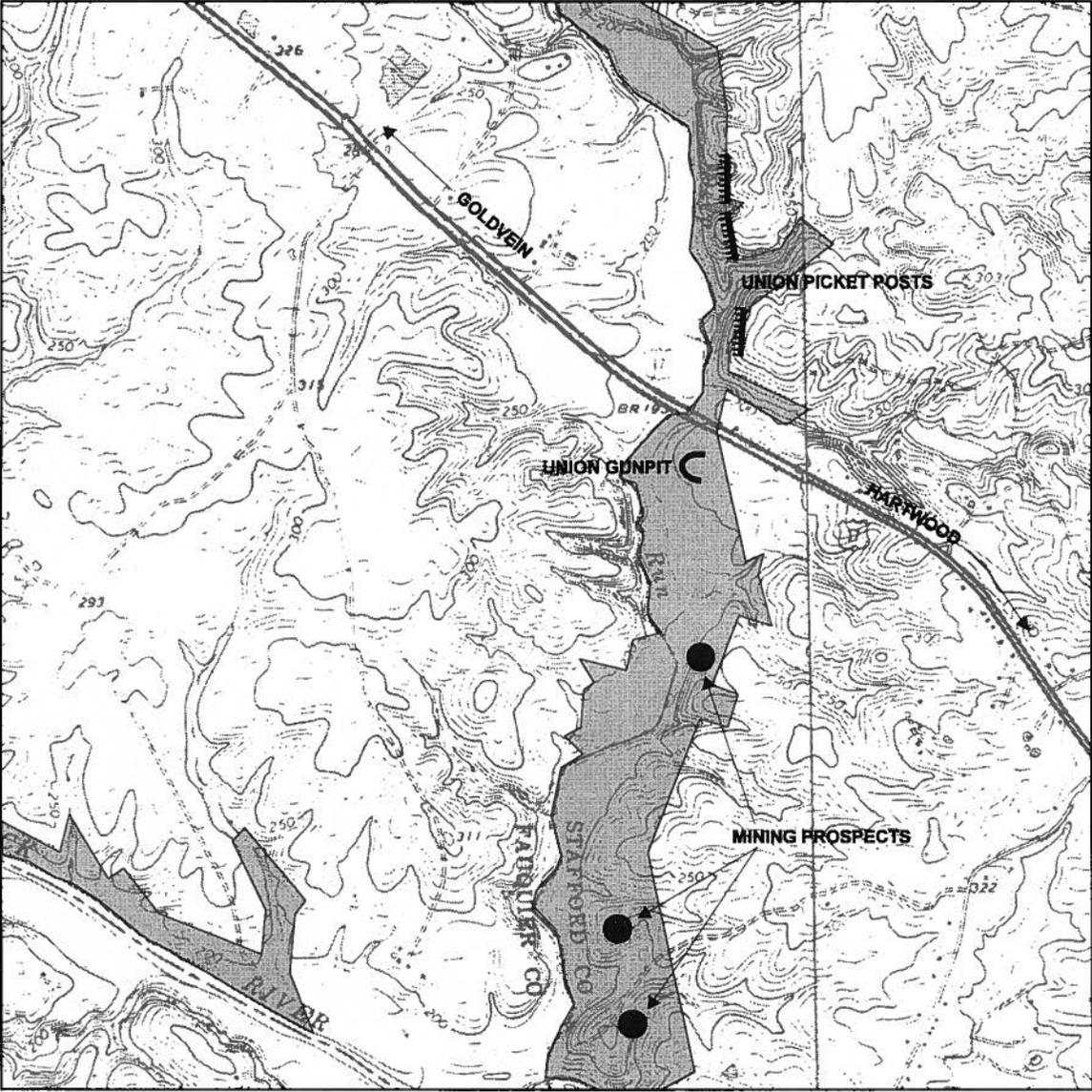
Conway, William R. "Above
Fredericksburg, Va., During the
Winter of 1862-3." Atlanta
Journal, January 4, 1902.

The ground to the east of Deep Run dominates the terrain to the west along which Route 17 (Marsh Road) approaches. Pickets posted in this area could readily keep watch in that direction and subsequent field research confirmed the presence of soldiers there during the Civil War. On the crest of the first dominant hill north of Route 17 (Marsh Road), for instance, is what appears to be a picket post. It consists of three shallow pits, evenly spaced, as well as nearby squared-off depressions that could have been shelter sites.

On the next hill to the north are five more pits. These are just to the east of the crest, revealing a clear view of Route 17 (Marsh Road) to the west yet remaining quite hidden from that direction. These pits are substantially deeper than the three on the hill to the south. The next hill to the north also exhibits the remains of a picket post and shelter sites. Much of the ground on top of these hills, however, has been previously logged or bulldozed to prepare for residential development. No other historic resources are evident above these picket posts or further upstream on the property above Deep Run.

South of the road, the terrain is not as commanding. In addition, the gentle slope to the east of the waterway has been heavily plowed. There is evidence of a lone gun pit guarding the southern exposure of Route 17 (Marsh Road) at Deep Run. Further downstream along Deep Run is faint evidence of hut sites among evidence of gold prospecting. Whether these sites are related to the Civil War or the earlier mining activity, however, is not known.

An examination of archival data for the Deep Run area provided very little information. Civil War maps do not show anything on these tracts either. In addition, the 1836 map of mining and milling sites is blank for the tracts in city ownership. Still, the City of Fredericksburg's riparian holdings include the commanding terrain as well as the few picket posts discovered during field research. Also within city ownership is the gun pit south of Route 17 and the numerous cuts related to gold mining.



Map 42. Military Preparations at Deep Run.

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Skinker's Ford (Rappahannock) - Skinker's Ford is located at Skinker's Mill, below Sumerduck Run but upstream from Rock Run. Lieutenant Norton described this crossing as "Rocky" and able to be "crossed by Cavalry." This distinction is important because infantry could not typically use a ford if it was over a certain depth. Horse mounted troops had more flexibility in this regard. According to the 1861 Military Dictionary:

In examining and reporting upon a ford, the main points to be considered are the firmness and regularity of the bottom, its length, width, and direction; the depth,... the rapidity of the current, the facilities of access, security from attack, and the means of rendering it impassable.... The depth of fords for cavalry should not be more than 4 feet 4 inches, and for infantry 3 feet 3 inches.... Should the stream be very rapid, however, depths much less than these could not be considered fordable, particularly if the bottom is uneven....

Military Dictionary, pp. 309-310.

A reference to troops at this location is contained in the 2 August 1863 report of Brigadier General George Greene, (commanding the 3rd Brigade, 2nd Division, 12th Corps). He wrote from Ellis's Ford as follows:

A force of 50 men is stationed at Ellis' Ford. At Mr. Royal's, one mile and a half below, is posted a detachment of 30 men, guarding a ford and dam (Skinker's); and the One hundred and thirty-seventh New York Volunteers, Colonial Ireland, is stationed at Kemper's Ford, 3 miles above here.

OR XXVII, pt. 3, p. 829.

On the south approach to the ford, in Culpeper County, is an ante-bellum road trace. This historic road should not be confused with the more recent road cut bulldozed into the ridge to the east. On the other side of the river, in Fauquier County, there are additional traces of roads that pass by Skinker's Mill. On a knob above Skinker's Mill is also a short line of military trenches, measuring approximately 40-50 feet in length. Evidence of any other military presence is no longer discernible as the area was subsequently logged and anything from an earlier time has been obliterated. Skinker's Ford and portions of its various approach roads are contained within the City of Fredericksburg's riparian holdings.



Map 43. Military Preparations at Skinker's Ford.

