

OVERVIEW AND MAJOR BATTLES OF THE CIVIL WAR; Session 3: Ed Seufert

- **Fredericksburg (Dec 11-15, 1862)**

The UNION's "Greatest Loss" in the Civil War

- **Chancellorsville (April 30-May 6, 1863)**

Lee's "Greatest Victory" in the Civil War

AND

Lee's Greatest Personal Loss in the Civil War

Condition of the Armies

CONFEDERATE Army:

- Severely **bloodied** and **undersupplied**
- Low on **ammunition, food, shoes**
- Many units at **half strength**
- **Vulnerable** — but still **dangerous**

UNION Army:

- **Larger** force and **BETTER** supplied
- In a **Defensive** posture
- Leadership marked by **CAUTION!**

Condition of the Armies

CONFEDERATE Army:

- Irony:
- *The weaker army retreats safely; the stronger army stands still.*

UNION Army:

- Larger force and BETTER supplied
- In a Defensive posture
- Leadership marked by CAUTION!

Why McClellan Did NOT Pursue Lee

- Believed Lee still outnumbered him
- Relied on flawed Pinkerton intelligence
- Kept large forces in reserve
- Habitual reluctance to risk decisive action

TAKEAWAY:

*McClellan fought not to lose,
rather than to destroy the enemy.*

The “Resting the Horses” Excuse

Oct 1–4, 1862:

- Lincoln personally visits McClellan near Antietam
- Urges immediate action to pursue Lee
- McClellan told Lincoln:
 - Cavalry and artillery horses were exhausted
 - Army needed time to refit and reorganize
- Lincoln quip:
“Are the horses tired of the war?”
- Weeks pass with no aggressive movement

The “Resting the Horses” Excuse



- Lincoln's Famous Quote:
If General McClellan does not want to use the army, I would like to borrow it for a while."

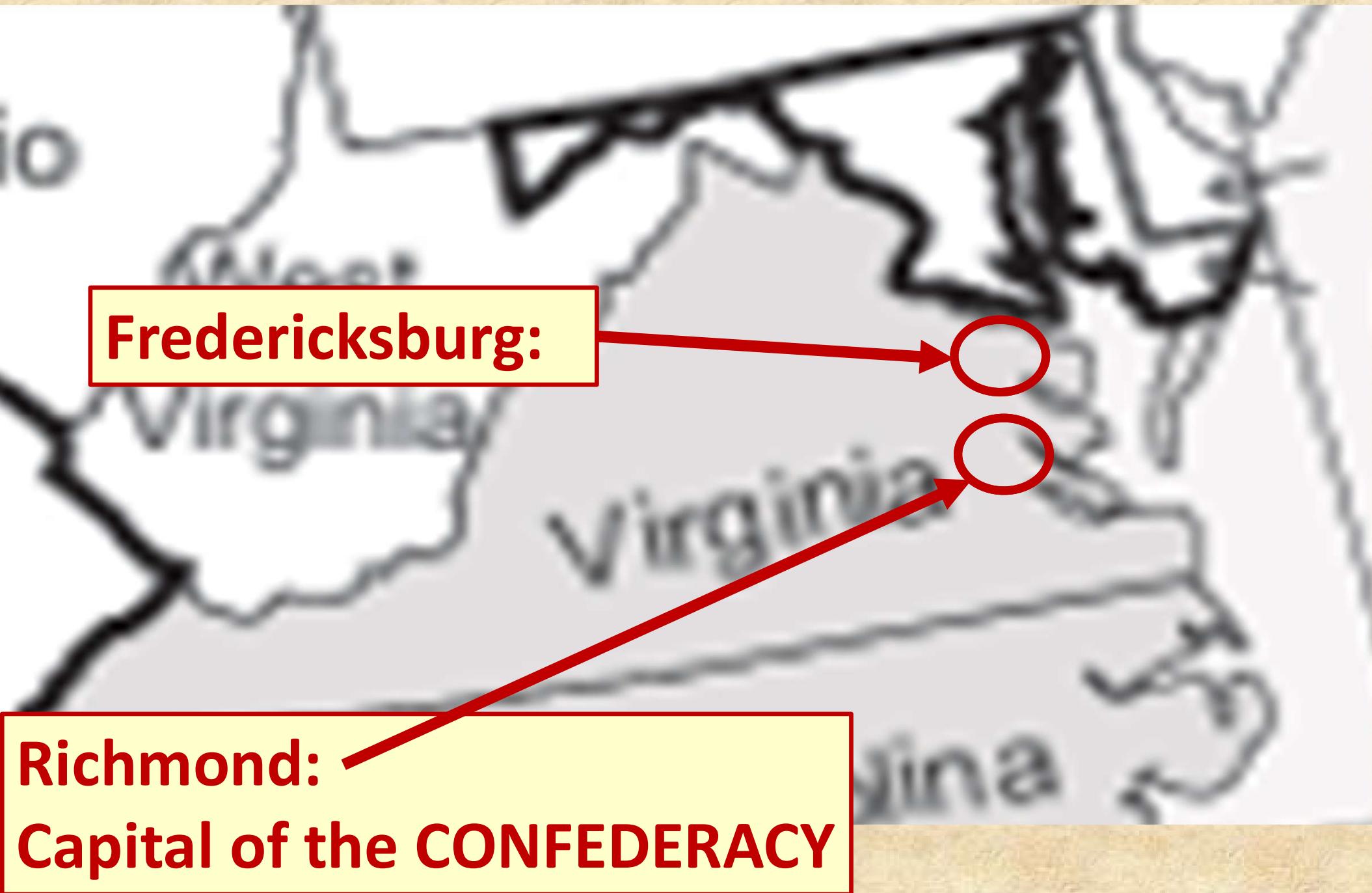
Lincoln Intervenes & Removes McClellan

- Nov 5, 1862:
Lincoln relieves McClellan of command
- Nov 7, 1862:
Ambrose Burnside appointed commander;
Chosen because:
 - Loyal and willing to act
 - Others lacked **Lincoln's confidence or were political opponents.**
 - Pressure for a **quick victory** before Winter

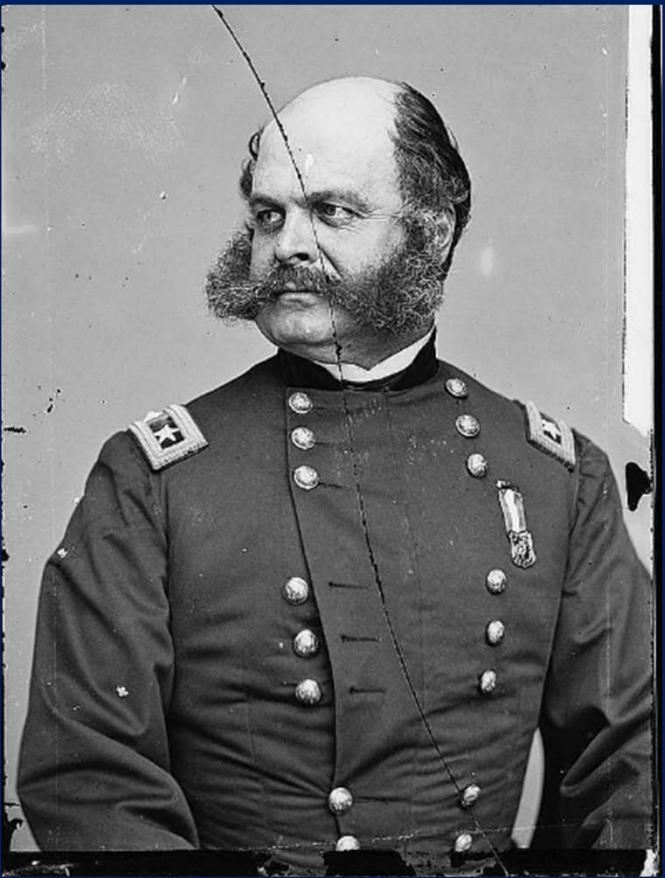
TAKEAWAY:

Antietam ended Lee's invasion — Fredericksburg shows what happens when haste replaces caution.

The Battle of Fredericksburg (Dec 11-15, 1862)



UNION Commander at the Battle of Fredericksburg



- Career U.S. Army officer;
West Point graduate
- Twice **refused command** of the **Army of the Potomac**
- Believed **rapid movement** was essential to regain **UNION momentum**
- Chose **direct frontal assaults** at **Fredericksburg** despite terrain

Ambrose E. Burnside: Commander Army of the Potomac

Why he matters:

Burnside's command turned Union urgency into catastrophe at Fredericksburg.

Lee versus Burnside

Lee

Fought a battle to WIN

Chose & held superior terrain

Let the enemy attack on his terms

Used artillery and position to maximum effect

Conserved his army

Lee fought to win the battle

Burnside

Fought a battle to move QUICKLY

Attacked terrain that favored the defender

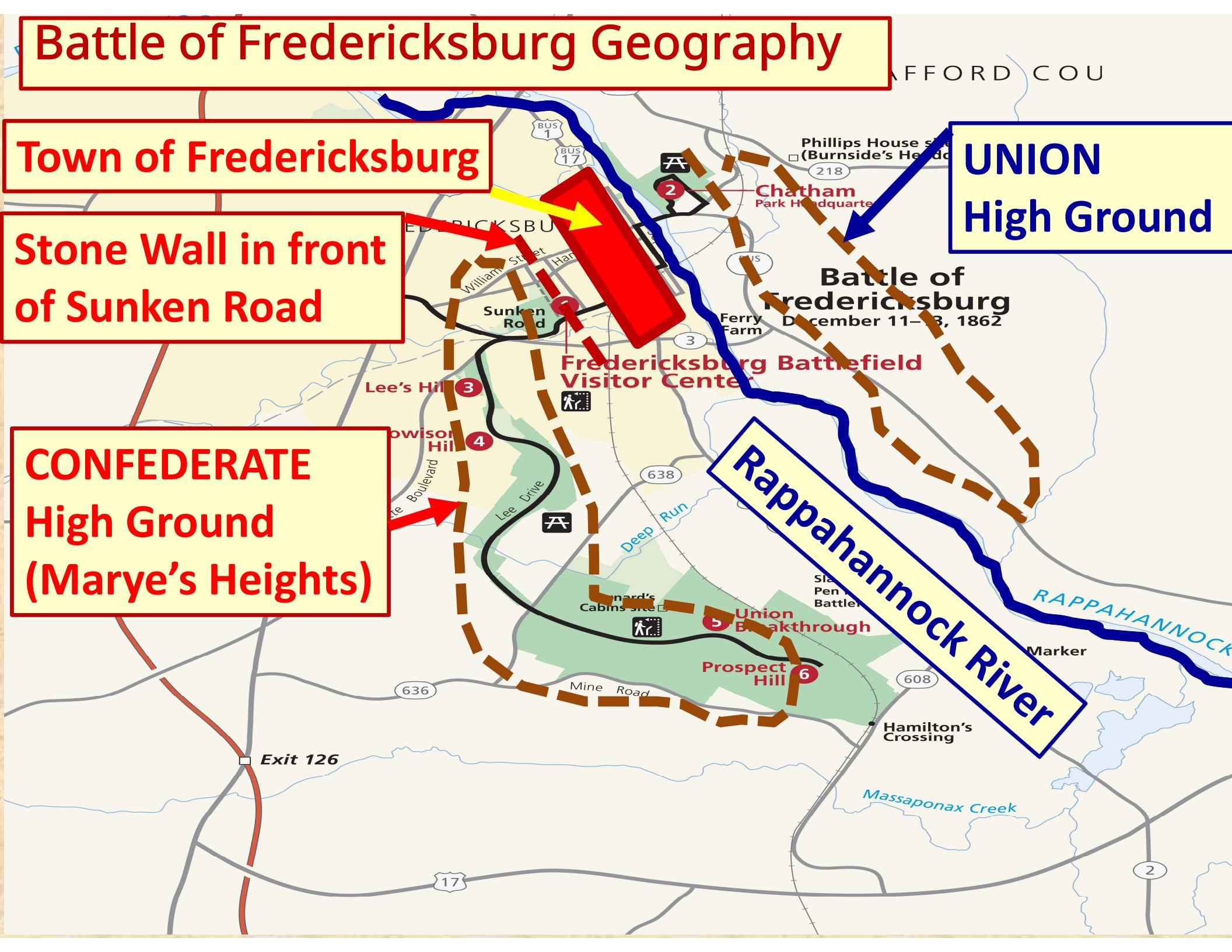
Ordered repeated frontal assaults

Relied on courage to overcome firepower

Expended his army

Burnside fought to prove he was NOT McClellan

Battle of Fredericksburg Geography



UNION
High Ground

**Stone Wall in front
of Sunken Road**

CONFEDERATE
High Ground
(Marye's Heights)

Geography, Defense, and the Pontoon Plan

- Rappahannock River: Major **natural obstacle**—
wide, cold, steep banks; limited **crossing points**
- **CONFEDERATE Advantage**: **High ground** south of the river (**Marye's Heights**) forms a natural fortress
- Protection of **Richmond**: Holding **Fredericksburg** blocks the most direct **UNION** route **south**
- **UNION Battle Plan**:
 - Use **pontoon bridges** for a **rapid crossing**
(Delivery of pontoons delayed to December)
 - Seize **high ground** before Lee could **concentrate**
- Delayed pontoons allowed **CONFEDERATES** to **entrench**—**the plan collapsed before the battle began**

Geography, Defense, and the Pontoon Plan

- Rappahannock River: Major **natural obstacle**—wide, cold, steep banks; limited **crossing points**

TAKEAWAY:

Fredericksburg was decided by geography and logistics before the first attack.

