

# **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.***

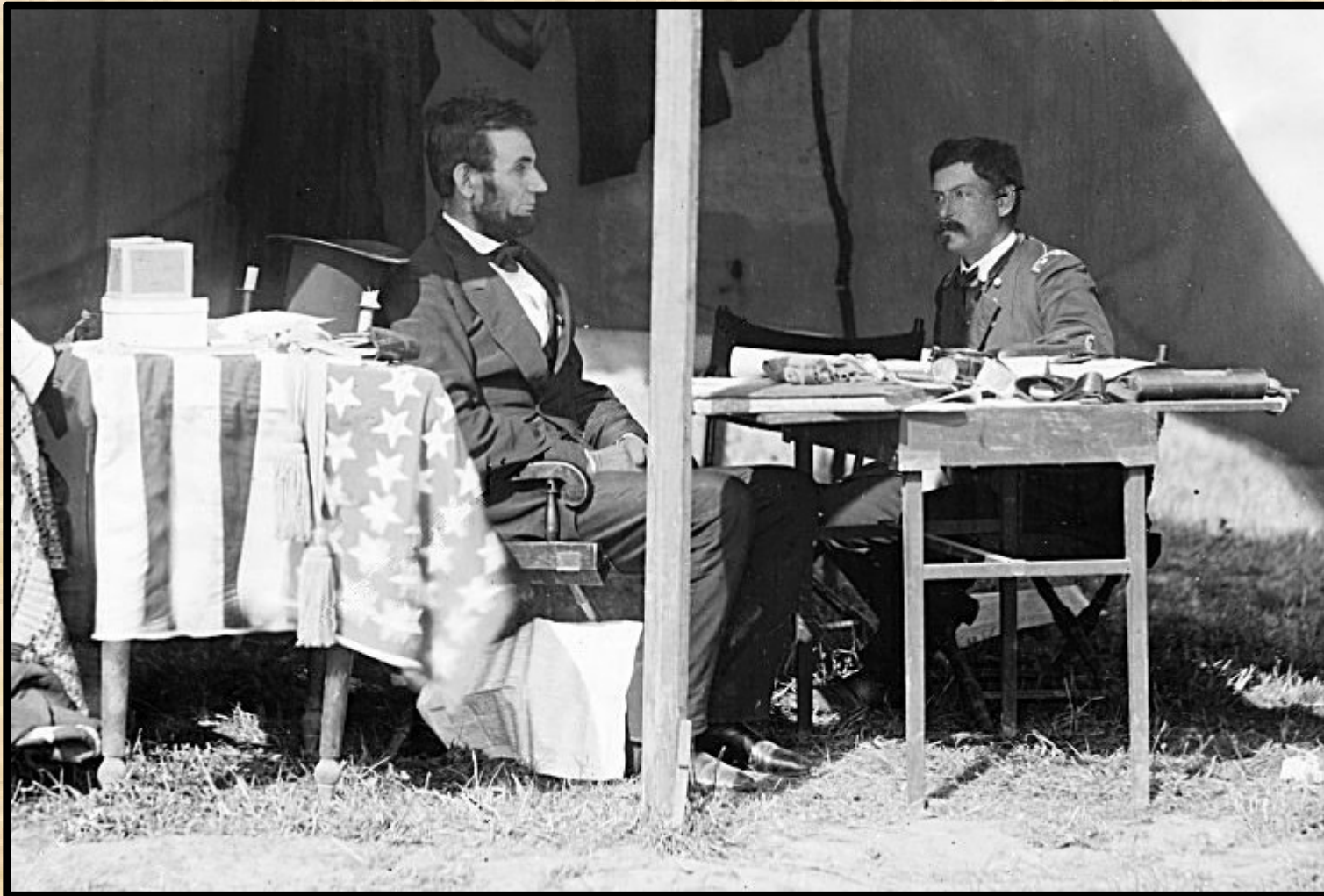


# The “Resting the Horses” Excuse

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.*



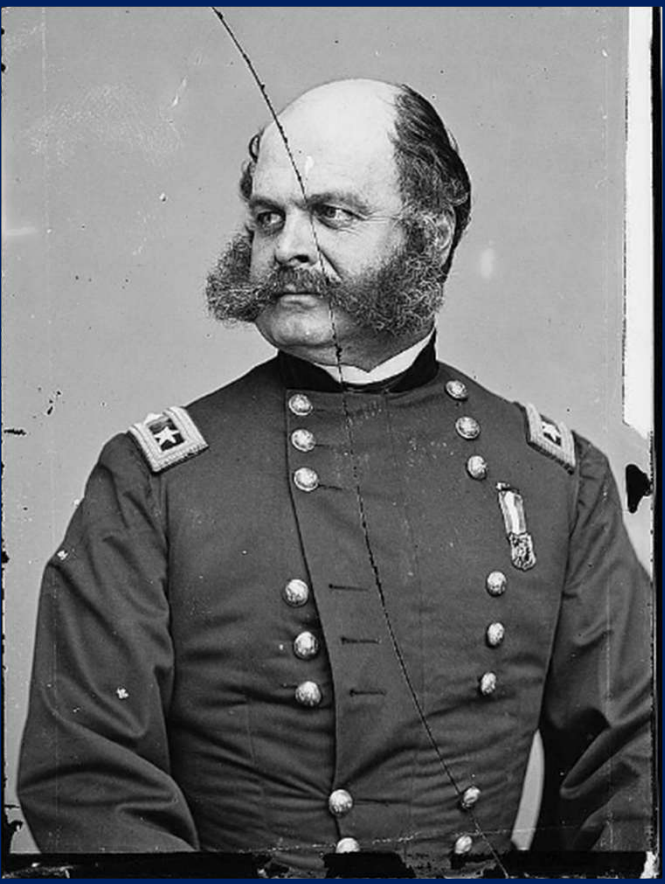
# The Battle of Fredericksburg (Dec 11-15, 1862)