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Ellis's Ford - Ellis's Ford, also called Barnett's Ford, lies almost directly north of Ely's Ford on the Rapidan and on a road connecting the two crossings. This north-south avenue was cut by an east-west road between Richardsville and Richard's Ford/Ferry. Modern bridges elsewhere have caused this crossing to become rather obscure, but it was once a busy location.

During the Civil War, there were two periods when the war in Virginia spilled into the region between the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers. It was during these times that Ellis's Ford gained some importance. The first time was in the summer of 1862 when Major General John Pope maneuvered his Union Army of Virginia against two Confederate divisions under General T. J. "Stonewall" Jackson and eventually the rest of General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. The second time was the summer and fall of 1863, after Gettysburg, when the Union Army of the Potomac, under Major General George G. Meade, confronted Lee's army. in a campaign of maneuver. There were other times when the Ellis Ford crossing was used, but the above two periods are when it took on military significance.

The Federal earthworks that remain evident at Ellis's Mill were constructed very early on. In May 1862, Major General George B. McClellan operated against Lee on the Richmond Peninsula. Stonewall Jackson was busy fighting Union forces in the Shenandoah Valley. In between, at Fredericksburg, was a Federal corps commanded by Major General Irvin McDowell. In late May, the Federal command responded to Jackson's offensive in the Shenandoah Valley by dispatching several columns to converge on the Confederate force. Brigadier General Rufus King, for instance, was ordered to move his division from the Fredericksburg area toward Warrenton and then to Front Royal. Flank security for these columns was provided at the Rappahannock River, as a soldier in the Ninth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry remembered:

Our 1st division was ordered to hold the fords on the Rappahannock river, and prevent the enemy from crossing. The division was furnished with a supply train and intrenching implements, and it was accompanied by two batteries of artillery.... The regiment bivouacked at Hartwood Church on the night of the 28th, and near the Rappahannock on the night of the 29th. On the 30th we encamped in a belt of woods on the bank of the river, in the vicinity of Ellis' Ford. Our pickets were posted along the river. We found the enemy's pickets on duty on the opposite bank. Our fatigue party dug rifle-pits and threw up intrenchments. On the night of June 2, while engaged in work on a rifle-pit near the ford, the enemy opened fire from a piece of artillery with grapeshot. They fortunately fired too high to kill, and our men escaped injury.

McNamara, Daniel George. The History of the Ninth Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. Boston, 1899, p. 307.

In June, Jackson overcame the various Federal forces in the Shenandoah Valley and then marched to Lee's aid in front of Richmond. Later that month, Federal authorities

brought the various forces under one overall army, and assigned General Pope to command this effort. In July 1862, Pope moved south, advancing from the area around Culpeper toward Gordonsville. In his report on these operations, Pope described the disposition of his advance elements.

The Cavalry forces covering the front of the army on that day (7 August 1862) were distributed as follows: General Buford, with five regiments, was posted at Madison Court-House with his pickets along the line of the Rapidan from Barnett's Ford as far west as the Blue Ridge.

OR XII, pt. 2, p. 24.

On 9 August, Stonewall Jackson (recently returned from in front of Richmond) fought a battle at Cedar Mountain against a portion of Pope's Army of Virginia. Jackson subsequently withdrew behind the Rapidan, but Lee soon dispatched the bulk of his Army of Northern Virginia toward Gordonsville. Even as Pope took command of the newly organized Army of Virginia, Lee had forced McCellan's Army of the Potomac back from Richmond to its base on the James River. McCellan was soon ordered to withdraw from the Peninsula and the Confederates were quick to respond. Southern columns initiated several actions that caused Pope to withdraw behind the Rappahannock. Elements of the Union Army of the Potomac began to arrive in the Rappahannock valley, however, just transferred from the Peninsula. As a consequence, Lee and Jackson launched what became the Second Manassas Campaign in an attempt to destroy Pope before he could be more substantially reinforced. A member of the famed Black Horse Cavalry recalled one of these early actions:

The Fourth Regiment crossed the Rappahannock at Wallis' ford, and, marching through farms, regardless of roads, came into the main road from Culpepper Court-House to Fredericksburg, and turning to the right, attacked the cavalry protecting Pope's extreme left and drove it across the Rappahannock at Ellis' mill.

Scott, John. "The Black Horse Cavalry," in the Philadelphia Weekly Times, 1879.

Second Manassas was followed by a campaign in Maryland that culminated in the Battle of Antietam, or Sharpsburg. In November of 1862, Major General Ambrose E. Burnside assumed command of the Army of the Potomac and shifted his operations from Culpeper to Fredericksburg. Still, the upriver fords remained potential approaches and were carefully guarded. While the main armies fought at Fredericksburg in December 1862, for instance, units such as the Sixth New York Cavalry patrolled the river. Their unit history describes a "dash over Barnett's Ford" (Ellis's) to reconnoiter that crossing. The entry for 14 December 1862 (the day after Burnside's futile attacks at Fredericksburg), states the "Sixth New York continued to hold the fords along the river and to patrol the roads in the vicinity (History of the

Sixth New York Cavalry. Worcester, Mass., 1908, p. 87)." Colonel Barnes' reconnaissance (described under the section on Richard's Ford) also emerged at Ellis's Ford on 31 December 1862.

Confederate troops at this crossing also prepared earthworks on their side of the river. Reference to these entrenchments is made in a Federal cavalry commander's report of 28 April 1863:

made a reconnaissance in person (after halting and feeding horses and men) to Ellis' Ford. Woke up their infantry, who came down into the rifle-pits and drew bead on us. They sent one shot at a picket I left.... Picketed near Ellis's, Kemper's, and Field's....

OR XXV, pt. 2, p. 276.

In the summer of 1863, the main armies confronted each other once again in the area between the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers. A cavalry action had occurred at Brandy Station in the spring, but in late July, the Union Army of the Potomac, now commanded by Major General George G. Meade, followed Lee's Confederate force back from Gettysburg. Meade soon advanced to the Rappahannock and on 1 August, a Union brigade commander reported from Ellis's Ford, a place that had clearly been picketed before:

I found the ford high and impassable to infantry. One large flat-boat, used at the ferry, was sunk by my orders, and a small boat removed and placed under guard. The mill commanding the ford I find to have been loopholed for musketry and strengthened with railroad iron. A rifle pit is also dug on the hill above the mill. These preparations for defense were made by our troops during last spring.