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(Delivery of pontoons delayed to December)
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Why Burnside Had to Act (Political & Strategic Pressure)

- New Commander (Nov 1862):
Burnside replaces McClellan with an expectation of **ACTION**, not **CAUTION**
- **Lincoln & Northern Pressure:**
After **Antietam**, *inaction was unacceptable*
- **Midterm Elections:** The administration needed a **UNION** success to sustain public support
- **Winter Approaching:** Once armies entered **winter quarters**, decisive operations would halt
- **Burnside's Intent:** Strike **quickly**, show **aggressiveness**, and end the campaign before **Winter**

Why Burnside Had to Act (Political & Strategic Pressure)

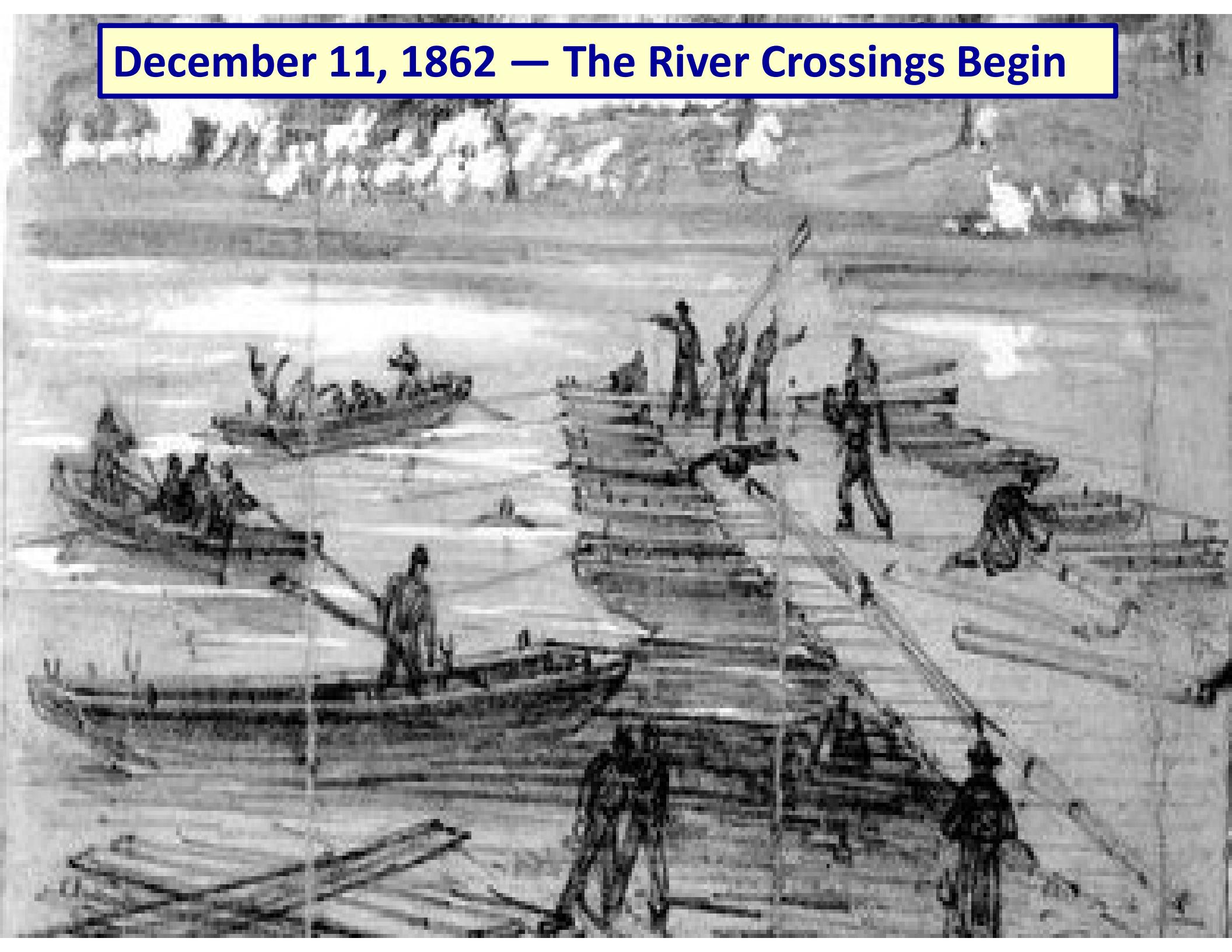
- New Commander (Nov 1862):
Burnside replaces McClellan with an expectation of
ACTION not **CAUTION**

TAKEAWAY:

*Fredericksburg happened because Burnside
felt he had to do something—FAST..*

- **Winter Approaching:** Once armies entered **winter quarters**, decisive operations would halt
- **Burnside's Intent:** Strike **quickly**, show **aggressiveness**, and end the campaign before **Winter**

December 11, 1862 — The River Crossings Begin



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UNION engineers attempt to lay pontoon bridges across the Rappahannock River

CONFEDERATE sharpshooters inside Fredericksburg fire from houses, warehouses, and cellars

Construction stalls under deadly fire

Burnside orders:

- Massive artillery bombardment of the town
- First major U.S. city deliberately shelled by its own army

UNION infantry finally cross by boat, clear the town street-by-street

Pontoon bridges completed late in the day

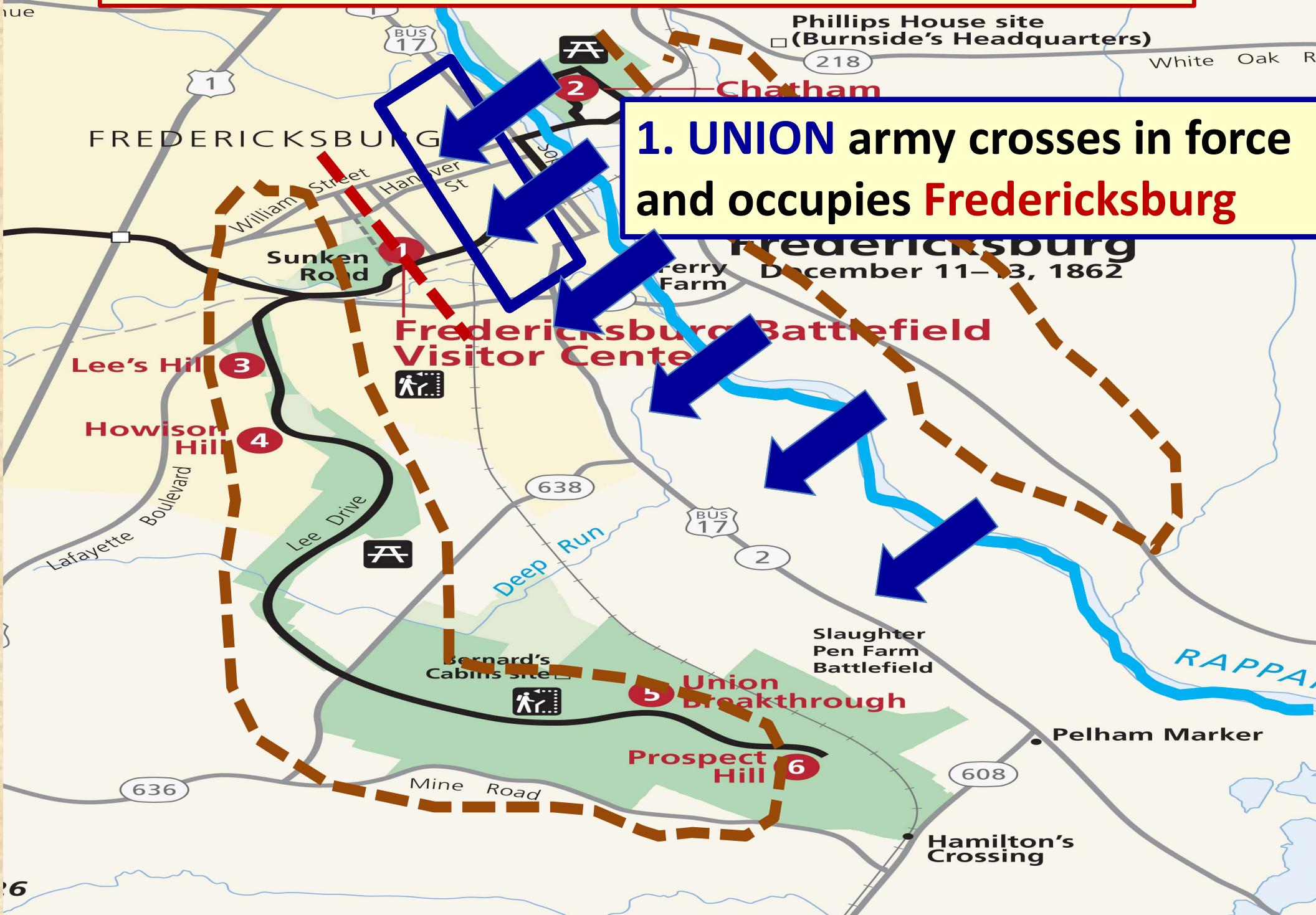
December 11, 1862 — The River Crossings Begin

TAKEAWAY:

What was supposed to be a surprise crossing turns into a slow, bloody prelude.