**Fredericksburg:**



**Richmond:**  
**Capital of the CONFEDERACY**

# 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 to prove he was NOT McClellan*

## 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

# Battle of Fredericksburg Geography

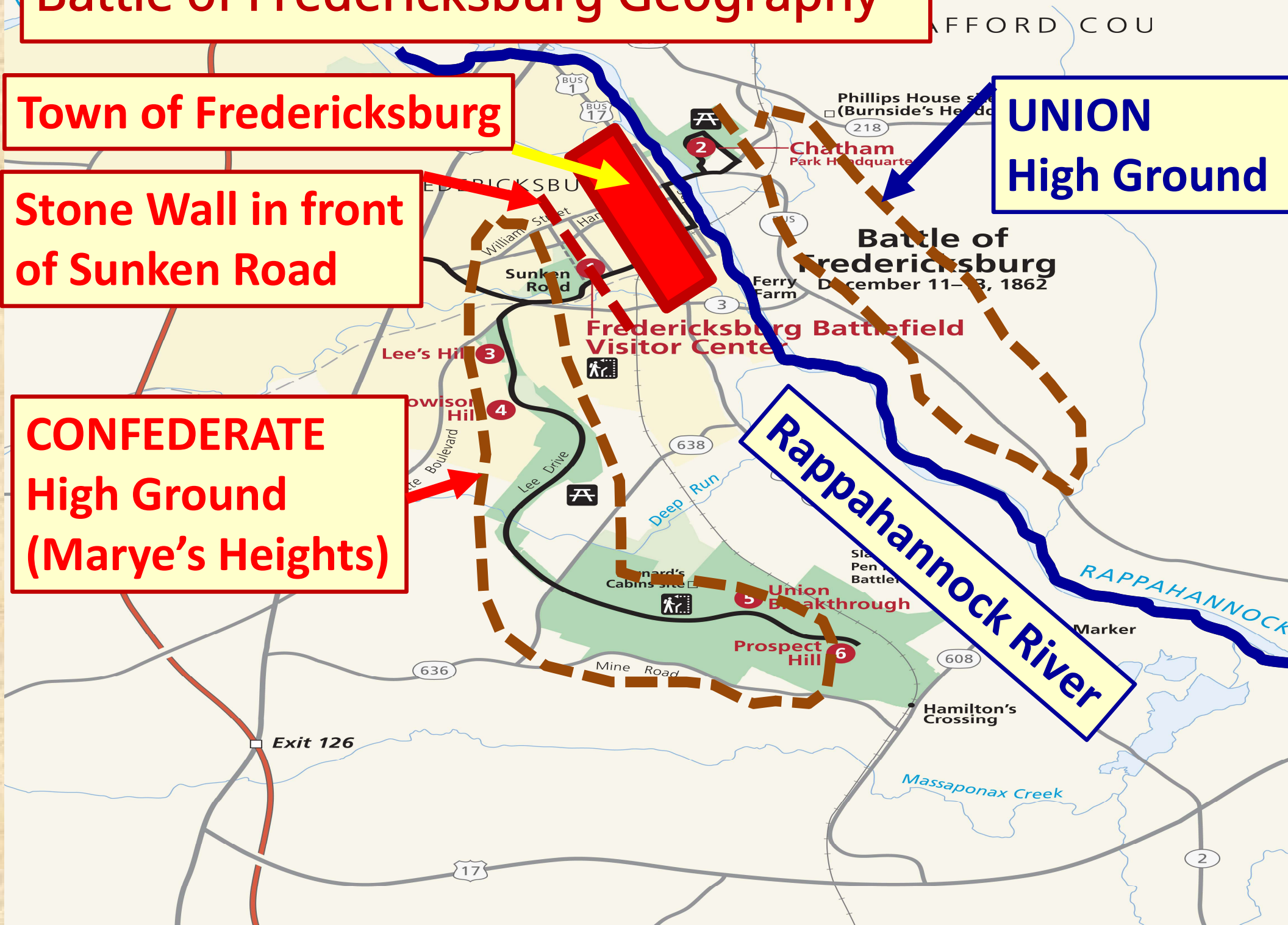
Town of Fredericksburg

Stone Wall in front of Sunken Road

CONFEDERATE  
High Ground  
(Marye's Heights)

UNION  
High Ground

Rappahannock River



# 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.***

- **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**



# 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)

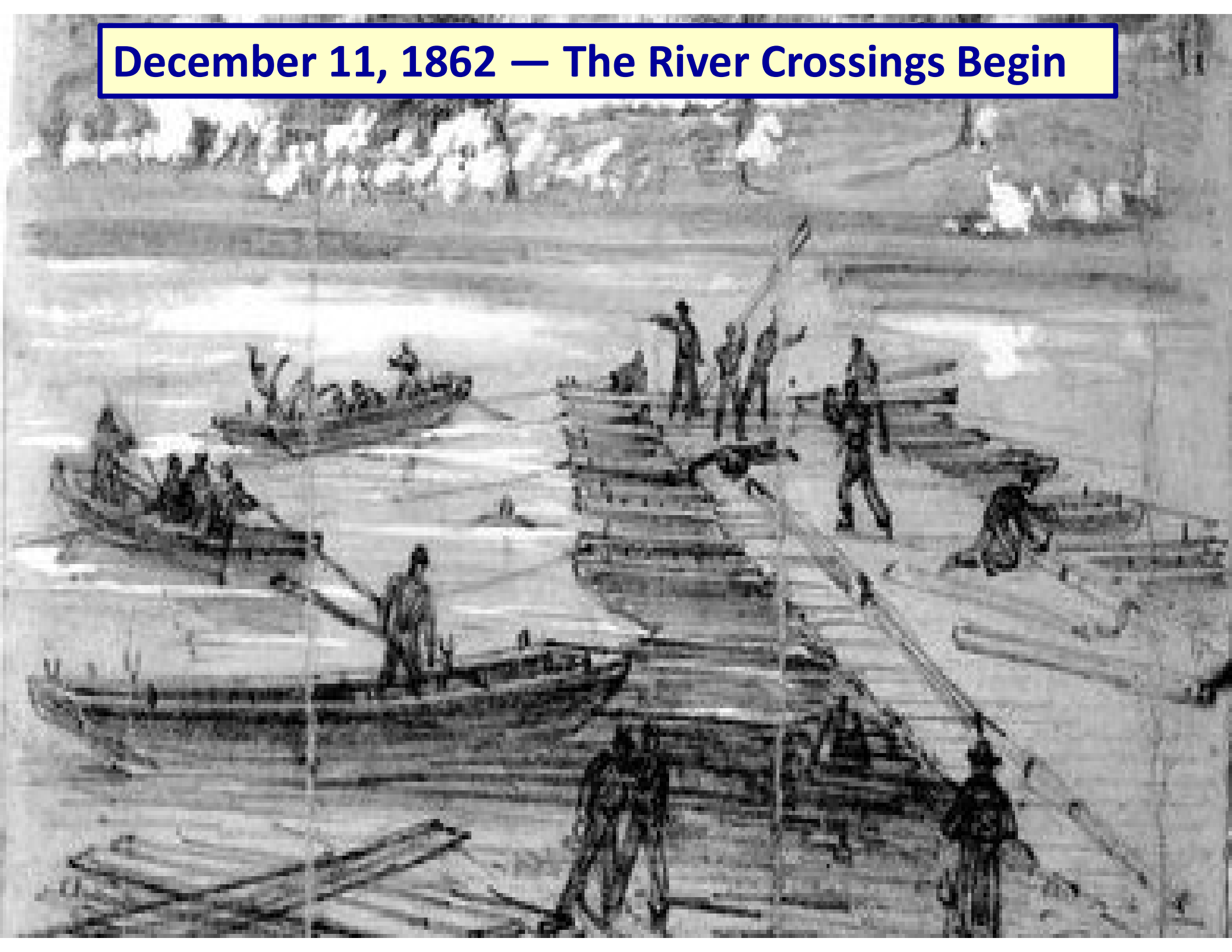
- New Commander (Nov 1862):  
Burnside replaces McClellan with an expectation of **ACTION** not **CAUTION**