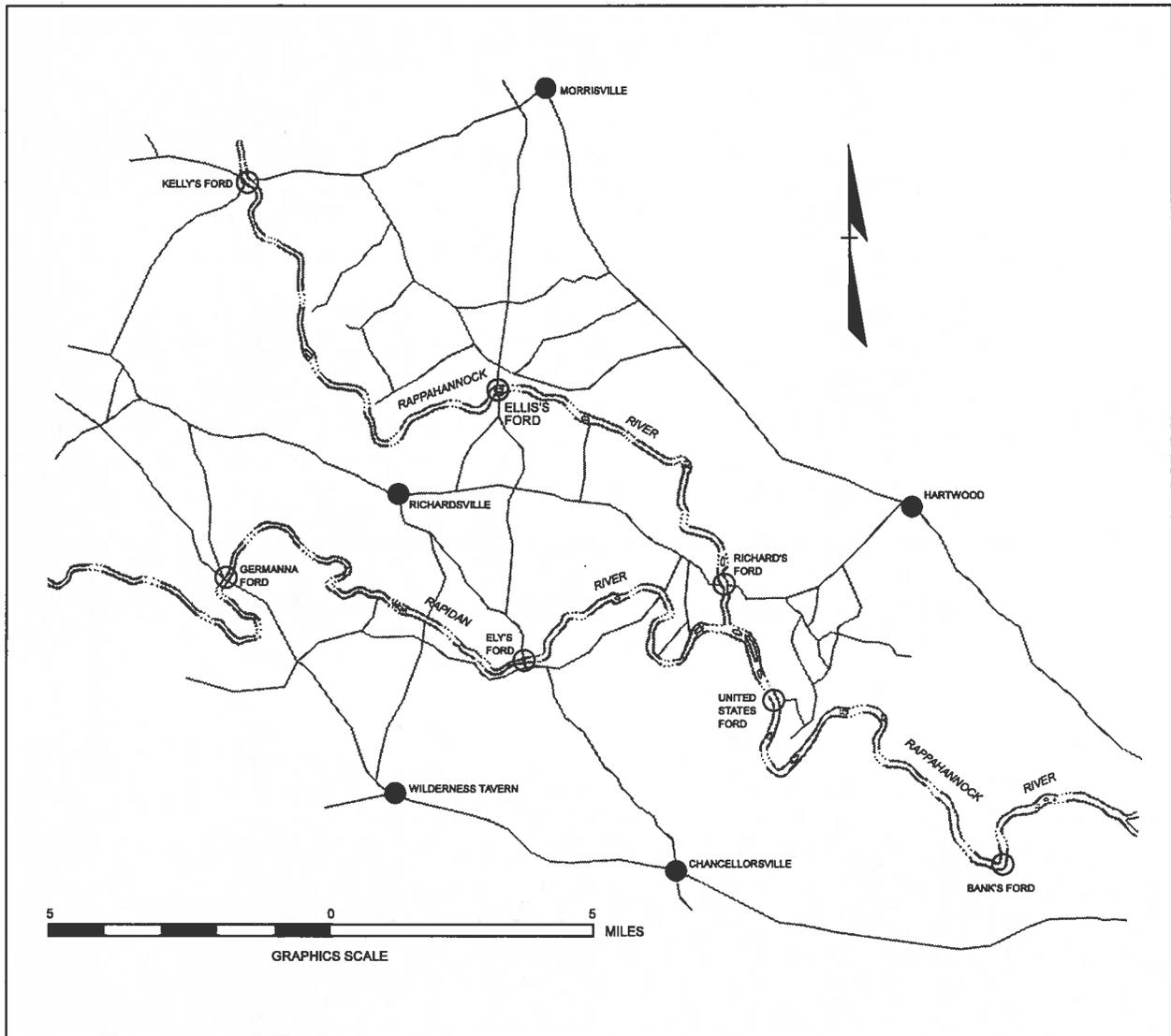
No enemy has been seen at this point since our arrival. One horseman and two armed men of the rebel service crossed yesterday to this side by boat, and are still on this side.

OR, XXVII, pt. 3, p. 822.

Along the Rappahannock, August was punctuated by some skirmishing, but no serious threats to either army. In September, the Confederate command detached General James Longstreet's Corps from the Army of Northern Virginia and sent it to join the Confederate army in Tennessee. Within days of Longstreet's departure, Meade advanced his Army of the Potomac to Culpeper Court House and pushed toward the Rapidan. Fighting occurred at Brandy Station, Culpeper Court House and elsewhere.

On 19-20 September 1863, a battle was fought in Tennessee along a creek called Chickamauga. Longstreet's detached corps was instrumental in achieving a Confederate victory. Federal authorities in Washington subsequently detached two corps from the Army of the Potomac and sent them to Tennessee to provide relief to

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Map 44. Military Importance of Ellis's Ford. As the historic road network shows, this ford provided another route across the Rappahannock, downstream of Kelly's Ford.

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the recently defeated Union army at Chattanooga.

With troops detached from both armies in the Rappahannock valley, Lee took the initiative. On 9 October, he began a movement to try to turn Meade's flank. Meade withdrew north, but Lee's effort ended badly at Bristoe Station. Unable to gain advantage, Lee had withdrawn behind the Rappahannock by 22 October. On 7 November, Meade resumed active operations and pushed back across the Rappahannock, establishing a base of supply at Brandy Station.

In late November, Meade advanced again, this time across the Rapidan, in what became known as the Mine Run Campaign. The main army crossed the Rapidan at Germanna Ford and at the Culpeper Mine Ford. The far ranging cavalry, however, crossed further out on the army's flanks. The First Maine Cavalry crossed at Ellis's.

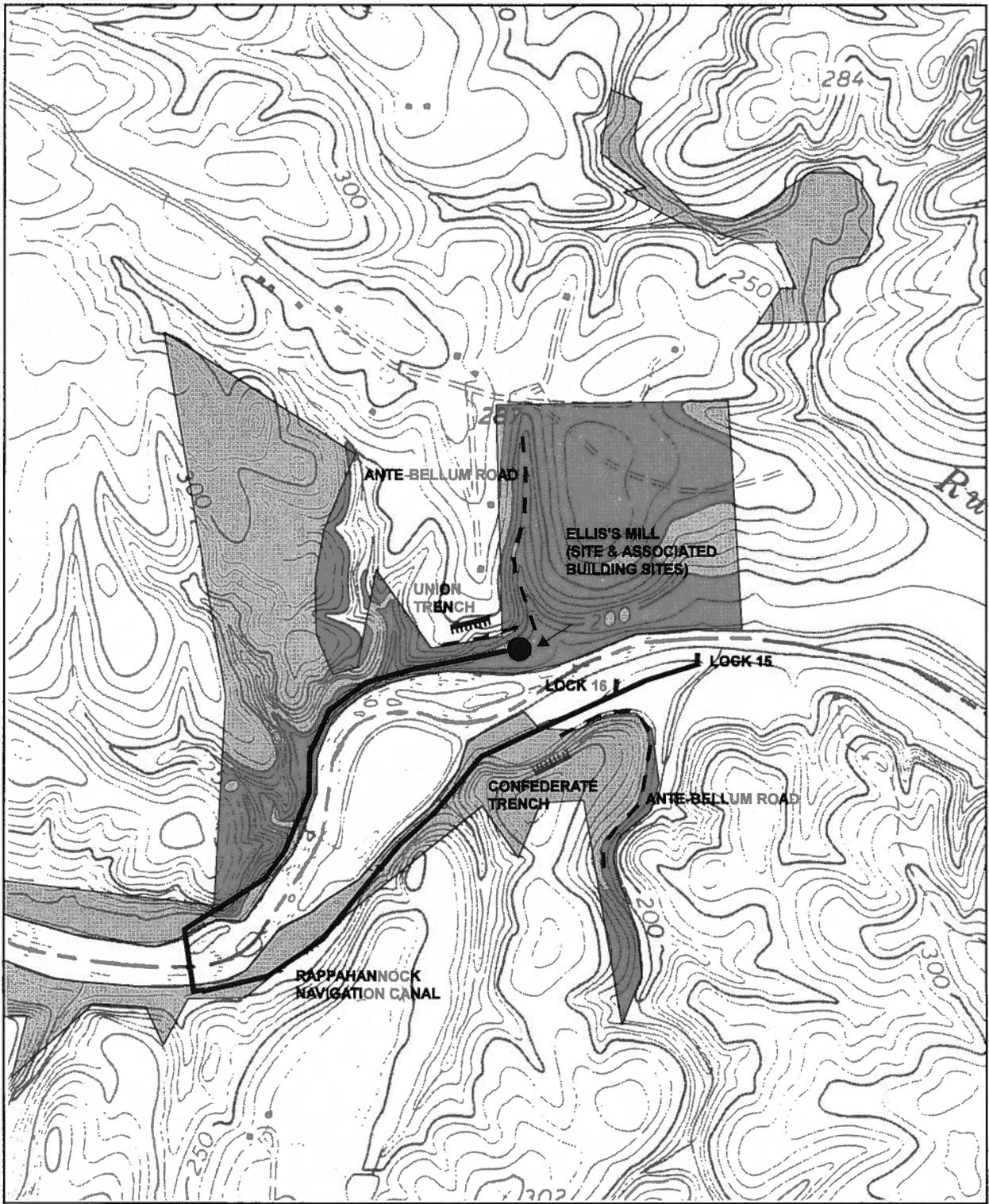
On the twenty-fourth of November a forward movement of the whole army was commenced, with the intention of trying once more to whip the rebel forces before going into winter quarters.... The First Maine crossed the Rappahannock at Ellis' ford, and marching to the Rapidan, a portion stood picket that night and the next day at Ely's ford, while the rest went into camp near Richardsville. On the twenty-sixth the Rapidan was crossed, and the division took the left of the army.