December 12, 1862 — Armies Take Their Positions



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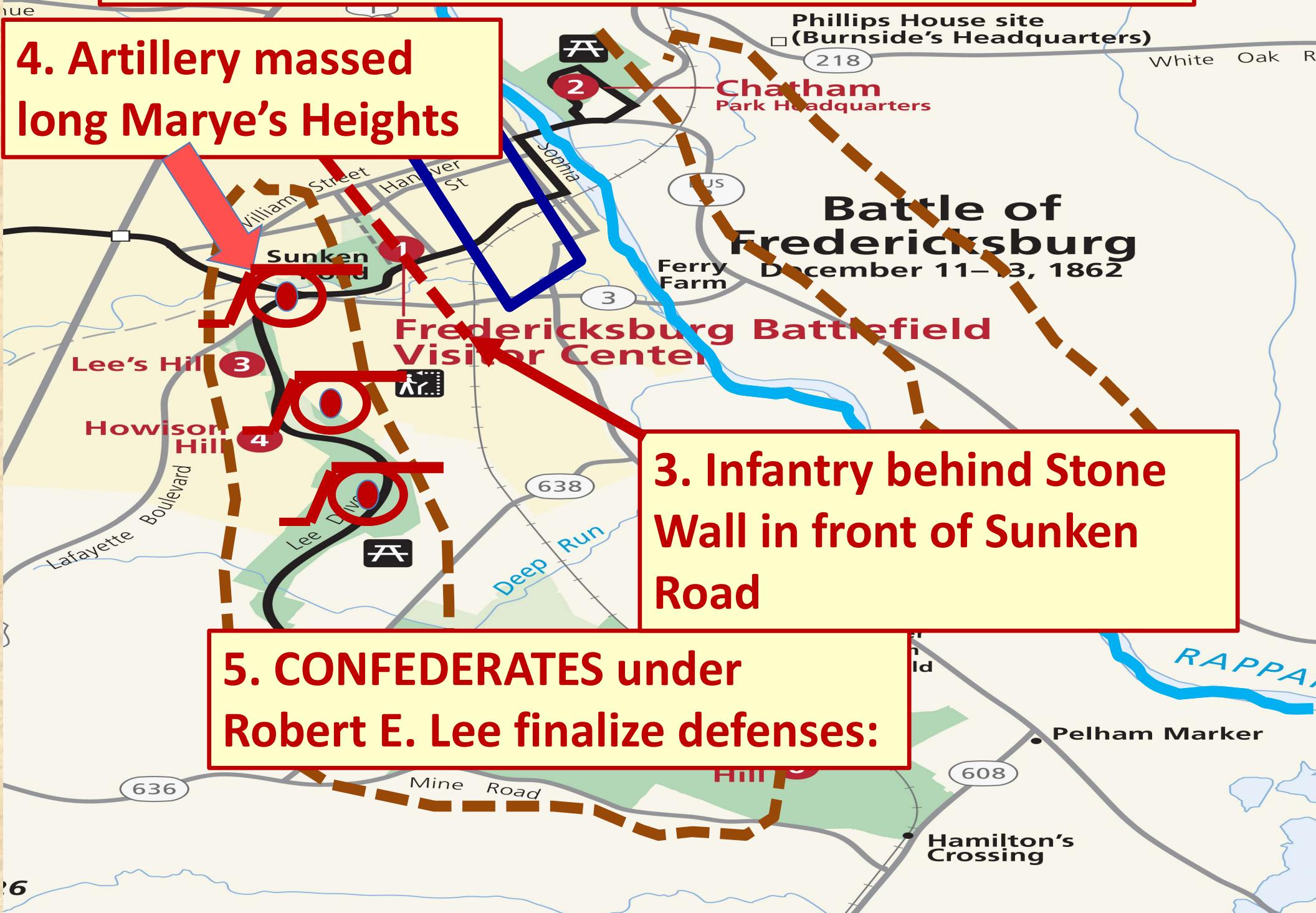
2. Burnside hesitates,
Reorganizing for a major assault

Battle of Fredericksburg December 11–13, 1862

3. Open fields west of
town are fully exposed.

December 12, 1862 — Armies Take Their Positions

4. Artillery massed long Marye's Heights



3. Infantry behind Stone Wall in front of Sunken Road

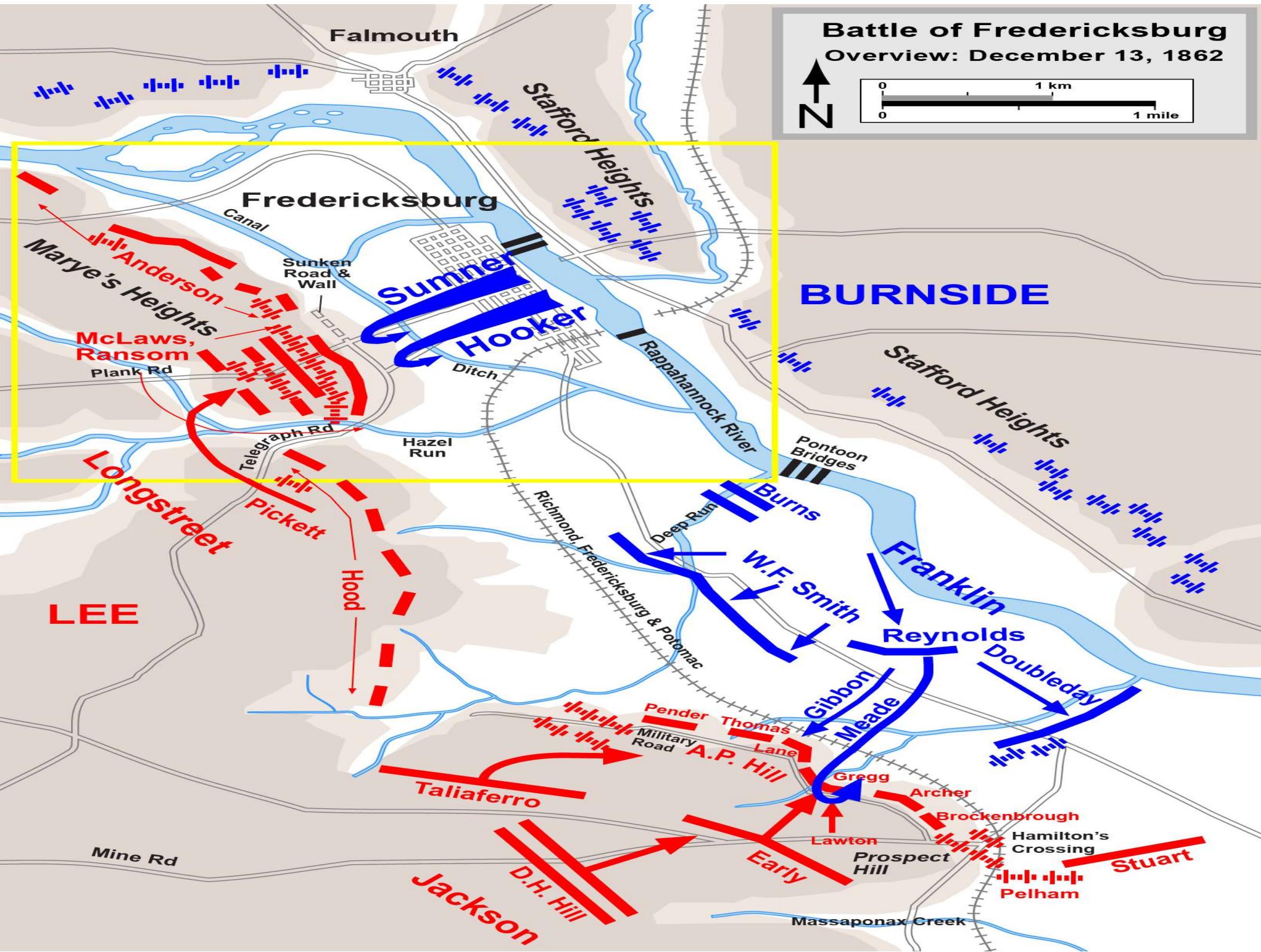
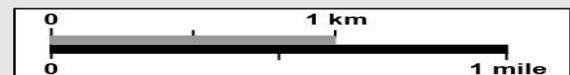
5. CONFEDERATES under Robert E. Lee finalize defenses:

December 12, 1862 — Armies Take Their Positions



Battle of Fredericksburg

Overview: December 13, 1862



Burnside launches repeated frontal assaults west of **Fredericksburg**

UNION troops must:

Cross **open** ground

Advance uphill

Under Converging **Rifle & Artillery** fire

The **stone wall** is nearly **impregnable**

CONFEDERATE fire is so steady that men reload behind the wall without standing

Some **UNION** troops reach within **30–40** yards of the wall— **NONE** break through



December 13, 1862 — Assaults Against Stone Wall & Marye's Heights



The stone wall is nearly impregnable

UNION assaults cease by nightfall
— the field is littered with **dead and wounded**

Thousands of wounded **UNION** soldiers lie
exposed overnight, many **freezing to death**

A temporary truce allows both sides to retrieve **wounded**

Burnside considers renewing the **attack** — even leading it personally — but is **dissuaded** by his generals

Lee refuses to **counterattack**, unwilling to risk his perfect **defensive position**

December 15: **Burnside** withdraws the Army of the Potomac back across the **Rappahannock**

UNION assaults cease by nightfall

— the field is littered with **dead and wounded**

The Campaign ends in
TOTAL UNION FAILURE

~~December 1st Burnside withdraws the~~

Army of the Potomac back across the Rappahannock

Casualties — Battle of Fredericksburg (Dec 11–15, 1862)

UNION Army

≈12,600 casualties

Over 8,000 in front of Marye's Heights alone

Some brigades lose 40–50% of their men in minutes

CONFEDERATE Army

≈5,300 casualties total

Losses at Marye's Heights: astonishingly low

Casualties — Battle of Fredericksburg (Dec 11–15, 1862)

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Fredericksburg was not lost for lack of courage.

It was lost because leadership chose to attack the strongest point of a perfectly prepared defense.

Five months later, at Chancellorsville, Lee will leave this kind of safety behind — and gamble everything.”

Lincoln Replaces Burnside — January 1863

Why the change was unavoidable:

- **Fredericksburg is a National Humiliation**
- Army **morale** collapses;
confidence in leadership is gone
- **Political** pressure mounts on **Abraham Lincoln**

January 26, 1863:

*Lincoln removes Burnside and appoints Joseph Hooker
as Commander of the Army of the Potomac*

UNION Commander at the Battle of Chancellorsville



- West Point graduate (1837)
- Aggressive and Confident in battle
- A strong corps-level commander
- Outspoken critic of superiors (especially McClellan and Burnside)
- Successfully led troops in 2nd Bull Run, Antietam, and Fredericksburg

Joseph Hooker: Commander Army of the Potomac

Why he matters:

*“He believed the Union army could win
—and promised Decisive Action.”*

Why Hooker Mattered (Before Chancellorsville)

- He rebuilt the **Army of the Potomac** into the best-organized **UNION** force yet:
 - Improved **logistics, sanitation, and morale**
 - Created a unified **Cavalry Corps**
 - Established the **Bureau of Military Information**
- By April 1863, the army was **stronger, healthier, and more confident** than at any prior point

Irony:

Hooker delivered Lincoln the best-prepared Army of the Potomac —but failed to command it decisively at Chancellorsville.

Lee versus Hooker

Lee

Commanded a severely

Why Lee matters:

Lee transformed numerical weakness into decisive victory through audacity and trust in subordinates.

