



0. FREDERICKSBURG: DEATH AND MERCY - Story  
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This illustration, [maintained by the Library of Congress](#), shows how the Union Army had to cross the Rappahannock River on the morning of December 13, 1862. Kurz & Allison, Art Publishers, from Chicago copyrighted this artwork in 1888 (but that copyright has long-since expired). Click on the image for a full-page view.

The battle went badly for the Union [soldiers](#) and for the Virginia [town](#) which was massively [damaged](#). The Union's [Irish Brigade](#), commanded by General [Thomas Meagher](#), was especially hard hit.

Frederick Lyman Hitchcock, a Union officer, later wrote a book about his experiences in the civil war. Of [the Fredericksburg campaign](#), he says this:

*I can truthfully say that in that moment I gave my life up. I do not expect ever again to face death more certainly than I thought I did then. It did not seem possible that I could go through that fire again and return alive.*

*... One may ask how such dangers can be faced. The answer is, there are many things more to be feared than death. Cowardice and failure of duty with me were some of them.*

*... I said to myself, "This is duty. I'll trust in God and do it. If I fall, I cannot die better." ...The nervous strain was simply awful. It can be appreciated only by those who have experienced it. The atmosphere seemed surcharged with the most startling and frightful things. Death, wounds, and appalling destruction everywhere. (Frederick Lyman Hitchcock, *War from the inside*, [pages 117-118](#).)*

Sgt. [Richard Kirkland](#), a 19-year with the 2nd South Carolina, heard the anguished cries of wounded Yankees begging for water. Listening till he could bear it no longer, and totally disregarding his own safety, Kirkland scaled the stone fence and brought relief to his enemy. His selfless deed is remembered today with a battlefield monument.

Burying [the dead](#) at Fredericksburg, after the "[Wilderness Campaign](#)," was a grim job. Thousands more were wounded.

[Clara Barton](#), who became known as an angel of the battlefield, helped doctors tend some of the Union's wounded at [Chatham Manor](#) (where George Washington and Robert E. Lee had courted their future wives). The beautiful home had been turned into a hospital.

With his men fallen all over the battlefield, General Burnside had no choice but to retreat. He [telegraphed](#) President Lincoln with the bad news. The [Fredericksburg battle](#) had revealed some of the General's flaws, leading to the federal rout. Lt. General [Ulysses S. Grant](#) later said of Burnside:

*[He was] an officer who was generally liked and respected, he was not, however, fitted to command an army. No one knew this better than himself.*

Not surprisingly, Burnside believed that his commanders had let him down at Fredericksburg. A notable exception was Maj. Gen. Edwin ("Bull") [Sumner](#) who had kept his troops back across the Rappahannock River. But ... it was Burnside who had decided to delay the river crossing. And *that* had led to deadly consequences.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/FREDERICKSBURG-DEATH-AND-MERCY-Gods-and-Generals>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/FREDERICKSBURG-DEATH-AND-MERCY-Gods-and-Generals>

## Media Stream



### Battle Damage - Fredericksburg, Virginia

U.S. National Archives, image 5/3/05-0207a.

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View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Battle-Damage-Fredericksburg-Virginia>



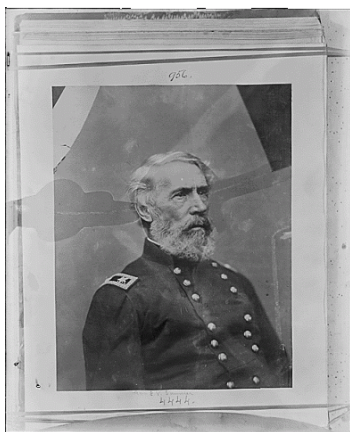
### Wilderness Campaign - Scene at Fredericksburg

Photographed by Timothy H. O'Sullivan. Courtesy, U.S. National Archives, image 111-B-4817.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Wilderness-Campaign-Scene-at-Fredericksburg>



### Brigadier General Edwin ("Bull") Sumner

Courtesy, U.S. National Archives, image 7/16/07-1519a.

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### Irish Brigade - Disastrous Losses at Fredericksburg

Clip from *Gods and Generals* (2003). Copyright, Warner Bros., all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the film.



**Directed by:** Ronald F. Maxwell

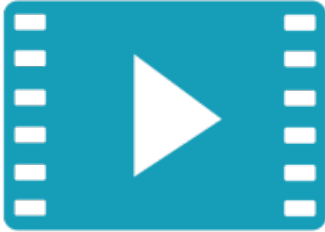
**Book by:** Jeff Shaara

**Screenplay by:** Ronald F. Maxwell

**Release Date:** 21 February 2003 (U.S.)

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### Battle of the Wilderness - Scenes from Wicked Spring

Video clip from *Wicked Spring*, online courtesy Wicked Spring, LLC.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Battle-of-the-Wilderness-Scenes-from-Wicked-Spring>