Tobie, Edward P. History of the
First Maine Cavalry, 1861-1865.
Boston, 1887, p. 210.

On the ridge north of Ellis's Mill is a line of military trenches dug by soldiers of the Ninth Massachusetts Regiment. This line is situated above a stone wall which likely marks the edge of an old road. These works extend for approximately 200 feet, its western end wrapping around the crest of the hill, facing from south to west.

On the opposite shore, in Culpeper County, there is evidence of a road that crosses the Rappahannock Canal. This road has seen much modern use, but has ante-bellum antecedents (according to wartime maps as well as the 1848 "Map and Profile of the Rappahannock River and Its Improvements"). The hilltops have been heavily bulldozed and timbered, making identification of any anomalies problematic. Still, a short line of trenches (approximately 65 feet long) has survived along the military crest of a steep hill overlooking the ford.

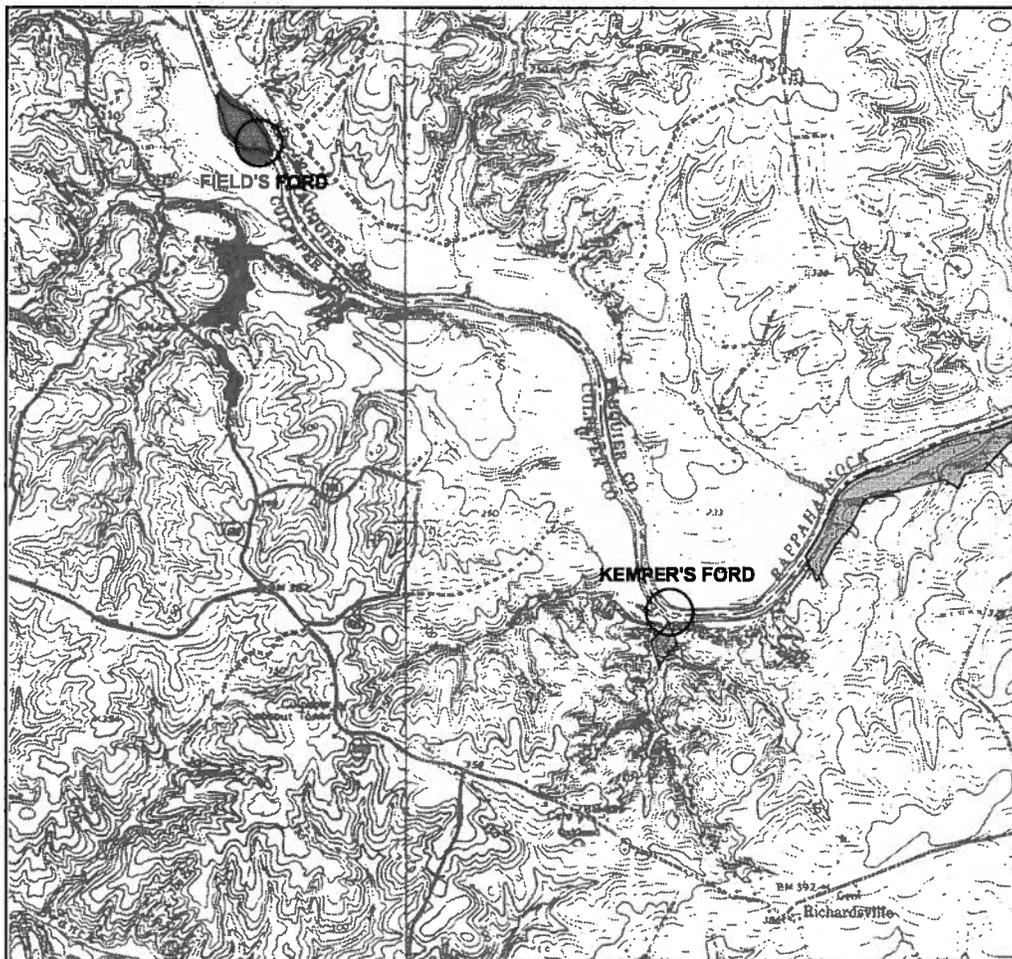
The map on the following page shows the resources at Ellis's Mill that are within the City of Fredericksburg's riparian holdings.



Map 45. Military Preparations at Ellis's Ford.

Kemper's Ford and Field's Ford - There are two additional fords above Ellis' where the City of Fredericksburg owns riparian property. The city's public holdings are extremely limited in these areas, though, and do not include any significant historic resources. For reference, Lieutenant L.B. Norton, Union signal officer, described these fords in his requisition book. Kemper's Ford is described as "Good but steep approaches." Field's Ford is called "Sandy now impassable."

There are Civil War references to Kemper's Ford in Union reports, but the city does not own any of the nearby property where earthworks are likely to be located.



Map 46. Kemper's and Field's Fords.