## 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



**December 11, 1862 — The River Crossings Begin**

**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**

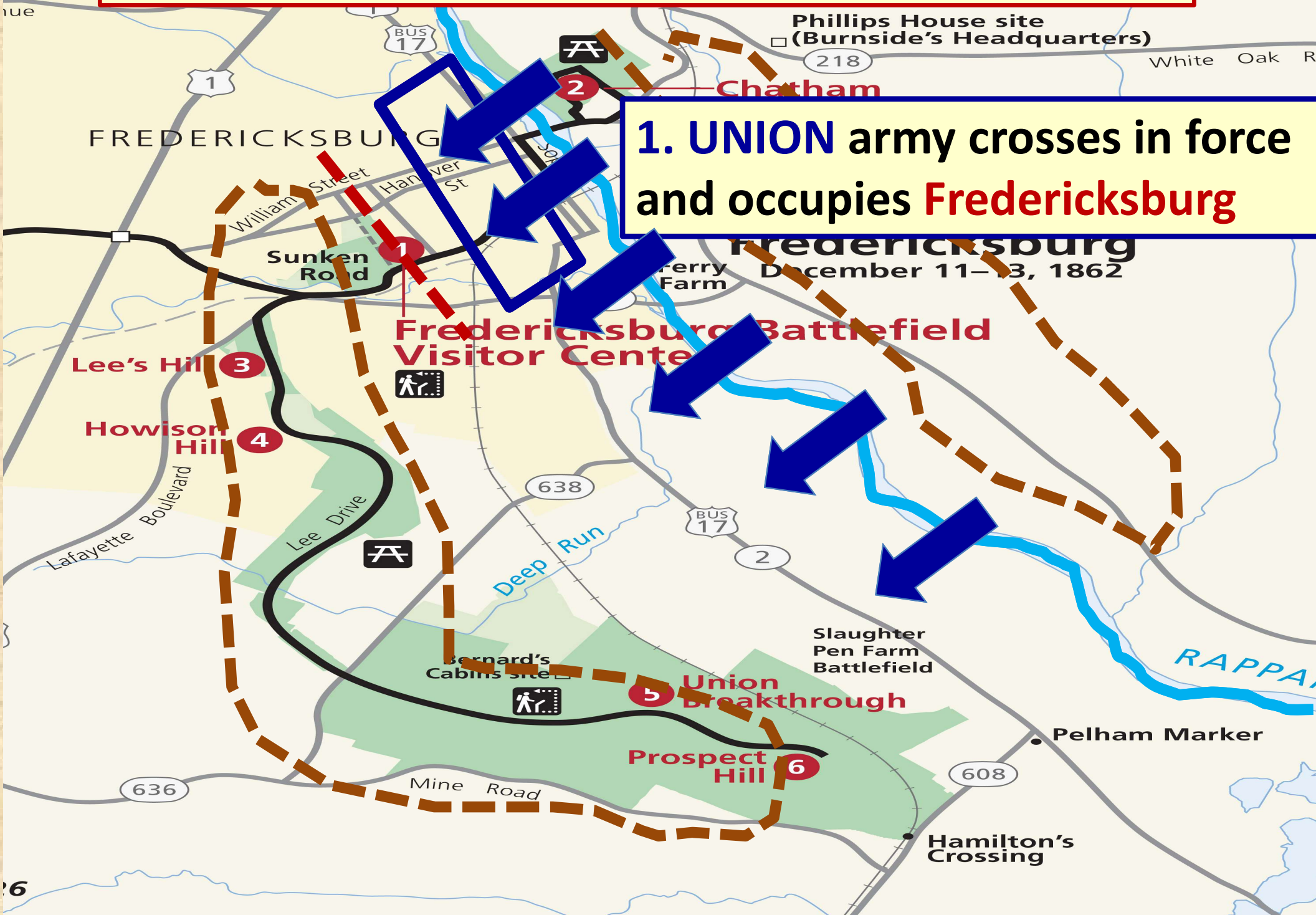
**December 11, 1862 — The River Crossings Begin**