Hooker

Commanded largest & best

late

Why Hooker matters:

Hooker showed that preparation & numbers cannot compensate for lost nerve at the decisive moment.

action to Jackson

reactive

Seized the initiative through maneuver & surprise

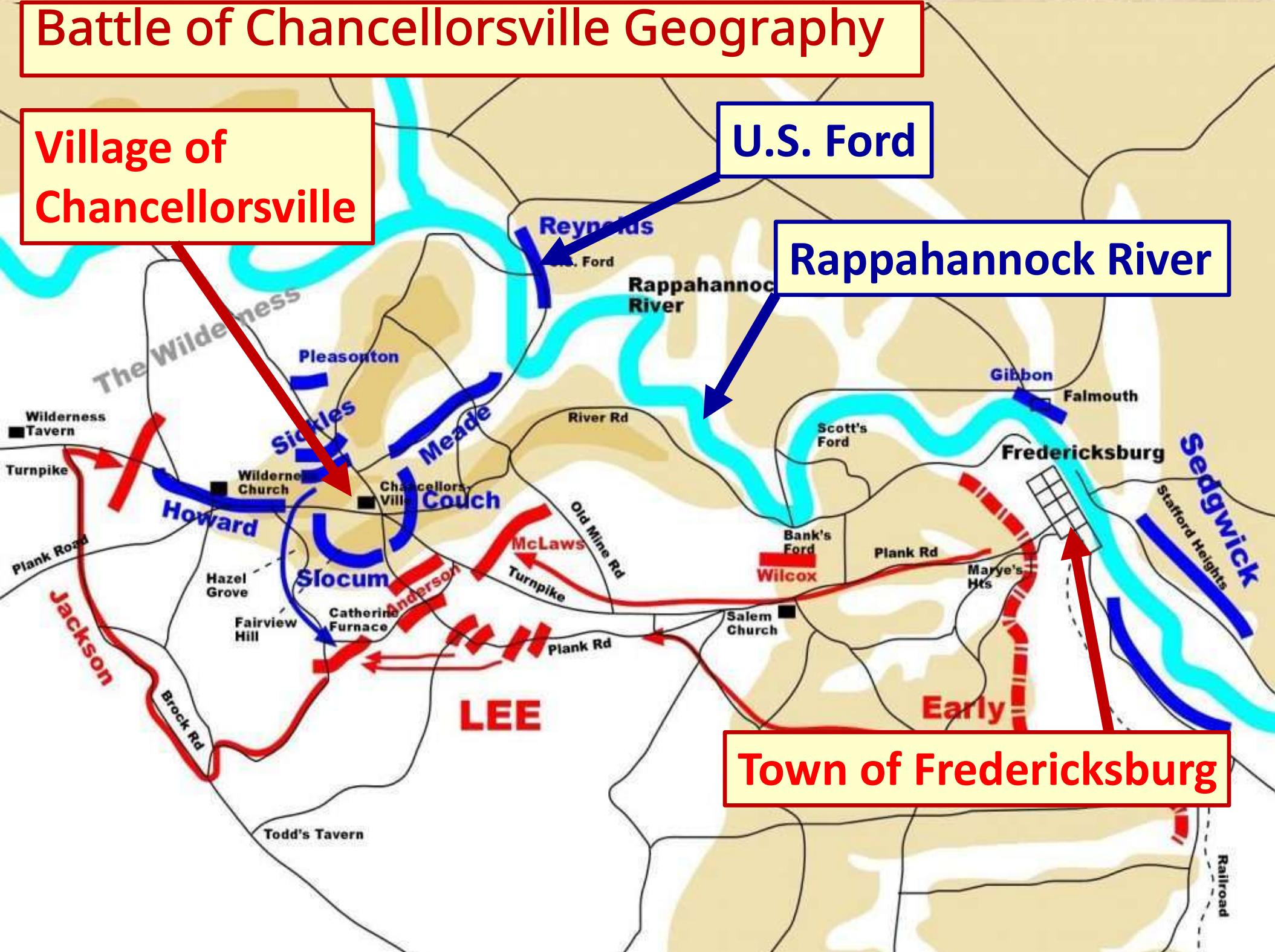
Failed to press advantages despite superior strength

Battle of Chancellorsville Geography

Village of Chancellorsville

U.S. Ford

Rappahannock River



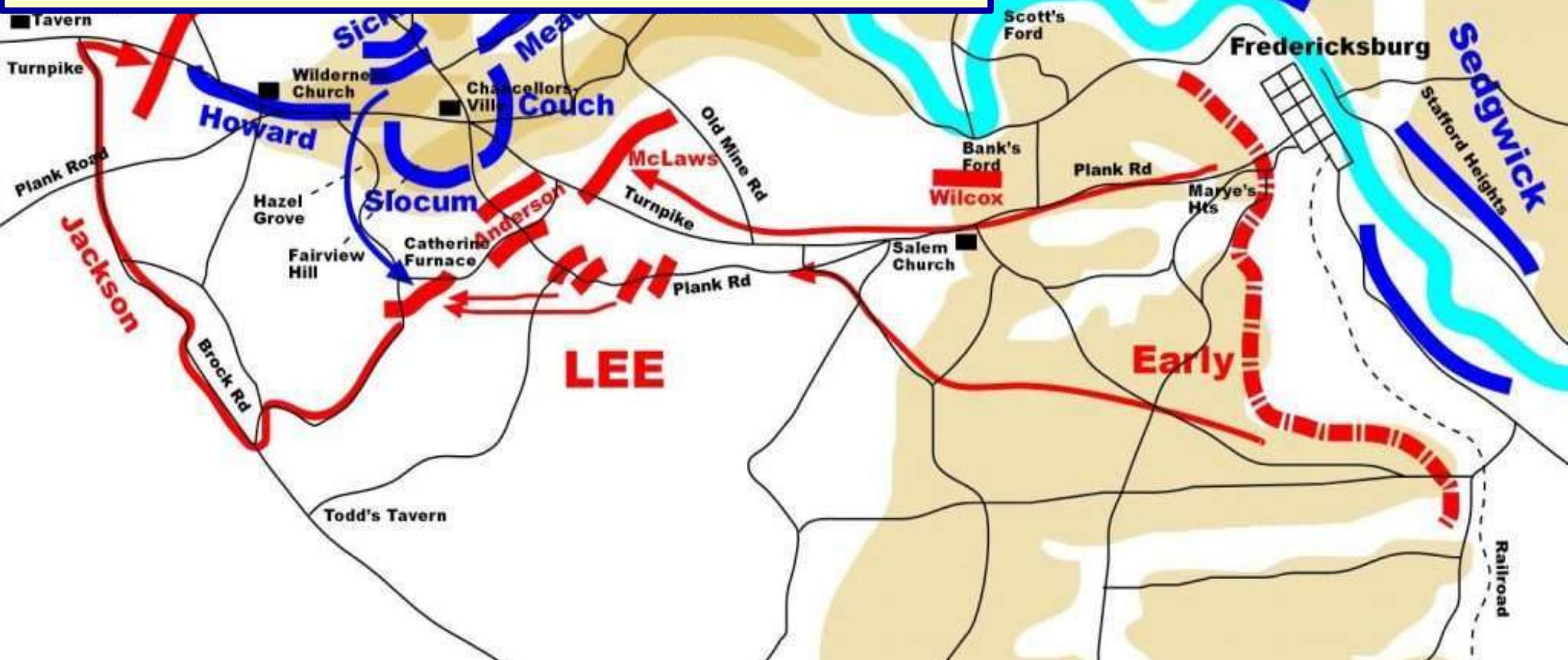
Town of Fredericksburg

Hooker's Operational Plan – Spring 1863

Objective:

Defeat Lee by maneuver –
not frontal assault

Force Lee to abandon Fredericksburg
or fight on UNION terms

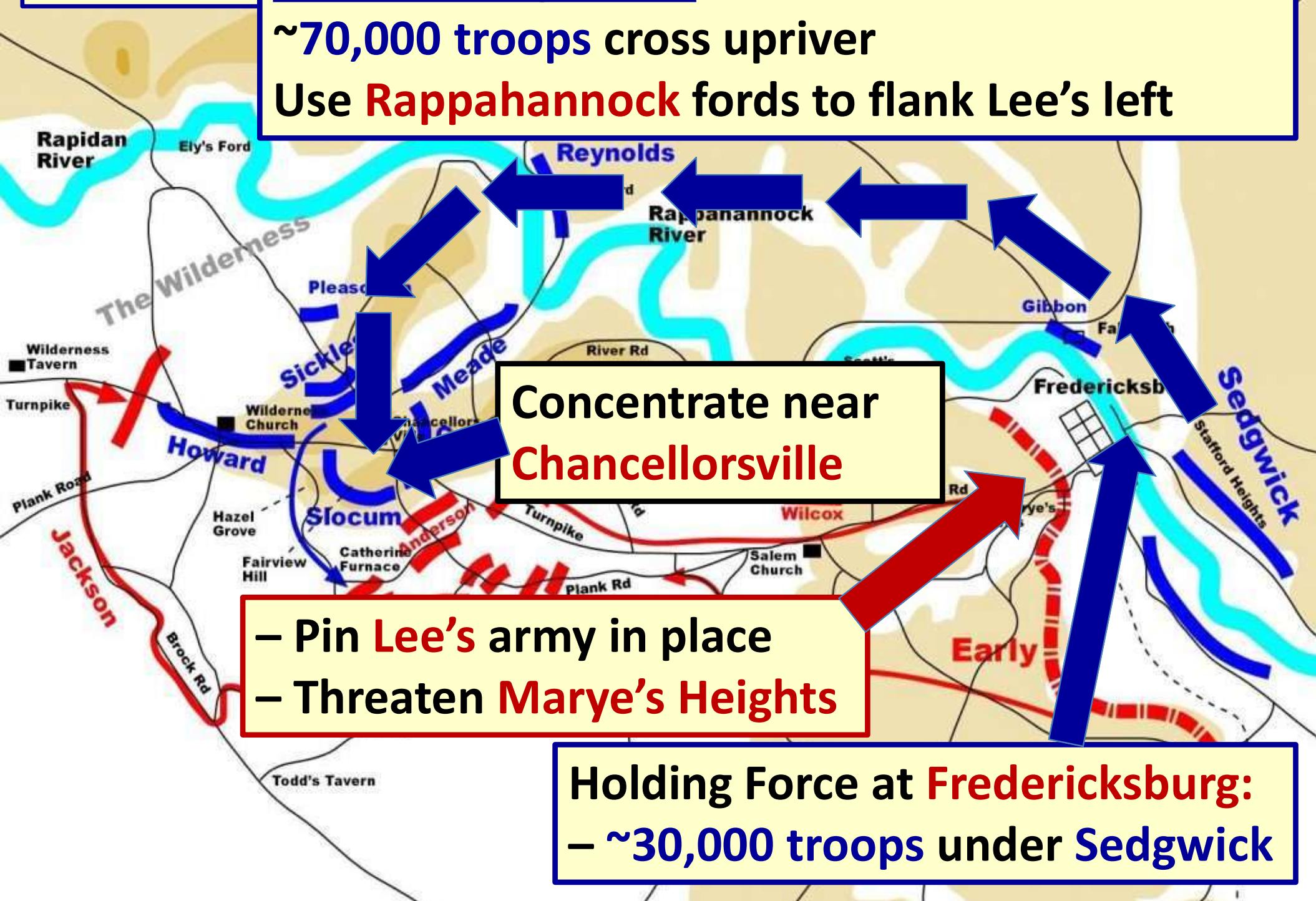


Hooker's

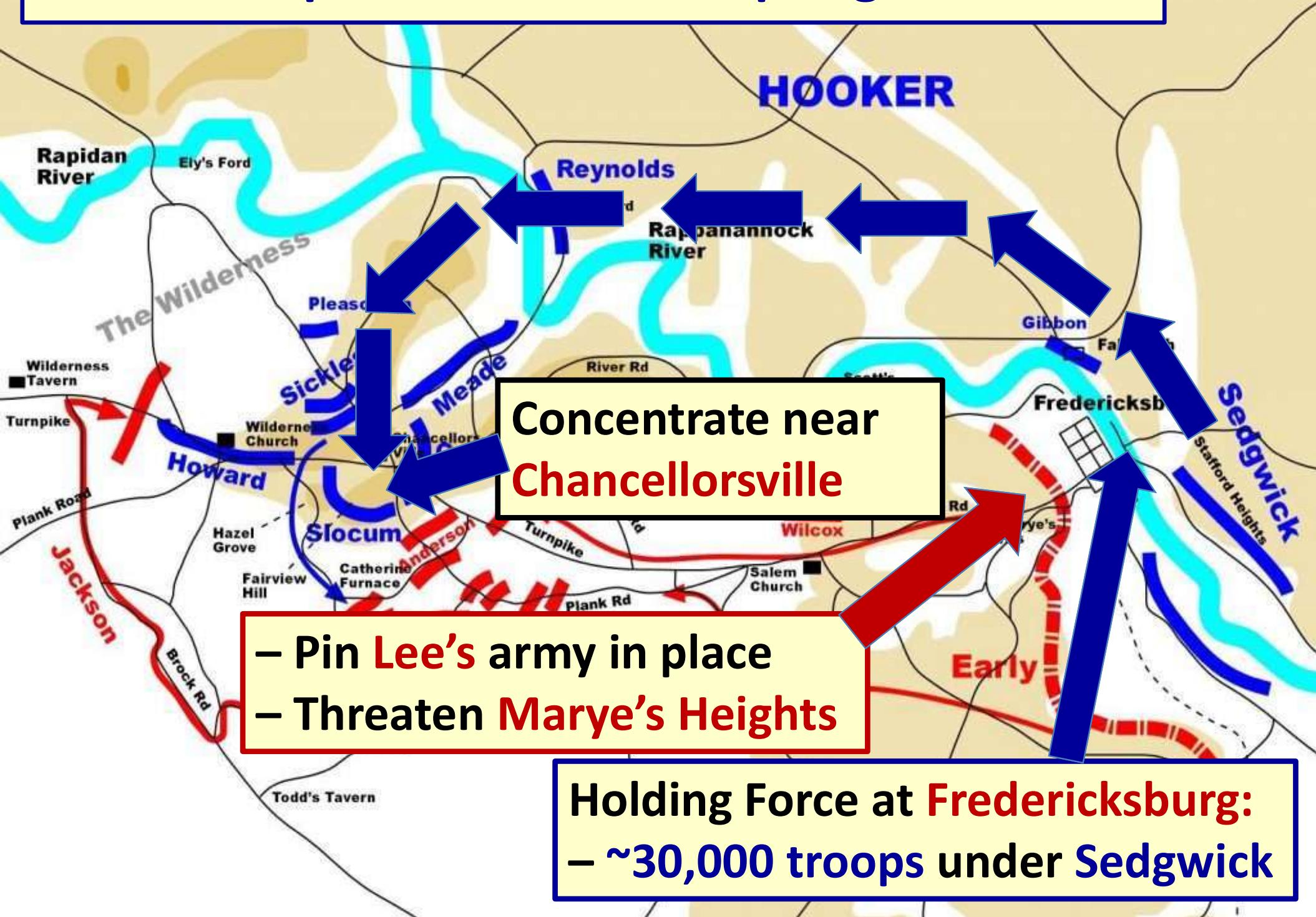
Main Turning Force:

~70,000 troops cross upriver

Use **Rappahannock** fords to flank Lee's left



Hooker's Operational Plan – Spring 1863



Hooker's Confidence:

“The enemy must either ingloriously fly or come out from behind his defenses and give us battle on our own ground.”

This was the **BEST UNION operational plan** of the war up to this point

Lincoln approved Hooker's Plan with this admonition:

“Put your whole army into the fight.”

OR as we would say today: “**Go ALL in!**”

The Plan Worked — until Hooker stopped advancing

The failure was **command execution, not design**

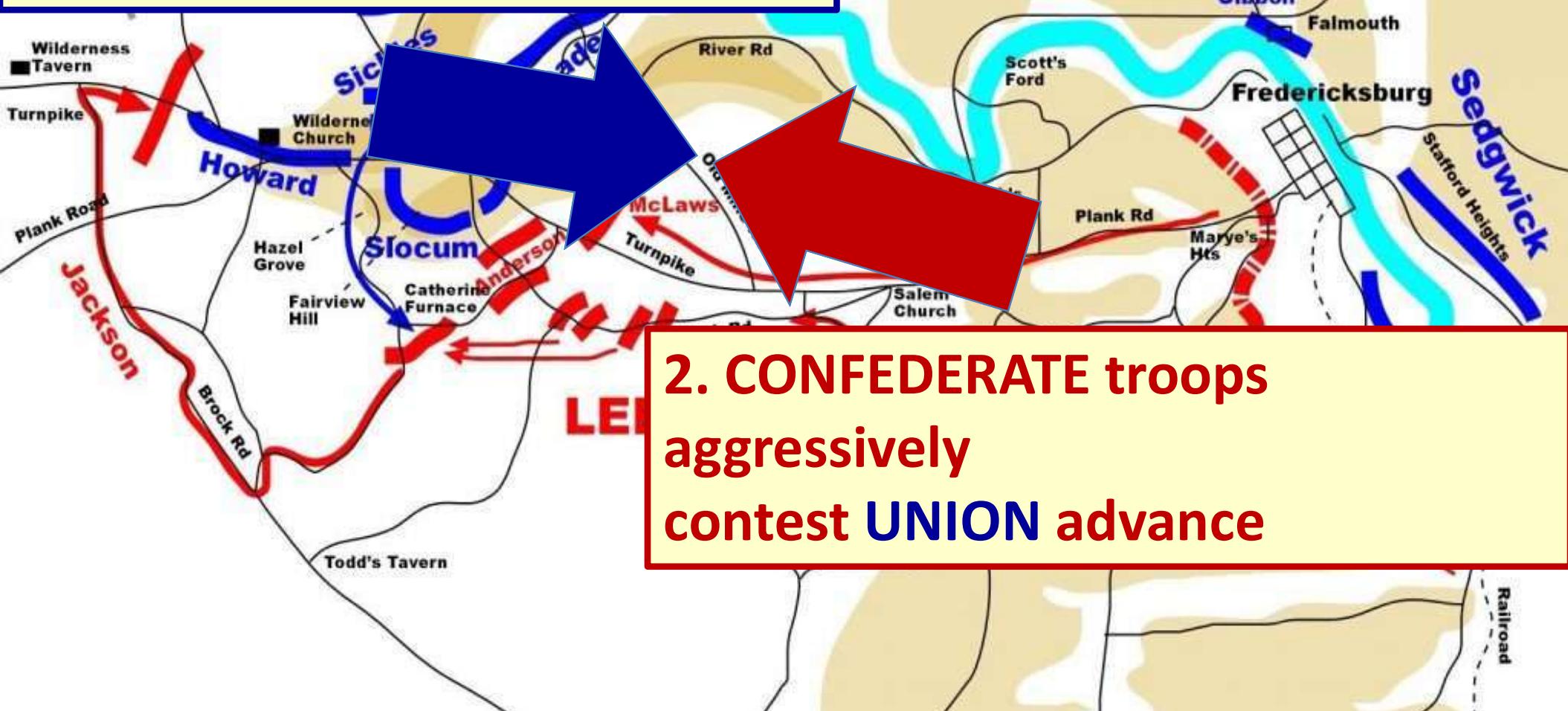
DAY 1 (May 1, 1863): Maneuver Turns to Missed Opportunity

1. UNION Movements

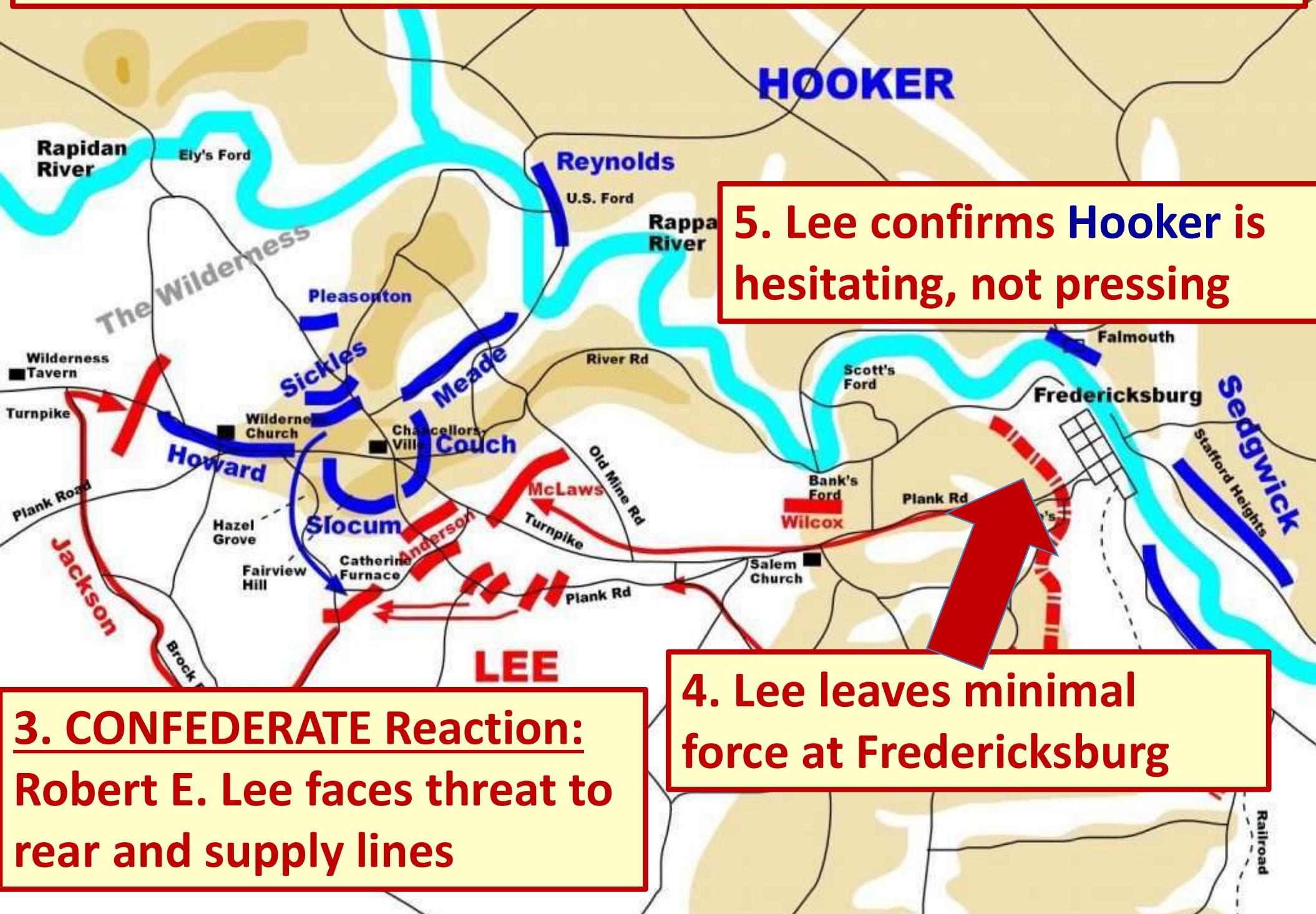
(Morning):