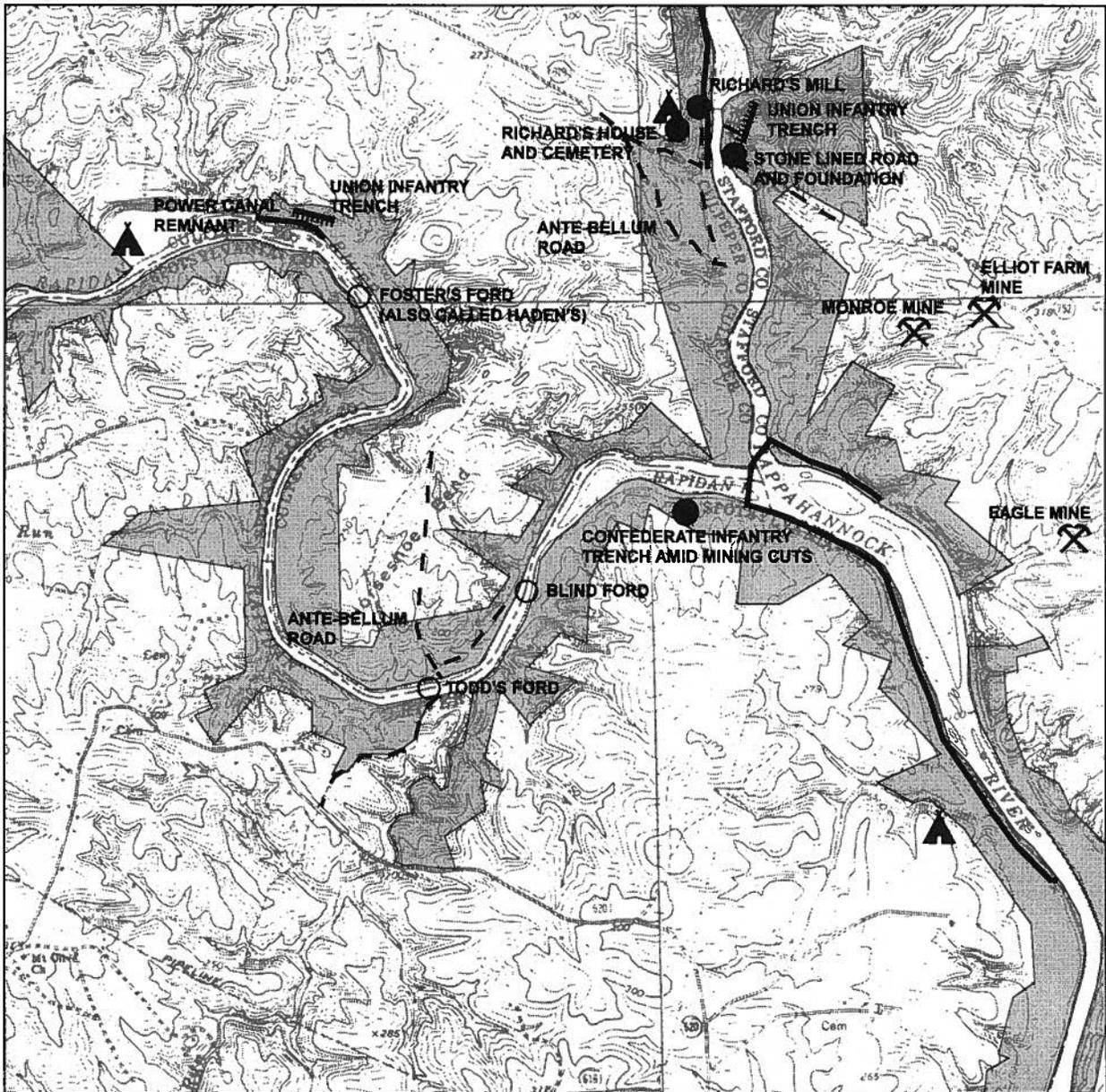
140

Blind Ford, Todd's Ford, and Foster's Ford - There are three fords between the confluence of the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers and Ely's Ford, approximately six miles upstream on the Rapidan. Blind Ford appears in Jedediah Hotchkiss's map of Chancellorsville that he prepared to accompany General Robert E. Lee's report of that campaign. On the map prepared to accompany Lee's report on the Mine Run Campaign, this stretch of the Rapidan is shown with Blind Ford as well as Todd's and Haden's (Foster's) Ford. The Federal map for this campaign, however, shows only Blind and Todd's Ford.

The thorough Lieutenant Norton, Union signal officer, described Blind Ford as "very bad." There is no evidence of military works at the crossing point although Confederate trenches are located slightly downstream on a hill just above the confluence. These works consist of earthworks across the northern face of a steep slope and around an earlier gold mining site. Additional works are located to the west and to the south of this hilltop. These works may have been manned to observe any units approaching Richard's Ford, approximately one mile to the north, or coming into the Horseshoe Bend area toward Blind or Todd's Fords.

At Todd's Ford, near Hunting Run in Spotsylvania County, there is also evidence of Confederate works. These are also located on an earlier gold mining site, but the military works are quite different from the industrial cuts. While some of the area has been altered by post-war activity (bulldozing) there are several intact trenches covering the old ford road. On the north side of the Rapidan are numerous gold mining cuts (described previously) and a distinct road trace descending the ridge fronting a ravine to the east of the mining activity.

Forster's Ford appears as "Haden's Ford" on the Confederate map of the Mine Run Campaign. There is evidence of a road trace on the south side of the Rapidan, but the north shore opposite is privately owned. The City of Fredericksburg's riparian property resumes less than 1,000 feet downstream of the ford, where a millrace is located. On a ridge above the power canal is a short line of trenches that may have been part of a larger network of Federal works covering this crossing.



Map 47. Blind, Todd's and Foster's Fords.

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Ely's Ford - Ely's Ford has been in use for thousands of years. Its environs were previously occupied by aboriginal tribes and the crossing remains in use today through a contemporary roadway bridge, located just to the west of the old ford. This river crossing derived the name still used today from a Spotsylvania family that lived nearby as early as the late eighteenth century.

The ford appears in historic records from the American Revolution. In 1781, General George Washington shifted the Continental Army, reinforced by a French expeditionary force, from New York to Virginia. As the armies moved south, to eventually confront the British at Yorktown, the militia officer George Weedon reported to the Marquis de Lafayette from Fredericksburg:

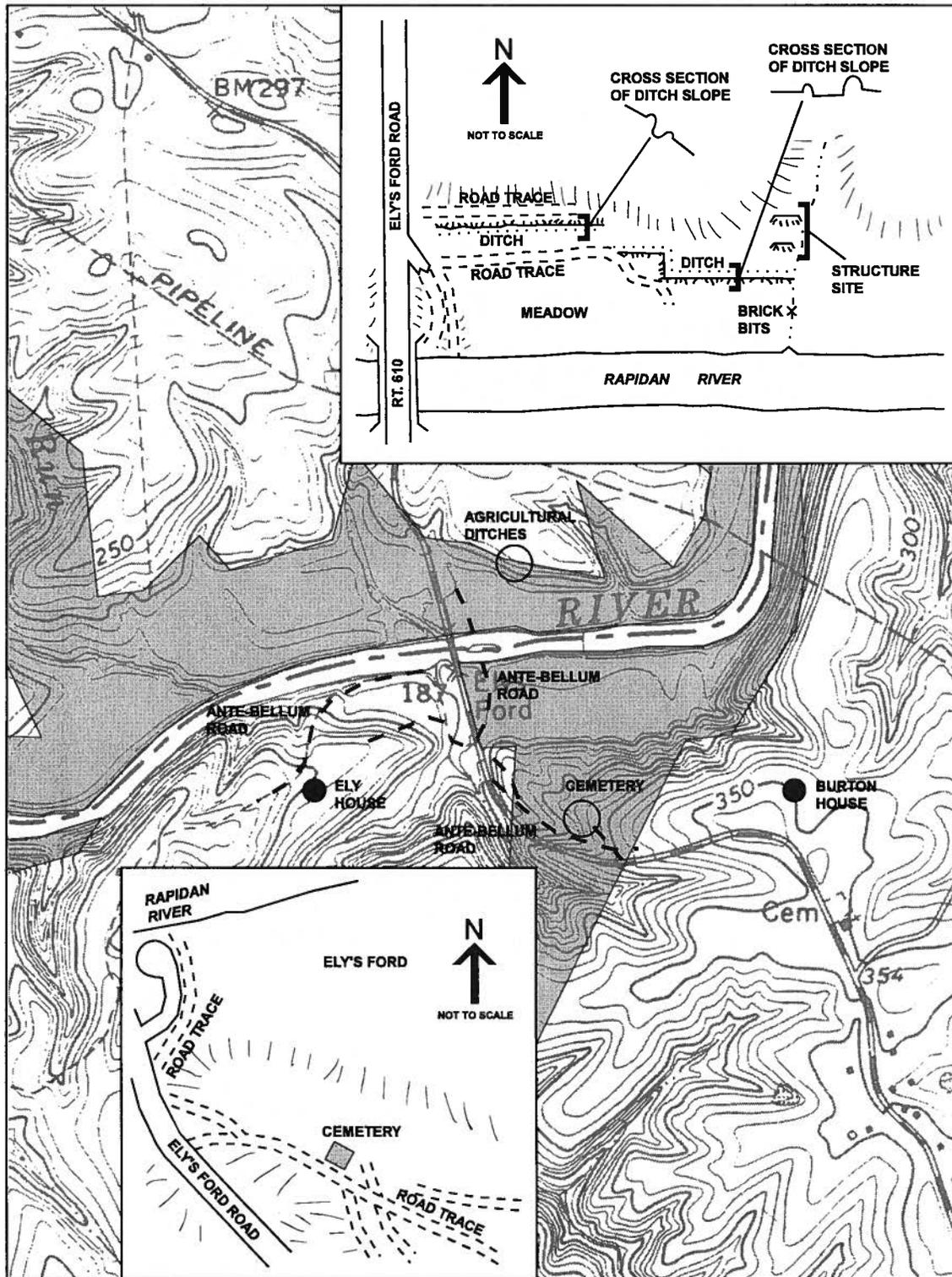
The Waggon with such Supplies as can be furnished shall be sent on tomorrow from this place. Have wrote to Dumfries and Alexandria to forward a second Brigade, who are Directed to Cross at Elies Ford and fall down on your rear unless the movements of the two Armies makes a different rout more Eligable....