**TAKEAWAY:**

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



# December 12, 1862 — Armies Take Their Positions

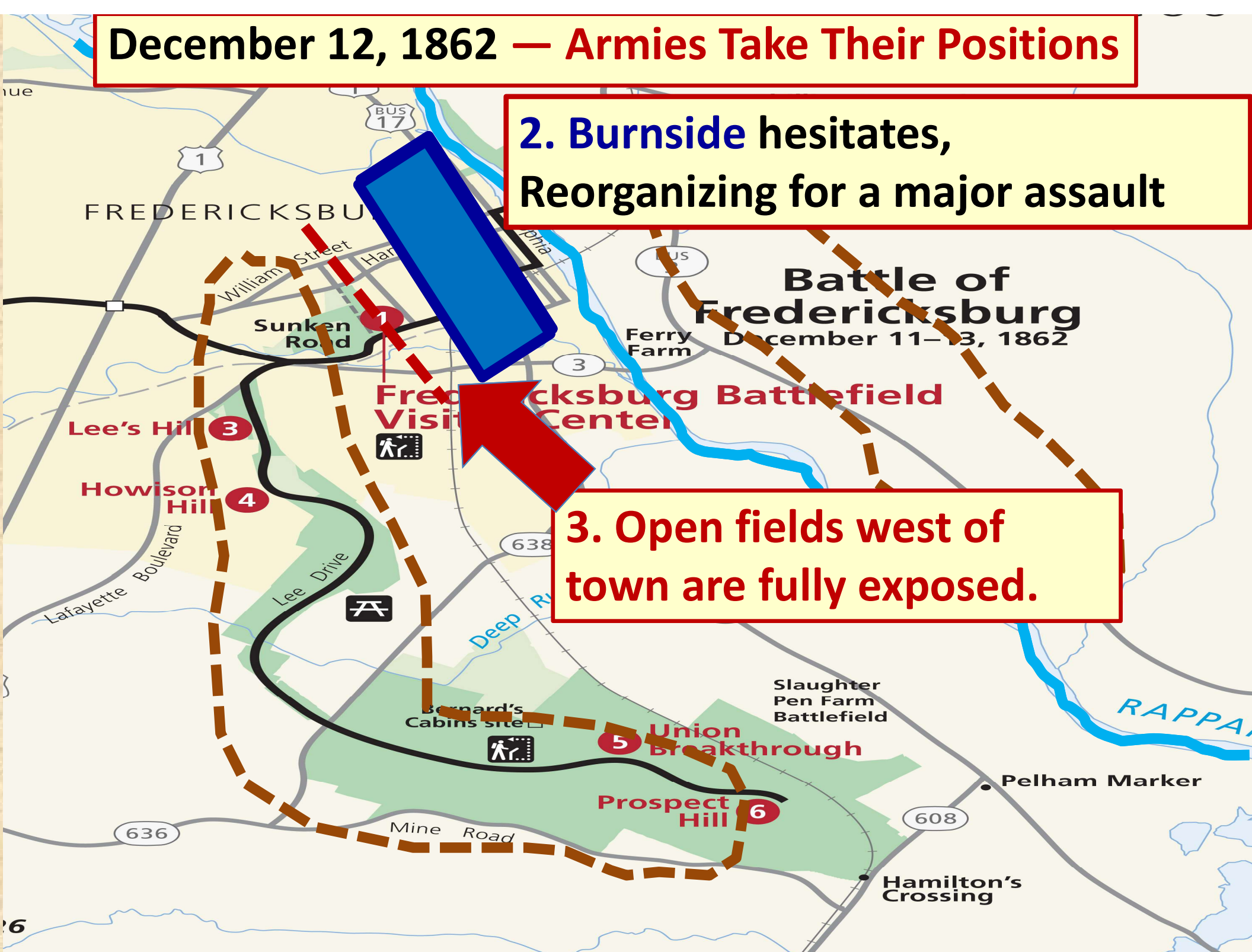




**December 12, 1862 — Armies Take Their Positions**

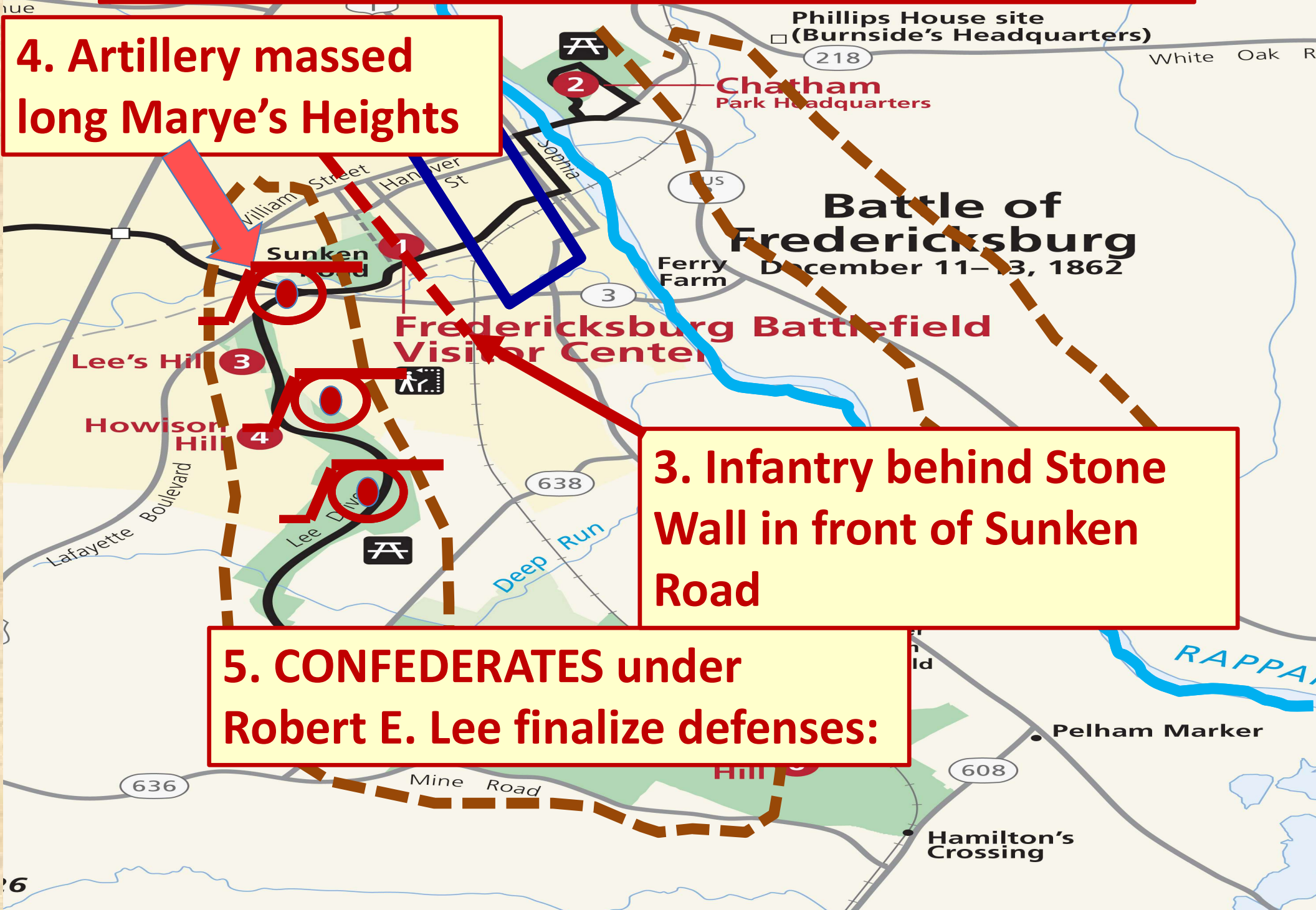
**2. Burnside hesitates,  
Reorganizing for a major assault**