Joseph Hooker pushes east
from Chancellorsville

HOOKER



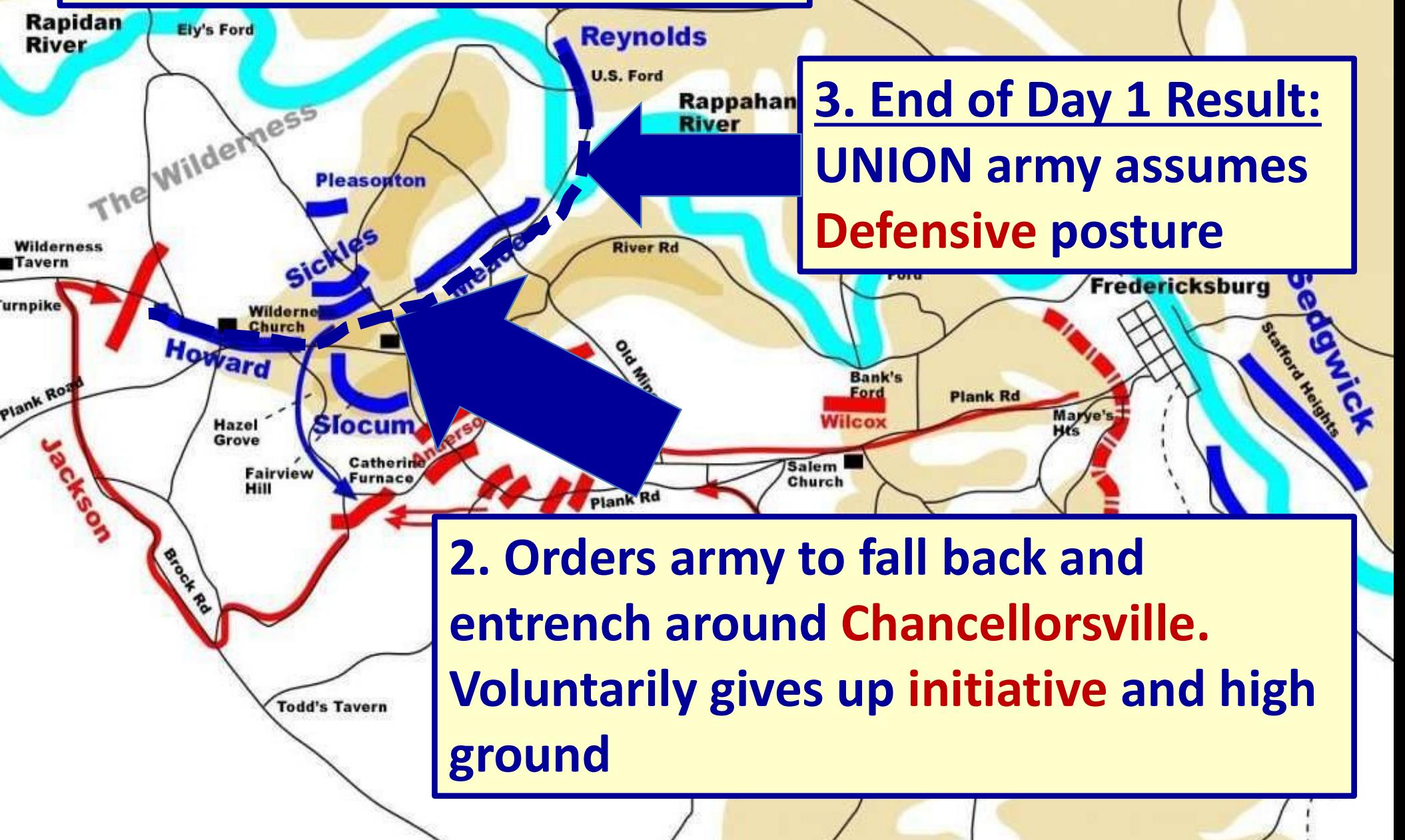
DAY 1 (May 1, 1863): Maneuver Turns to Missed Opportunity



1. Critical Decision (Afternoon):

Hooker halts the advance

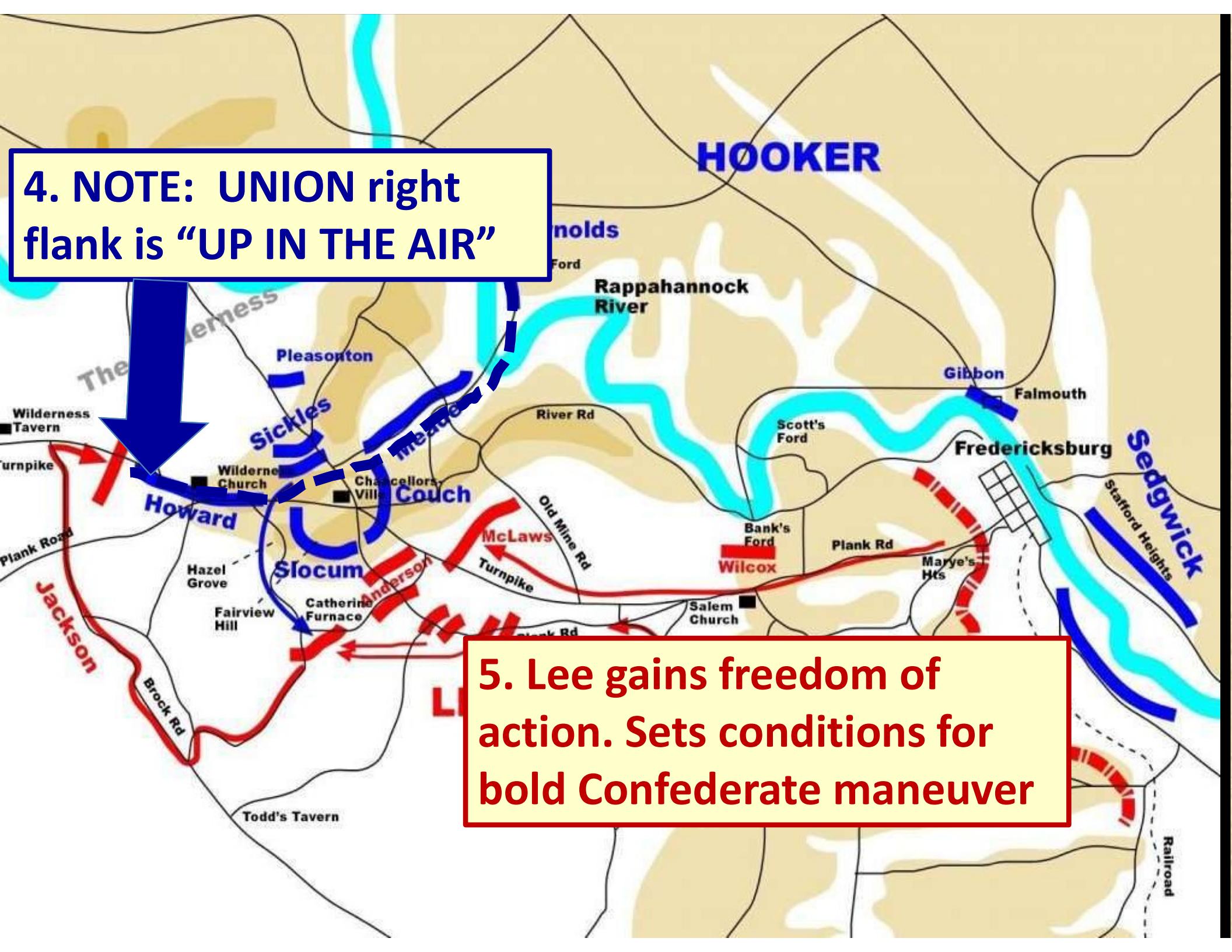
HOOKER



3. End of Day 1 Result:
UNION army assumes
Defensive posture

2. Orders army to fall back and
entrench around Chancellorsville.
Voluntarily gives up initiative and high
ground

4. NOTE: UNION right flank is “UP IN THE AIR”



HOOKER

5. Lee gains freedom of action. Sets conditions for bold Confederate maneuver

Night of May 1–2: Lee and Jackson Plan the Flank March



LEE AND JACKSON PLANNING THE BATTLE OF CHANCELLORSVILLE.

Night of May 1–2: Lee and Jackson Plan the Flank March

The Situation:

UNION army halted and entrenched around Chancellorsville

UNION right flank “in the air” — poorly anchored

CONFEDERATE army outnumbered more than 2 to 1

Lee’s Assessment:

Hooker has surrendered the initiative

Opportunity exists to strike decisively

Stonewall Jackson to take ~28,000 men on a LONG flank march around UNION right for a Surprise attack next day.

Forces Left Behind:

Lee holds Hooker in place with ~14,000 troops

Night of May 1–2: Lee and Jackson Plan the Flank March

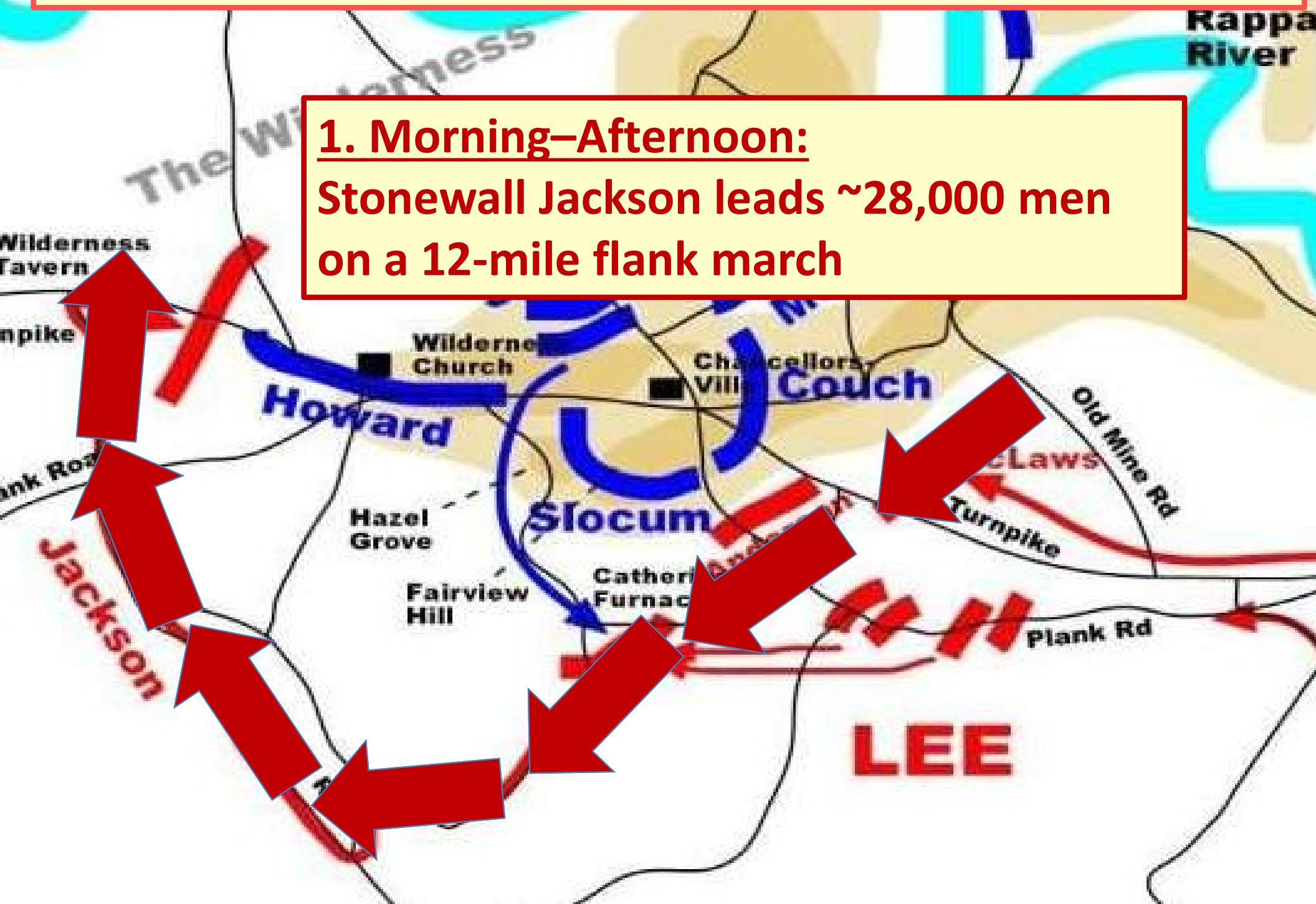


***This plan only works if Hooker does nothing
— and that is exactly what happens.”***

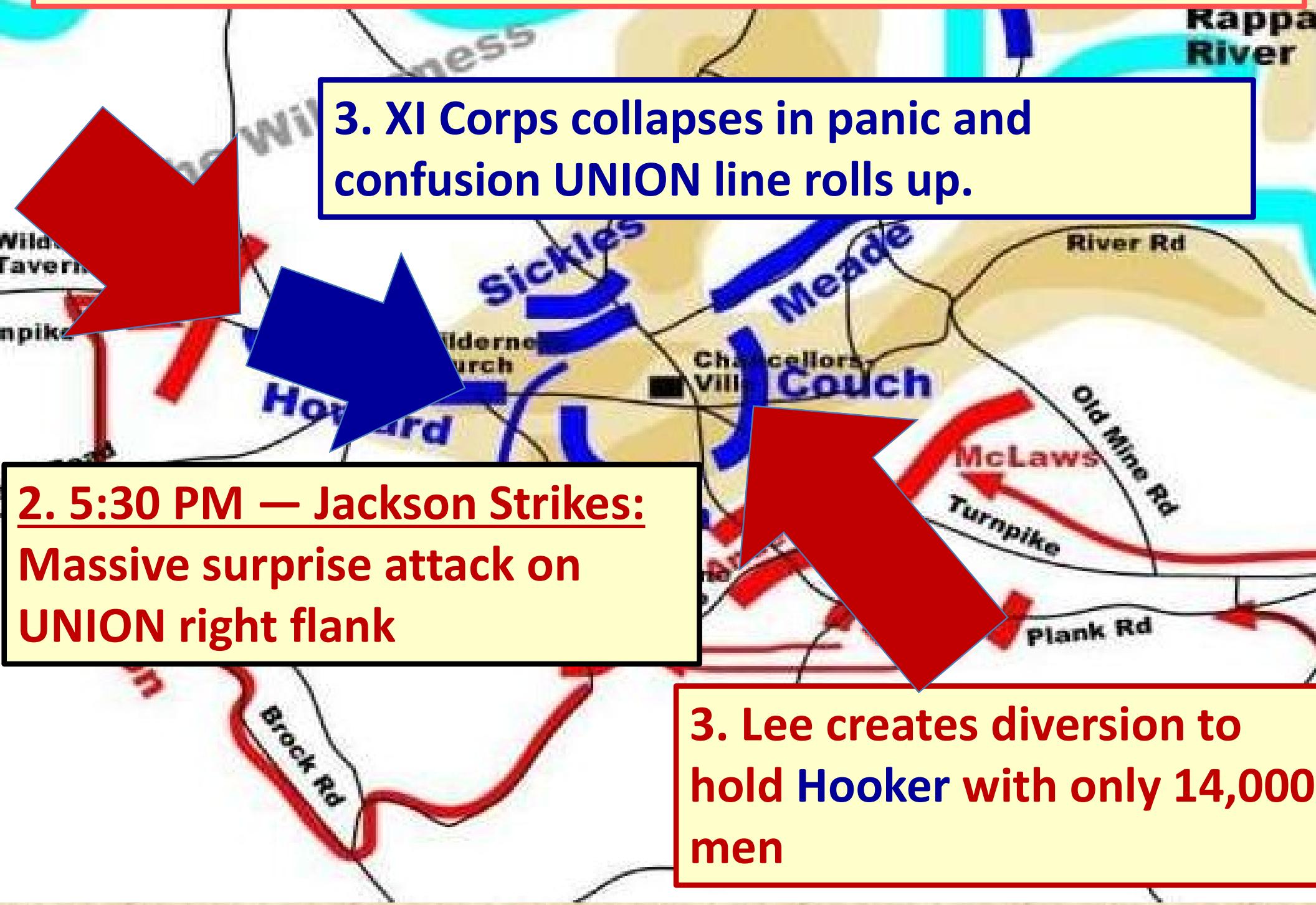
LEE AND JACKSON PLANNING THE BATTLE OF CHANCELLORSVILLE.

Flank March & Devastating Surprise (May 2, 1863)

1. Morning–Afternoon:
Stonewall Jackson leads ~28,000 men
on a 12-mile flank march

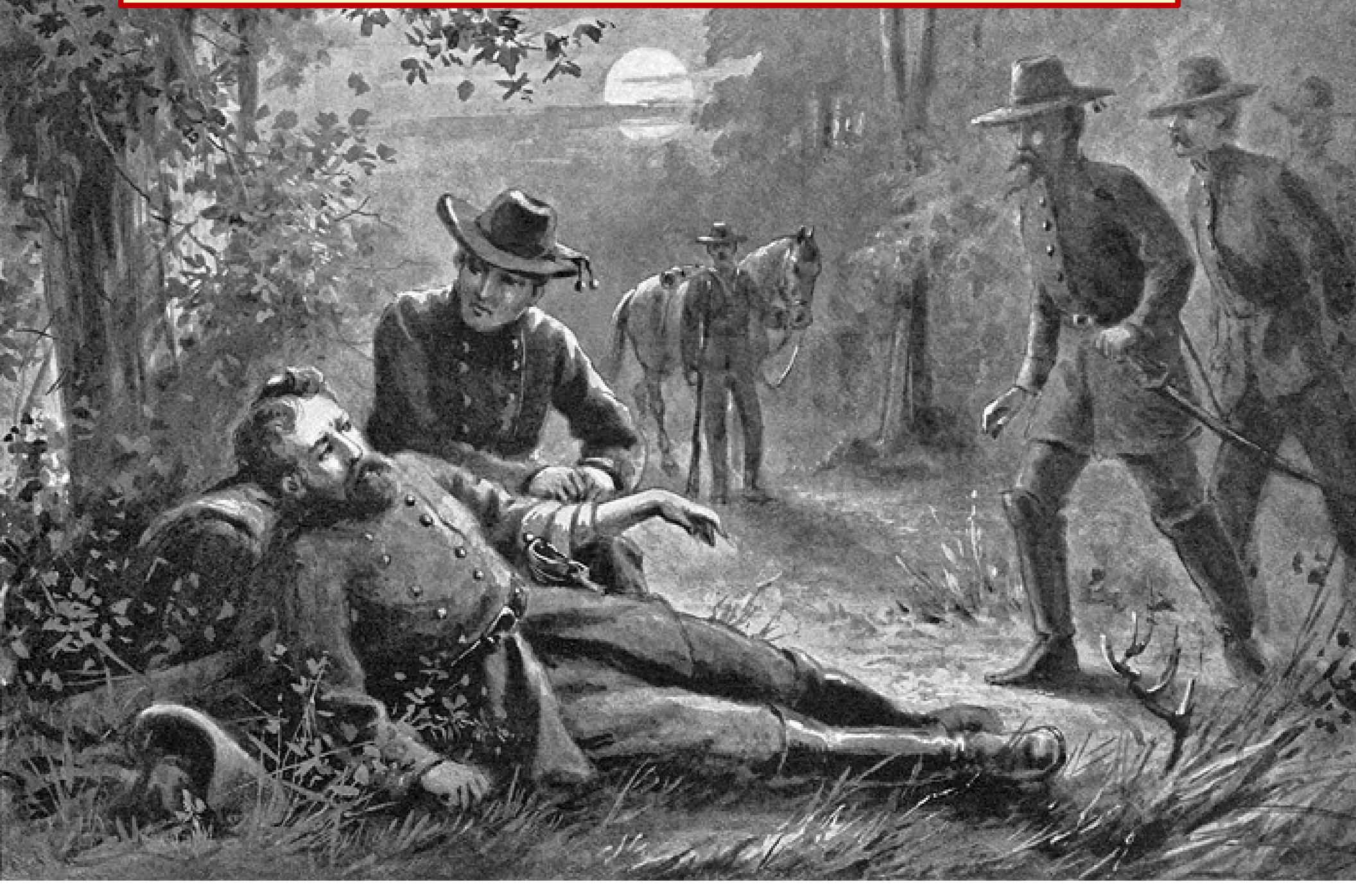


Flank March & Devastating Surprise (May 2, 1863)



Stonewall Jackson Wounded by Friendly Fire

— Night of May 2, 1863



At night Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, rode forward with staff to reconnoiter UNION positions

Returning through CONFEDERATE lines after dark; mistaken for UNION cavalry & fired upon by NC Infantry

Jackson had 3 gunshot wounds; 2 in the left arm, 1 in the right hand.

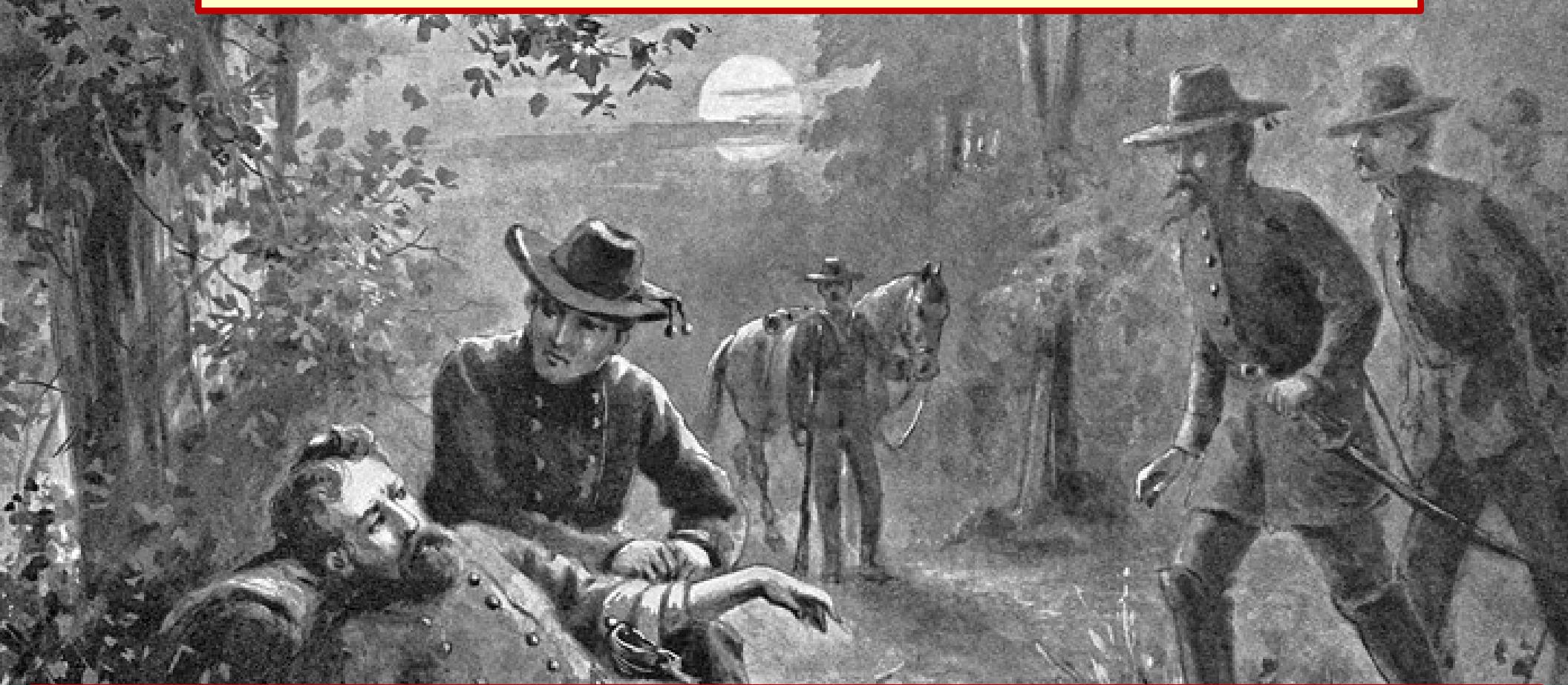
Left arm amputated the next day; initially seemed to recover.

Developed pneumonia; died 8 days later on May 10, 1863

Last reported words:

“Let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of the trees.”

Stonewall Jackson Wounded by Friendly Fire — Night of May 2, 1863



Lee loses his most aggressive and trusted lieutenant and later remarked:

“He has lost his left arm, but I have lost my right.”