Weedon to Lafayette, 17 June 1781.

The ford attained military significance again during the period 1862-1864. It shows up on both Union and Confederate maps as "Ely's Ford" (Hotchkiss and Michler maps of Chancellorsville). Both maps also clearly show the "Ely's Ford Road" that runs from the ford to the Chancellorsville crossroads as well as the north-south trace from the ford to the area just west of Wilderness Church. Lieutenant L.B. Norton, a Union signal officer, described the ford as "Tolerably good (much used)." Union troops appear to have first used Ely's Ford in August 1862, in response to General T.J. "Stonewall" Jackson's advance from Gordonsville to Culpeper. At that time Federal columns were sent from the Fredericksburg area to the west. As Brigadier General Marsena Patrick wrote in his diary:

We took the road to Chancellorsville & thence to Ely's Ford, on the Rapidan - It is a fine ford & we crossed without difficulty - From there we went on about 4 or 5 miles, to the junction of this road with that from Falmouth,.... After wating a long while, sending messages both ways, to Doubleday in my rear, & Hatch on my right, an Officer of McDowell's Staff ... arrived, to hurry up Gen. King, saying that Jackson had taken a strong position on Slaughter's (Cedar) Mountain & was cutting Banks to pieces....

Sparks, David S., ed. Inside Lincoln's Army: The Diary of Marsena Rudolph Patrick. New York, 1964, p. 118.



Map 48. Ely's Ford.

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Union troops are shown crossing the Rapidan River at Ely's Ford without the benefit of pontoons. The view is from Spotsylvania County, looking across the river into Culpeper County (from Battles and Leaders of the Civil War).

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In April and May 1863, during the Chancellorsville Campaign, Ely's Ford saw more activity. On 29 April, for example, Major General George Meade's Union 5th Corps crossed here as part of a flanking column descending on the Confederate army in Spotsylvania.

Several days after the Federal infantry had passed, a division of Union cavalry, Brigadier General William Averell commanding, approached the ford from the west, returning from a rather unsuccessful raid. By then the Battle of Chancellorsville was in progress, as a member of the 3rd Pennsylvania Cavalry remembered:

After nightfall on May 2, the head of the column turned the hill sloping down to the Rapidan River, the Third Pennsylvania in front.

A night battle scene, of intense interest, opened to our view. Before us, beyond the valley, the road led to Chancellorsville; over the tree tops in the distance, the shells were bursting in air or with fiery trail falling and exploding in the woods; the volleys of musketry, the shouts of the combatants, thrilling in the extreme, filled us with apprehension. Which army would first secure possession of the road beyond the ford was the question in our minds. When within about a hundred yards of Ely's Ford, one of the advance guard came back and reported... that they were halted by a strong force at the ford and could see picket fires burning.

History of the Third Pennsylvania Cavalry.
Philadelphia, 1905, pp. 232-233.

The force at the ford turned out to be a regiment of New York infantry and the horse soldiers soon went into bivouac on the north side of the river, taking care of their horses, and otherwise resting. General J.E.B. Stuart, however, had approached the Ely's Ford Road as Stonewall Jackson's corps attacked the Union 11th Corps on 2 May. He moved into position opposite the Federal soldiers and prepared to attack, but soon received word that both Jackson and General A.P. Hill had been wounded and that he had been ordered to take command of Jackson's Corps. Stuart hurried away to his new duties, but ordered the Sixteenth North Carolina Infantry (Pender's Brigade, A.P. Hill's Division, Jackson's Corps), which had already deployed, to fire three volleys at the Federals on the Culpeper shore and then withdraw. The Pennsylvania trooper continued:

Some of the men had already lain down to sleep, when suddenly a volley was poured in upon us from the hills on the opposite side of the river. The sparks flew in every direction; wounded horses galloped over and among the men, creating much disorder.... soon many of the Third opened fire upon the Confederates, who retired after firing several more volleys.

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Hundreds of horses were found the next morning grazing in the adjoining fields, and the men were out at daybreak, looking for mounts. Many were never recovered, and much disputing followed as to the ownership of animals.

History of the Third Pennsylvania Cavalry.
Philadelphia, 1905, pp. 233-234

A soldier in one of Averell's other units recalled the cavalry column's movements the next day:

May 3, 1863 Sunday. Hot & clear - We hear heavy cannonading and musketry about Chancellorsville - We rest all A.M. - P.M. ordered out cross the Rapidan at Ealys Ford - and passed between the contending forces - i.e. where they had been fighting - Saw many dead, and wounded soldiers - we crossed the U.S. Ford on pontoons and went on picket near Richards Ford - Awful is result of Battle.

Mohr, James C., ed. The Cormany Diaries.
Pittsburgh, 1982, p. 309.

During the Mine Run Campaign, Ely's Ford was bridged with pontoons again. As a soldier in the Fifteenth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry remembered:

We marched to Ely's Ford, on the Rapidan, and crossed on the pontoon bridge at nine a.m. on the 2nd instant (of December); halted at eleven a.m. and made coffee, and moved again at one P.M.; arrived at our old camp near Brandy Station about eight P.M.