**3. Open fields west of  
town are fully exposed.**



# December 12, 1862 — Armies Take Their Positions

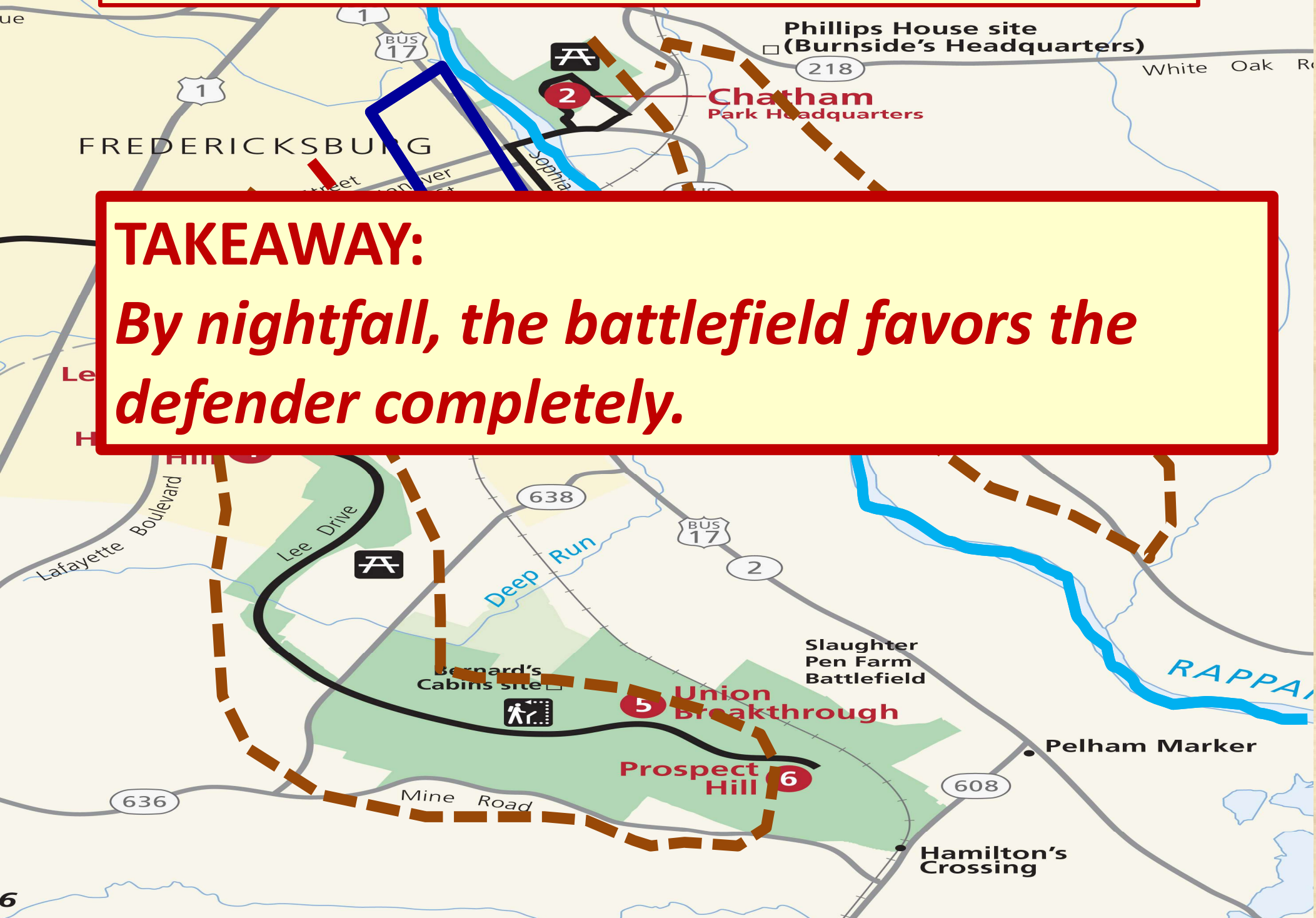
4. Artillery massed long Marye's Heights



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



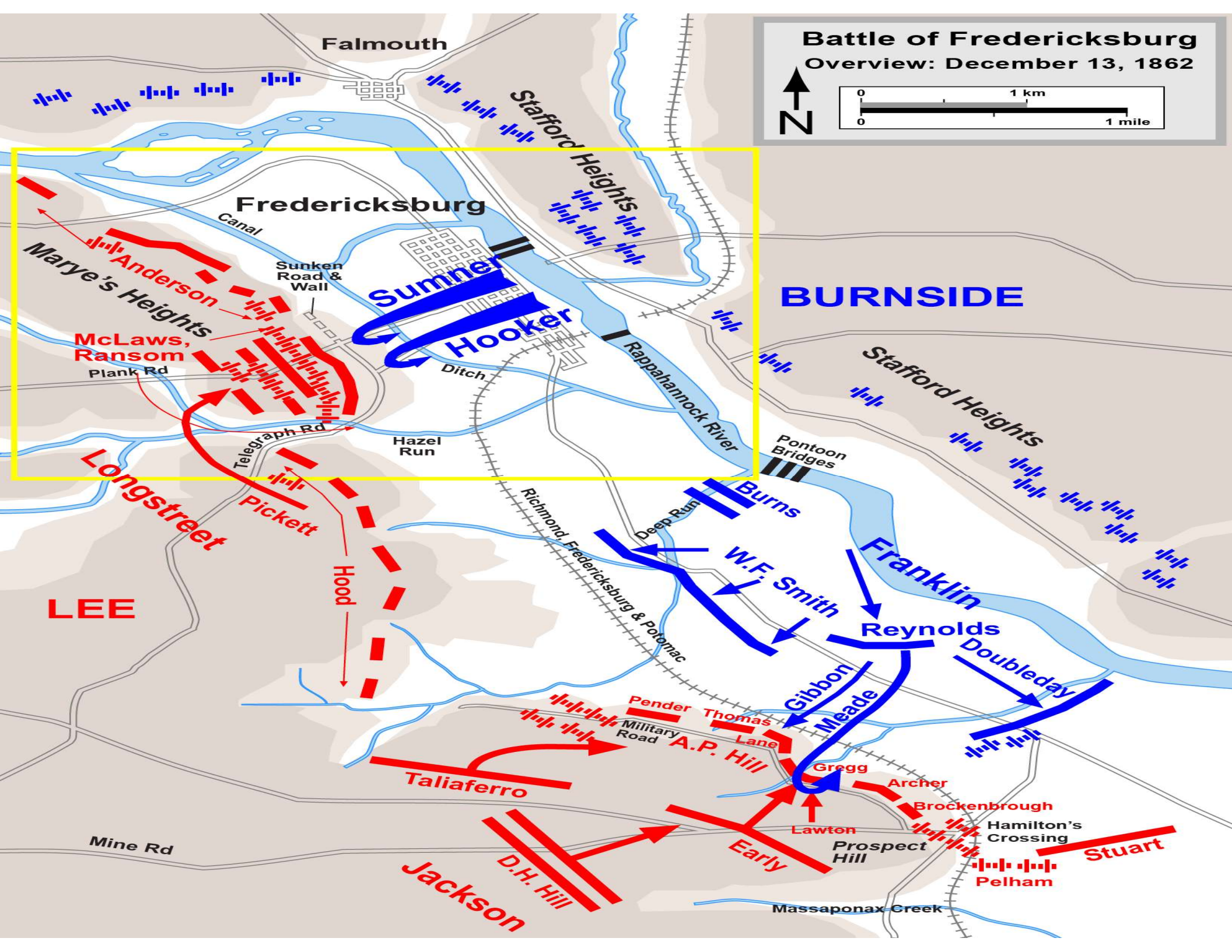
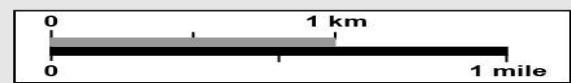
## TAKEAWAY:

*By nightfall, the battlefield favors the defender completely.*



# 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



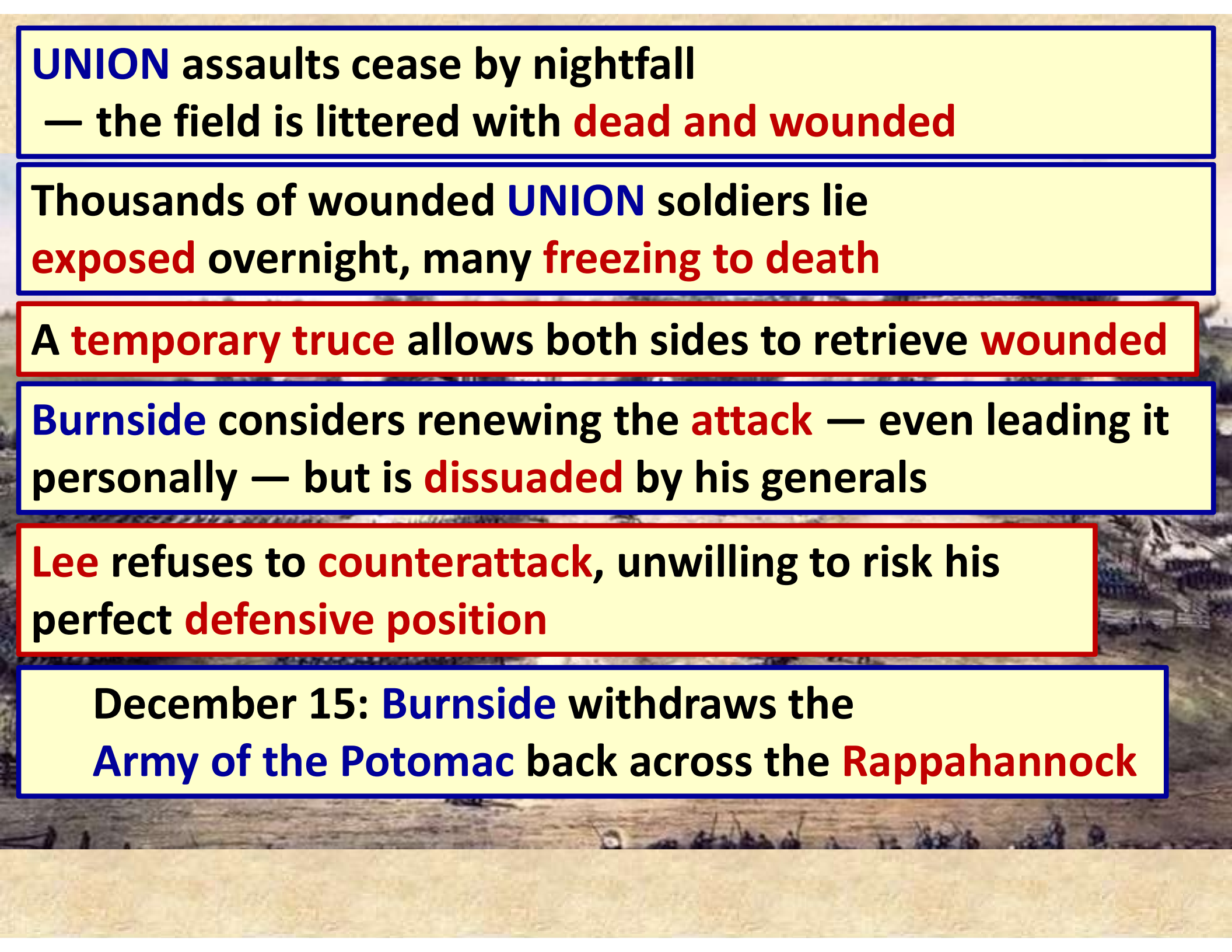


**December 13, 1862 — Assaults Against Stone Wall & Marye's Heights**



**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 19. 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)

*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 **2<sup>nd</sup> 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

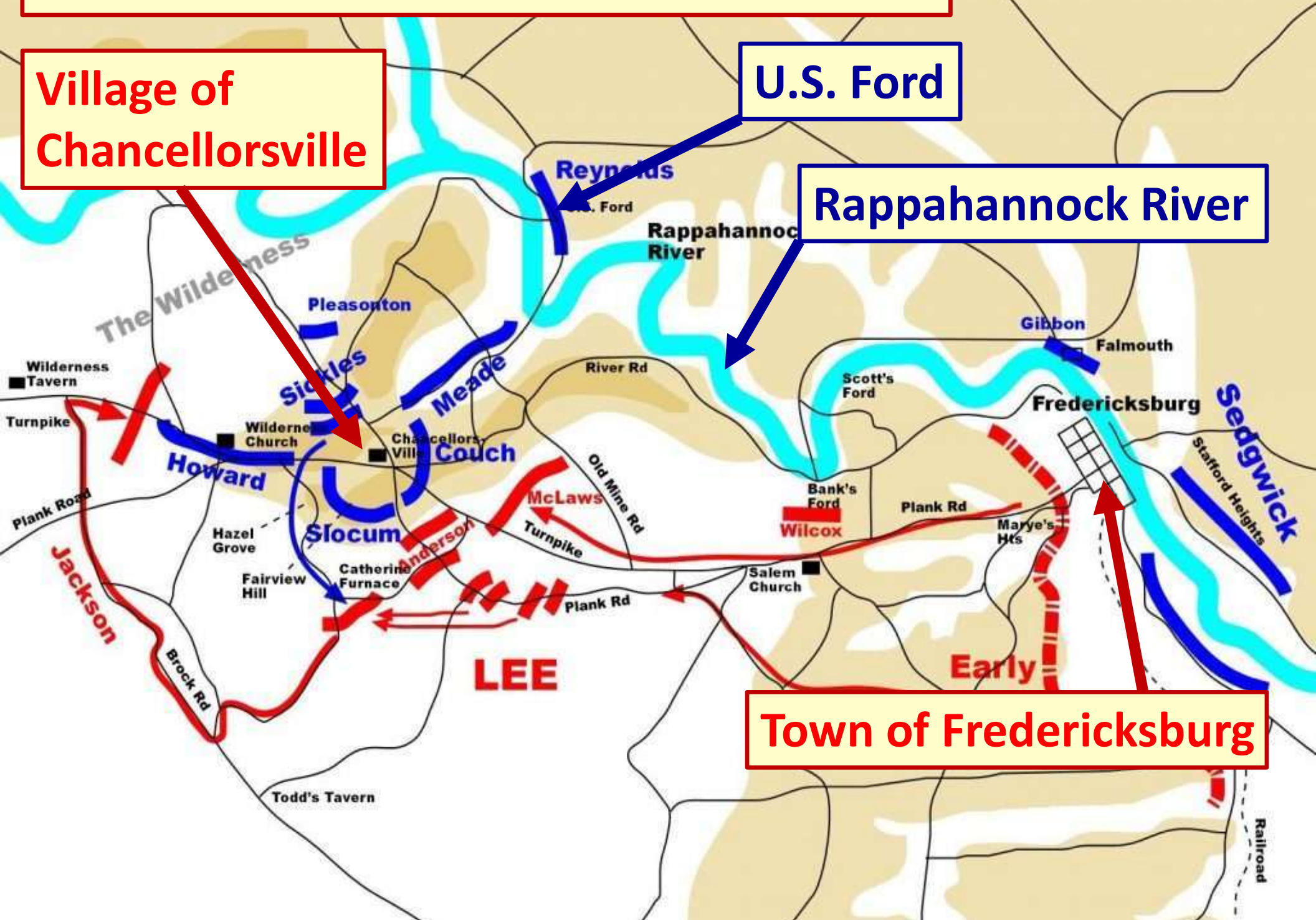
Failed to press advantages despite superior strength