May 3, 1863 — Final Day at Chancellorsville

3. UNION army compressed around Chancellorsville crossroads

May 3, 1863 — Final Day at Chancellorsville

1. Robert E. Lee launches coordinated assaults from east and west

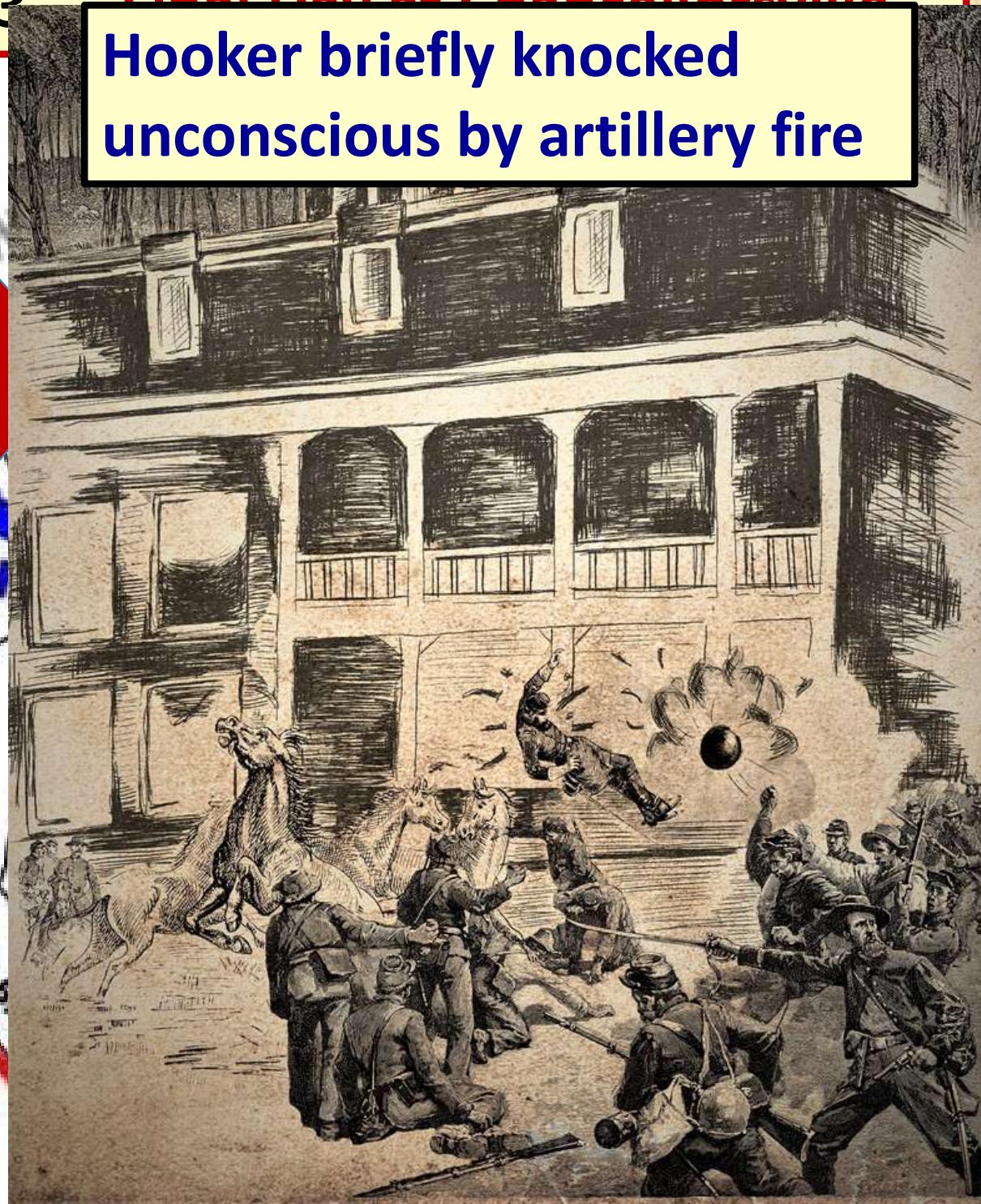
2. J.E.B. Stuart temporarily commands Jackson's corps

LEE

May 3, 1863

Final Day at Chancellorsville

Hooker briefly knocked unconscious by artillery fire



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pike

nk Road

Jackson

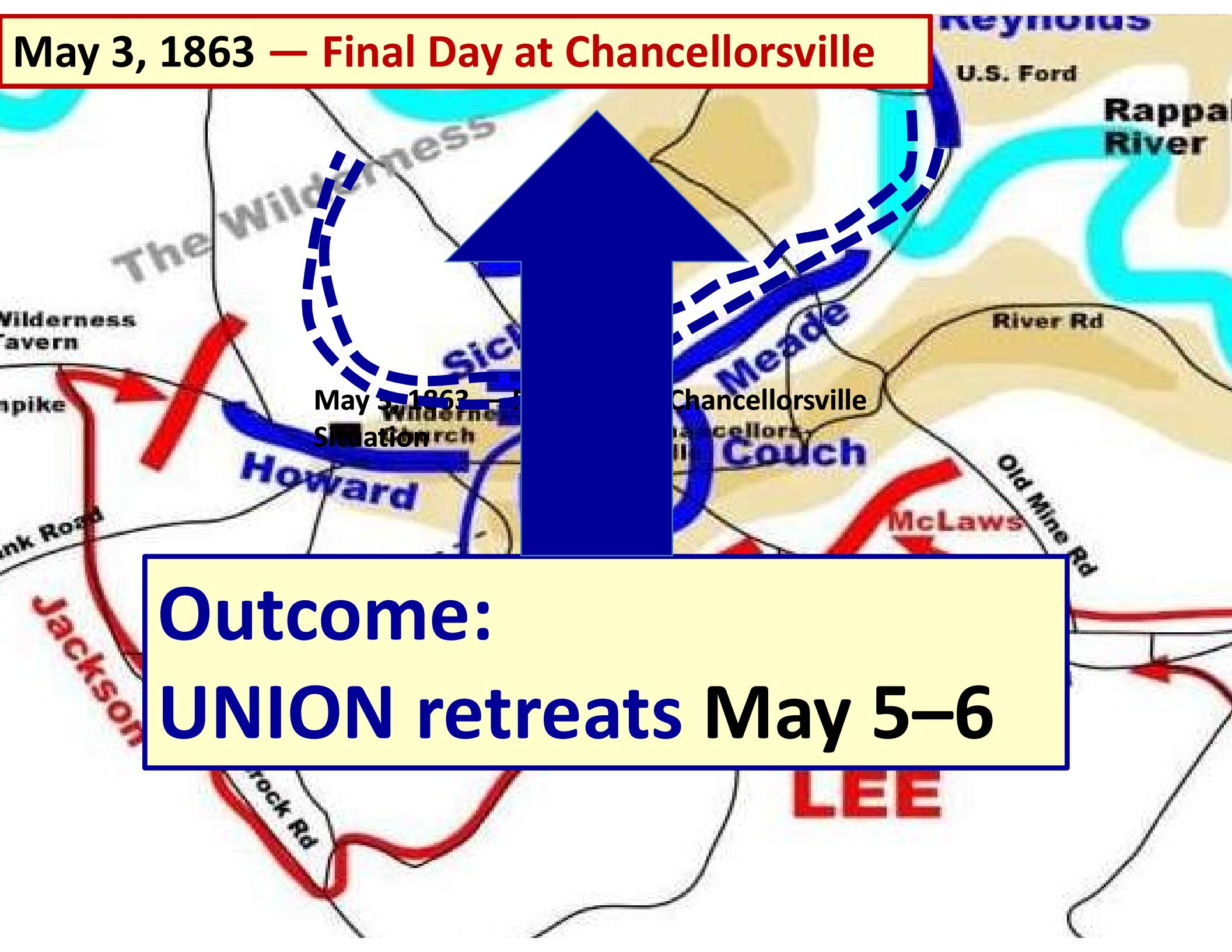
U.S. Ford

Rappa
River

Old Mine Rd

Plank Rd

May 3, 1863 — Final Day at Chancellorsville



Outcome:
UNION retreats May 5–6

May 3, 1863

Final Day at Chancellorsville

UNION

Chancellorsville

Hooker briefly knocked

Union lines collapse under fire

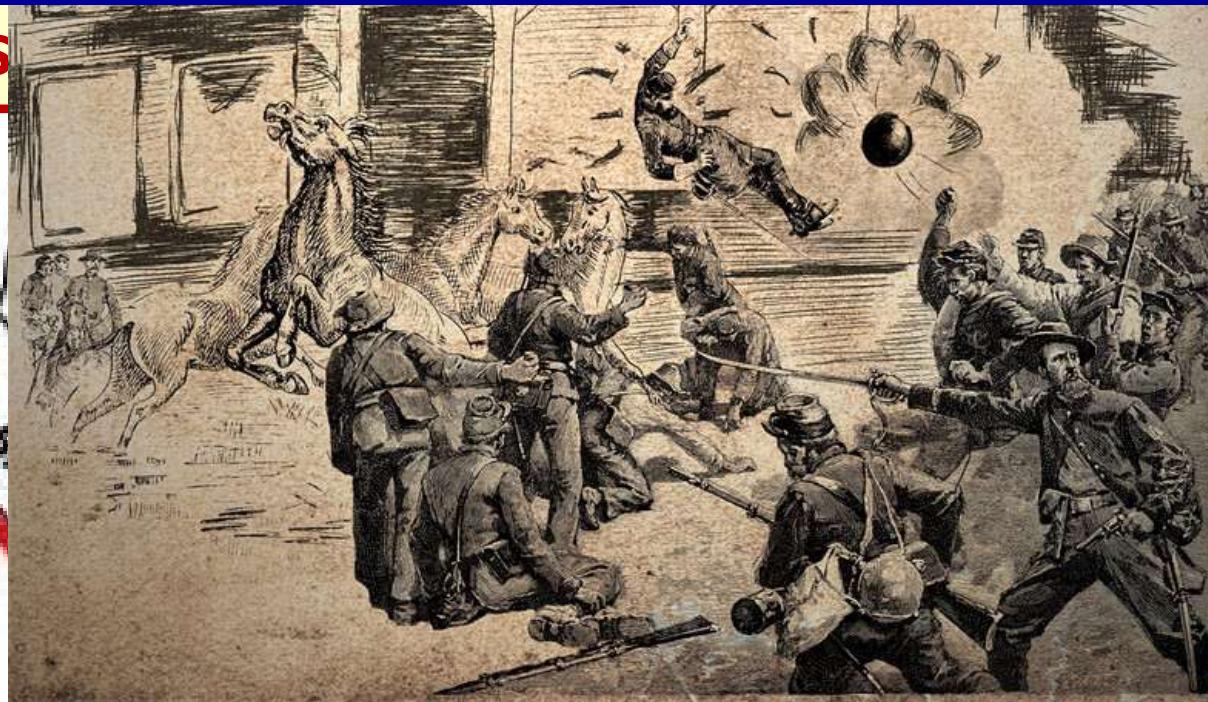
sustained pressure

Outcome:

UNION retreats May 5–6

J.E.B. S

commands



Battle of Chancellorsville — Casualties & Cost (May 1–6, 1863)

UNION casualties:

≈17,000 (killed, wounded, captured, missing)

CONFEDERATE casualties:

≈13,000 — severe losses for a smaller army

CONFEDERATE victory comes

At high proportional cost

Death of **Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson**,
experienced irreplaceable field commander

Reinforces **Robert E. Lee’s** belief that
decisive action—not attrition—is required

Impact of the Battle of Chancellorsville (May 1–6, 1863)

From Stunning Victory to Fateful Decision

Greatest CONFEDERATE victory — at a High Cost

- Lee defeats a much larger UNION army through audacity and maneuver
- Victory overshadowed by death of Stonewall Jackson

Peak CONFEDERATE Confidence

- Army morale soars; belief in Lee's invincibility
- UNION command shaken; Northern confidence damaged

Virginia Is Exhausted

- Central Virginia depleted of food, forage, and manpower
- A prolonged defensive war in Virginia is unsustainable

Strategic Logic Shifts North

- Relieve pressure on **Virginia**;
Supply the army from **Northern** farmland
- Threaten **Northern** cities and influence public opinion

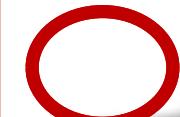
Consequences

- Chancellorsville convinces Lee that bold offense is the answer
- Directly leads to the **Gettysburg** Campaign

“Chancellorsville gave Lee supreme confidence — and pushed him toward **THE MOST CONSEQUENTIAL GAMBLE** of the War”

TRANSITION TO GETTYSBURG

Gettysburg:



Chancellorsville:



MAJOR BATTLES OF THE CIVIL WAR PART 2:

Ed Seufert

CLASS 1: Vicksburg (May 18-July 4, 1863)

CLASS 2: Gettysburg (July 1-3, 1863)

CLASS 3:

Chickamauga (Sept 19-20, 1863)

Chattanooga (Nov 23-25, 1863)

THE END