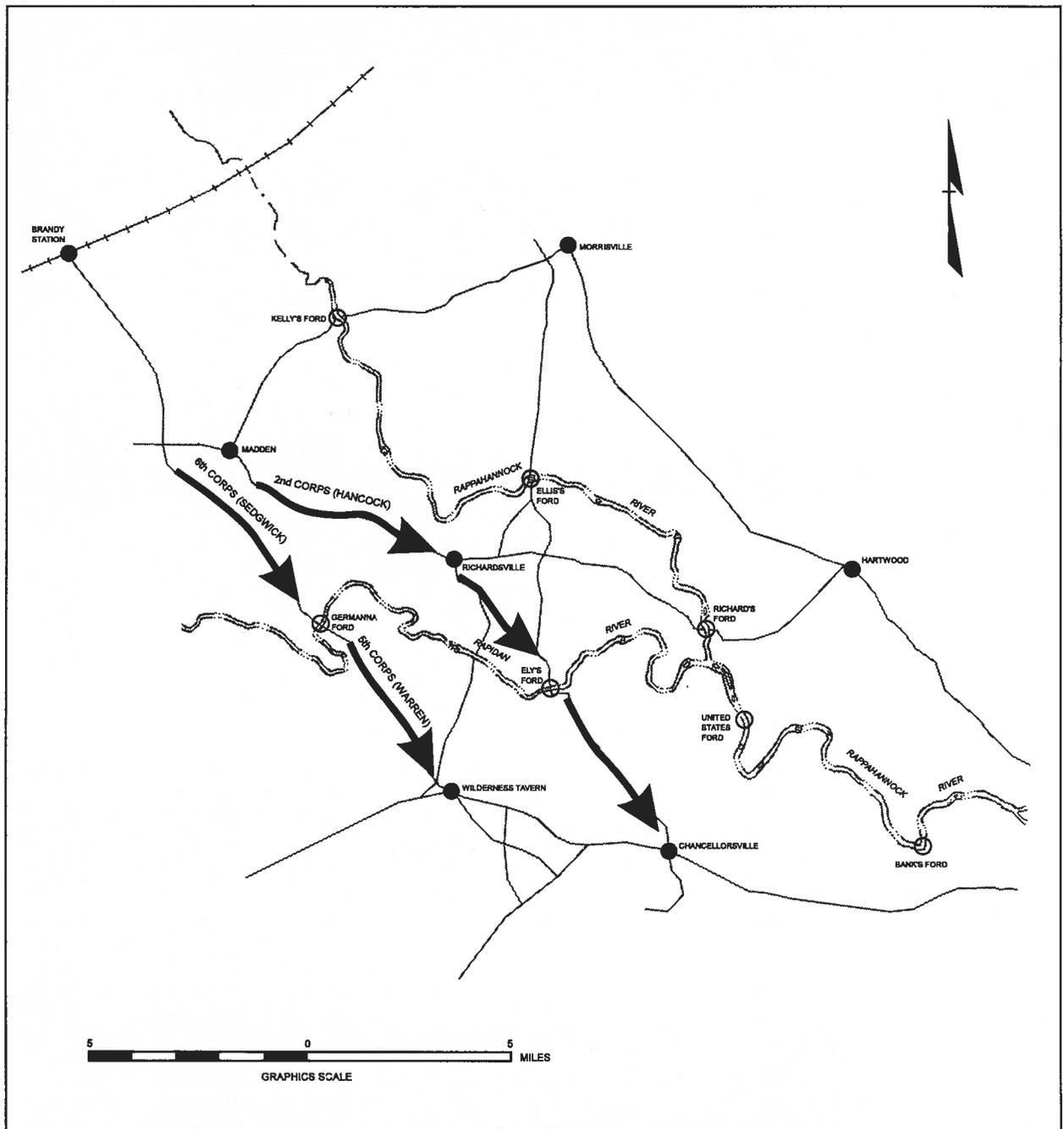
Ford, Andrew Elmer.
The Story of the
Fifteenth Regiment Massachusetts
Volunteer Infantry. Clinton, 1898, p. 308.

The bulk of the Union Army of the Potomac wintered near Brandy Station, which served as a railhead depot. From Brandy Station, General Meade ordered his cavalry to launch what became known as the Kilpatrick - Dahlgren Raid to liberate Union prisoners being held in the Confederate capital at Richmond. While another force diverted attention to the west, the raiders headed toward Ely's Ford. Although this raid proved unsuccessful, its opening moves went exceedingly well. A Confederate lieutenant wrote of the action at the Rapidan crossing:

Whether because of the treacherous conduct of a citizen in conducting the advance guard of Dahlgren's (Union) force over the river so as to get behind the detachment... on picket at Ely's Ford, or because of the rapidity of their dash across the stream, the sixteen men were of the Confederate picket captured, and none escaped to give warning of the advance.

Beale, G. W. A Lieutenant of Cavalry
in Lee's Army. Boston, 1918, p. 135.

A Federal cavalryman recalled that night's action somewhat differently:



Map 49. Ely's Ford During the Wilderness Campaign. The Union 2nd Corps crossed the Rapidan at Ely's Ford, while the other two Union corps crossed at Germainna Ford, to the west.

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We proceeded to within two miles of the ford and halted until dark, when Lieut. Merritt, with fifteen dismounted men and two scouts sent from headquarters, waded the river about one mile above the ford, and, aided by the darkness, the night being stormy, succeeded in approaching and securing the two videttes guarding the ford, and, after much difficulty, ascertained the position of the reserve. A large fire built in a ravine on the banks of the river some distance below the ford, evidently intended to deceive us, caused some delay; but we finally discovered that their picket reserve were in a house (either the Ely House or, more likely, the Burton House) some distance back from the river. We proceeded silently to this house, surrounded it, and, rushing in, after a brief struggle, captured the whole party, sixteen men, a lieutenant, and the officer of the day, who had halted for the night on his tour of inspection. His report of the vigilance and efficiency of his picket was probably never made.

Beaudry, Louis N. Records of the Fifth New York Cavalry. Albany, 1874, pp. 95-96.

In the spring of 1864, Ely's Ford served a military purpose for the last time. In early May, Meade's Army of the Potomac departed its winter encampments near Culpeper. His right wing headed toward the Germanna crossing, a division of cavalry (Wilson's) in the van and the 5th Corps (Warren's) and 6th Corps (Sedgwick's) close behind. The Federal left wing marched toward Ely's Ford, a cavalry division (Gregg's) in front and Major General Winfield Scott Hancock's 2nd Corps following. Meade's orders of 2 May indicate how the column was to avoid disclosing the movement to the Confederates who were able to survey the valley from atop Clark's Mountain:

Major-General Sheridan, commanding Cavalry Corps, will move Gregg's cavalry division to the vicinity of Richardsville. It will be accompanied by one-half the canvas pontoon train, the engineer troops with which will repair the road to Ely's Ford as far as practicable without exposing their work to the observation of the enemy. Guards will be placed on all occupied houses on or in the vicinity of the route of the cavalry and in advance toward the Rapidan, so as to prevent any communication with the enemy by the inhabitants.

OR XXXVI, pt. 2, p. 331.

The Federal crossing actually went very well. The night of 3/4 May 1864 was cold and dark, providing cover for a company of Union cavalrymen who quietly waded the river to surprise the Confederate pickets. The Federal engineers began work on the first bridge as soon as they could get their equipment in place and float pontoons. They were nearly done when the Union infantry swung into site at dawn. The first bridge was completed shortly thereafter and the Union 2nd Corps began to cross into Spotsylvania as the engineers began construction of a second pontoon bridge. Hancock kept Meade apprised of his progress:

The head of my column arrived here at 5:30, and has just commenced crossing the canvas bridge. The wooden bridge is being laid. General Gregg is moving to

There are a great number of road traces around Ely's Ford. Downstream of the crossing on the Spotsylvania shore, for example, is a road that parallels the river for approximately 1,500 feet below the pipeline crossing. Its heavy embankments denote long and hard use. Portions of the old Ely's Ford Road are also evident just to the east of the modern Route 610, clearly visible between well defined dirt walls.

Also in Spotsylvania is another road leading away from the ford upstream. It extends up the slope of a ridge along the river and runs adjacent to an abandoned house with a stone foundation and chimney. This structure is likely the Ely House, but this area is beyond the City of Fredericksburg's riparian holdings.

On the Culpeper side of the ford there is a road trace to the east of the Route 610 bridge that lines up with the oldest trace on the Spotsylvania side. There are also a series of ditches and road traces that cut parallel to the river at the base of the bluff. The road traces extend downriver, possibly having served the Smith Gold Mine. The ditches have an unusual profile and may be remnants of Virginia ditch-fences that once kept livestock out of particular areas.

On the first creek to east of the ford, in Culpeper County, is a structure site. It sits above one of the ditches, measures approximately 35 by 25 feet, and abuts the creek. Pieces of brick were found in the creek below this site. This site near a watercourse, in the proximity of several man-made features, suggests a potential millsite. Because this feature does not show up on any nineteenth century maps and because the Ely's Ford area has had such long use, its vintage could be late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.

Other evidence of human occupation on city-owned property occurs on the Spotsylvania side. On a ridge above the river, along the old Ely's Ford Road, is a small untended cemetery. It has three identifiable graves with crude headstones and footstones. The stones are primitive and have no legend on them. There is a 1940s-50s vintage wire fence enclosing the site. Margaret C. Klein's Tombstone Inscriptions of Spotsylvania County, Virginia, makes no mention of a burial ground in this location. Though this work is not definitive, it does not list Elys, Elleys, or Ellies buried elsewhere, suggesting this is one of the Ely family plots.

Evidence of Civil War earthworks is nearly non-existent. The floodplain has been altered by the river while the crests of the hills, where military works would likely be found, have been altered by bulldozers preparing residential construction sites. Still, field research uncovered a single gun pit on the extreme southwest corner of a ridge that is oriented toward the ford.

Although not located on City of Fredericksburg property, the numerous structure sites reflect the potential wealth of archaeological resources at Ely's Ford. Given the ford's antiquity, the layers of habitation (including known Native American occupation) may also contain evidence of frontier period occupation.

Culpeper Mine Ford, Hall's Ford, and Skinker's Ford (Rapidan) - There are three fords on the Rapidan River between Ely's Ford and Germanna. The first of these is the Culpeper Mine Ford, that saw use during the Civil War. The other two are Hall's (sometimes called McNeill's) and Skinker's Fords. This latter crossing should not be confused with the ford of the same name on the Rappahannock.

A Union signal officer, Lieutenant L.B. Norton described the Culpeper Mine Ford as "Tolerably good." He listed only one other ford, between what he called the "Culpeper Ford" and Germanna, but labelled it as "Ford near Vauclose Mine - Crossed by Cavalry." In fact, the Vauclose Mines are approximately two-thirds of a mile to the south/southwest of the Melville Mine. Neither of these complexes is near Hall's or Skinker's Fords. Norton's reference is likely applicable to Hall's Ford. First, it is the next ford upriver from the Culpeper Mine Ford and closest to any mining activity. Second, it was in use as late as the early twentieth century, according to a Mrs. Hall who still lives nearby and remembers crossing the river there in a horse-drawn buggy. Finally, there are several gun pits opposite this ford in Orange County that overlook the crossing site, indicating recognized utility.

As the Wilderness campaign opened in early May 1864, the Union Army of the Potomac used Germanna and Ely's Fords to cross their striking columns. The necessary supply and ammunition trains, however, were routed primarily across pontoon bridges at the Culpeper Mine Ford. Major General George G. Meade's orders of 2 May 1864 were very explicit in how the supply trains would coordinate with the combat arms:

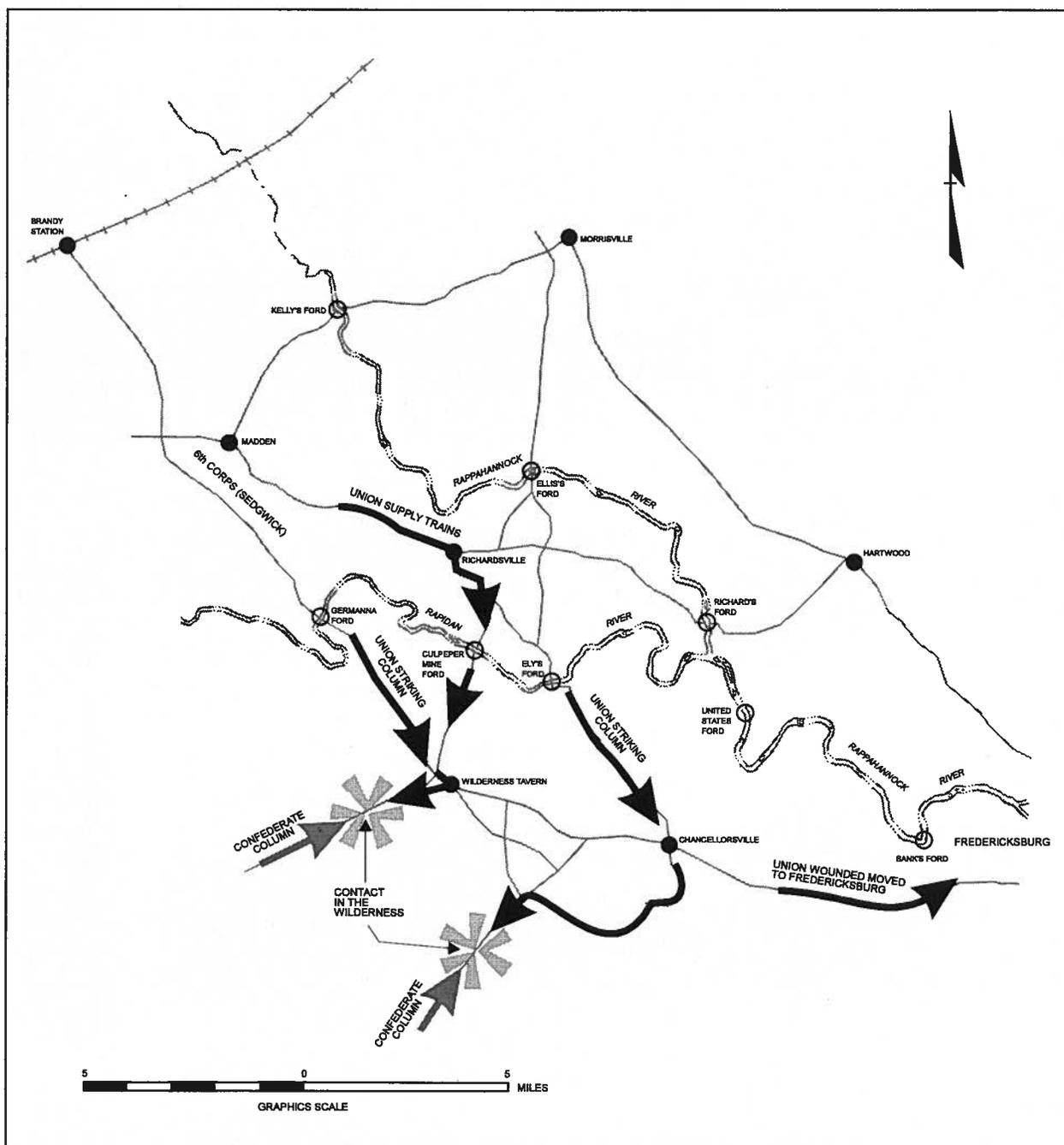
So much of the bridge train of the Sixth Corps as may be necessary to bridge the Rapidan at Culpeper Mine Ford will proceed to Richardsville in rear of the Reserve Artillery, and, as soon as it is ascertained that the Reserve Artillery are crossing, it will move to Culpeper Mine Ford, where the bridge will be established. The engineers of this bridge train will at once open a road from Culpeper Mine Ford direct to Richardsville.

OR XXXVI. pt. 2, p. 332.

Evidence of any Civil War activity at the Culpeper Mine Ford has been obliterated by subsequent ground disturbing activity. Further, the City of Fredericksburg owns very little property in this vicinity. All three fords appear on General N. Michler's 1867 Map of the Battlefield of the Wilderness, Va., but there is no evidence of either Hall's or Skinker's having been used during active operations during the Civil War.

The City of Fredericksburg owns only a slight amount of property in this vicinity. The Confederate gun pits overlooking Hall's Ford appear to be on private property. Any earthworks at Skinker's Ford must necessarily be on private property as the City owns only a small amount of property there.

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Map 50. Military Use of Culpeper Mine Ford. In the opening moves of the Wilderness Campaign, Grant's supply trains crossed at the Culpeper Mine Ford, between his two striking columns. As the campaign progressed, Grant shifted his base of supply to Fredericksburg, where hospitals were also set up to handle casualties.

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