# Battle of Chancellorsville Geography

Village of  
Chancellorsville

U.S. Ford

Rappahannock River



Town of Fredericksburg

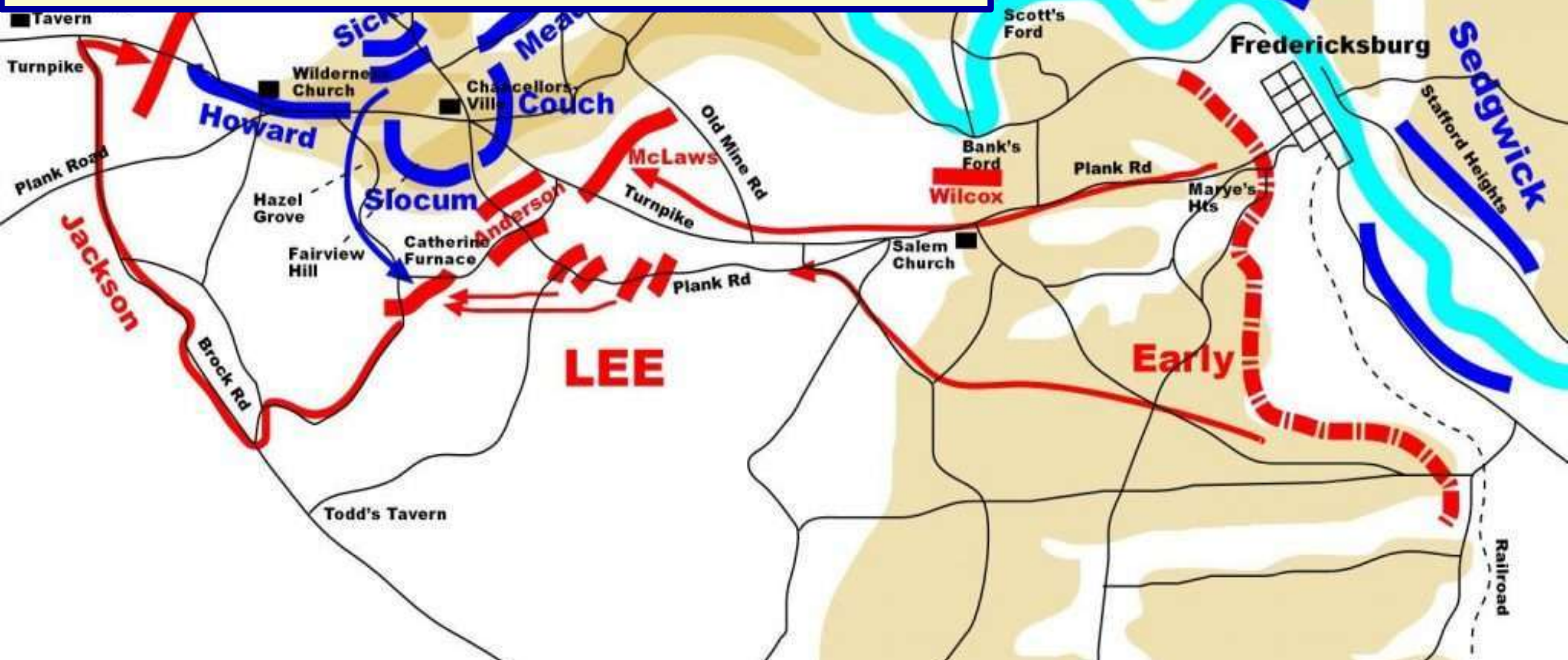


# Hooker's Operational Plan – Spring 1863

Objective:

Defeat **Lee** by **maneuver** —  
*not frontal assault*

Force **Lee** to abandon **Fredericksburg**  
or fight on **UNION** terms



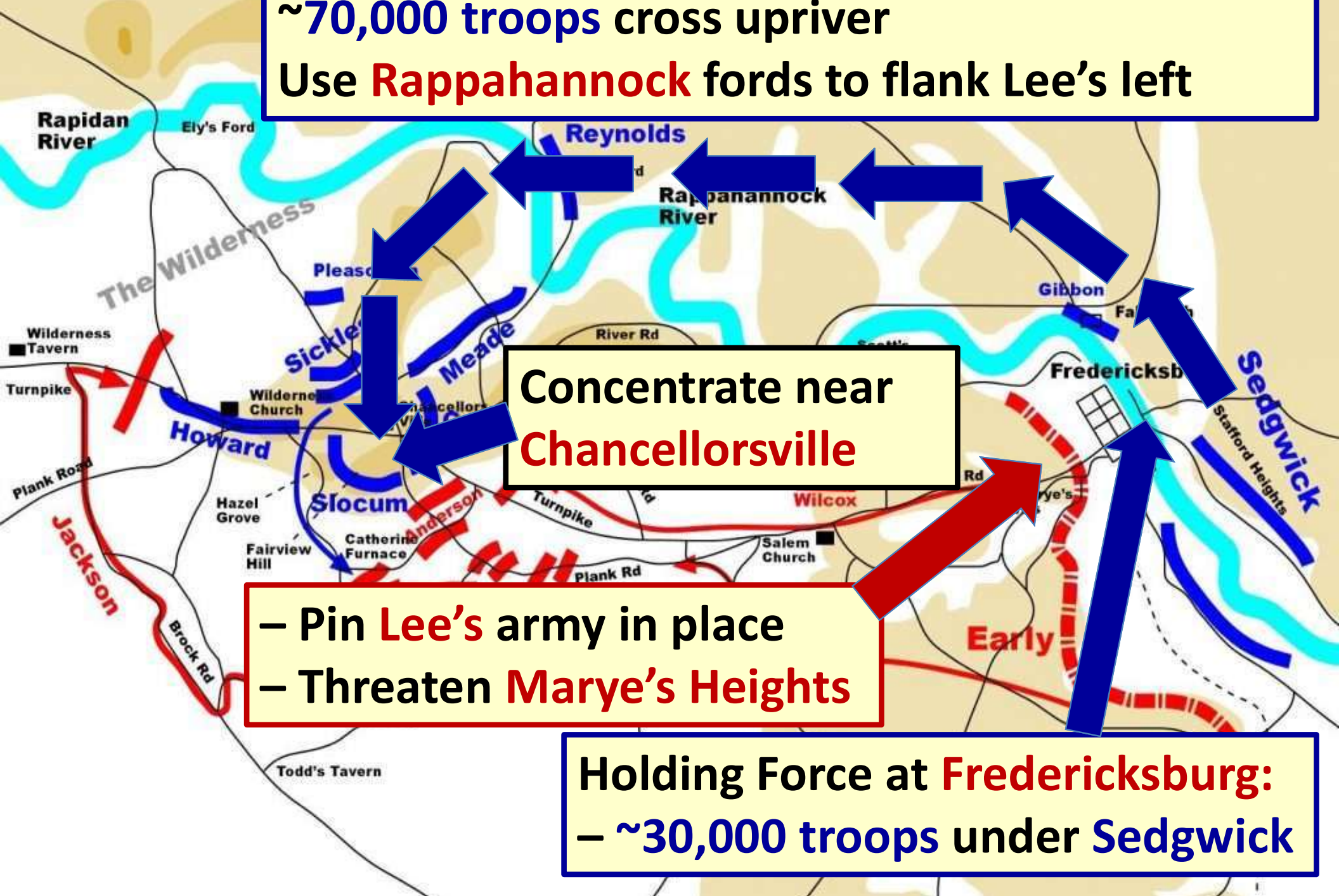


**Hooker's**

Main Turning Force:

~70,000 troops cross upriver

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

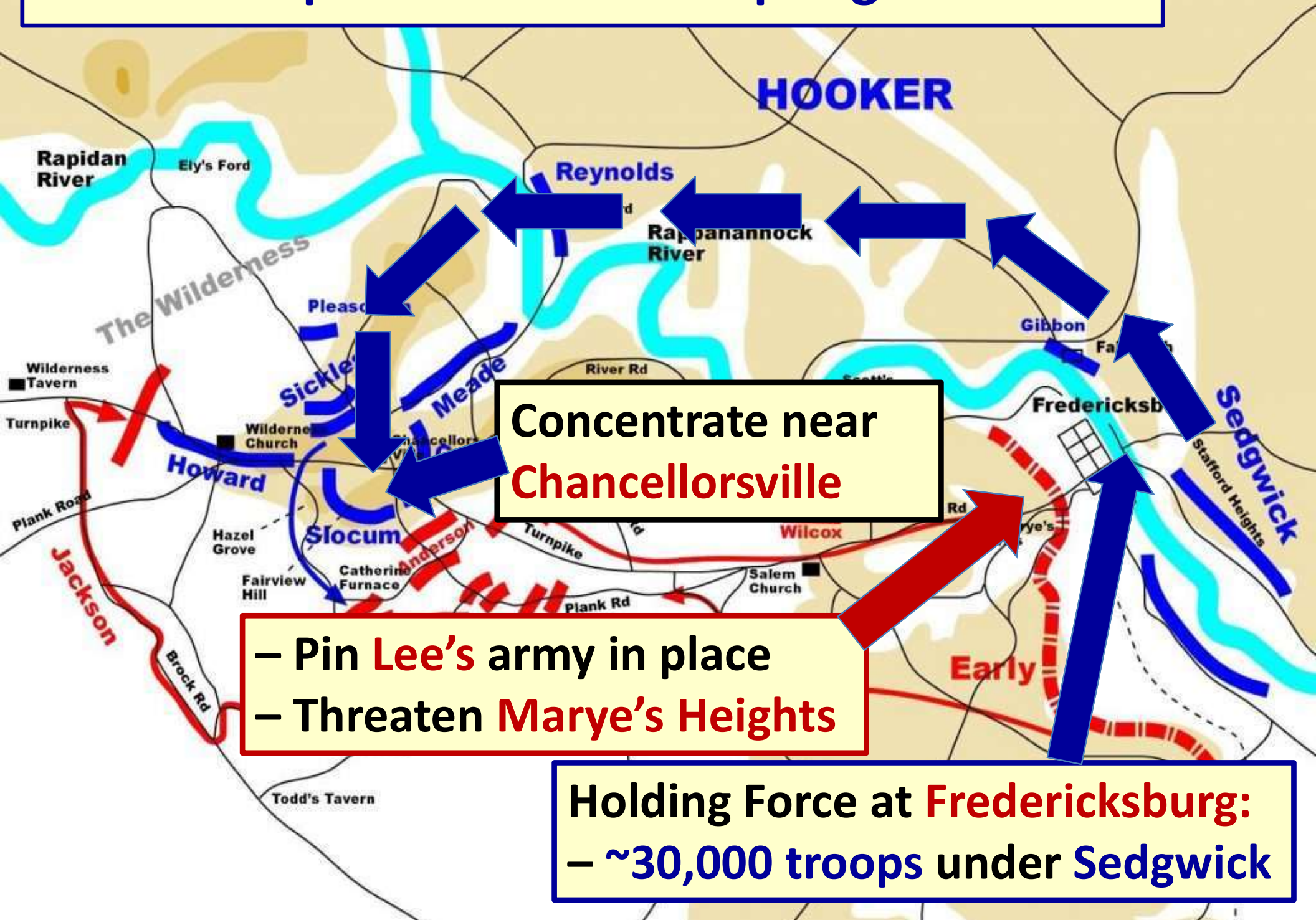


Concentrate near  
**Chancellorsville**

- Pin **Lee's** army in place
- Threaten **Marye's Heights**

Holding Force at **Fredericksburg**:  
– ~30,000 troops under Sedgwick

# 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

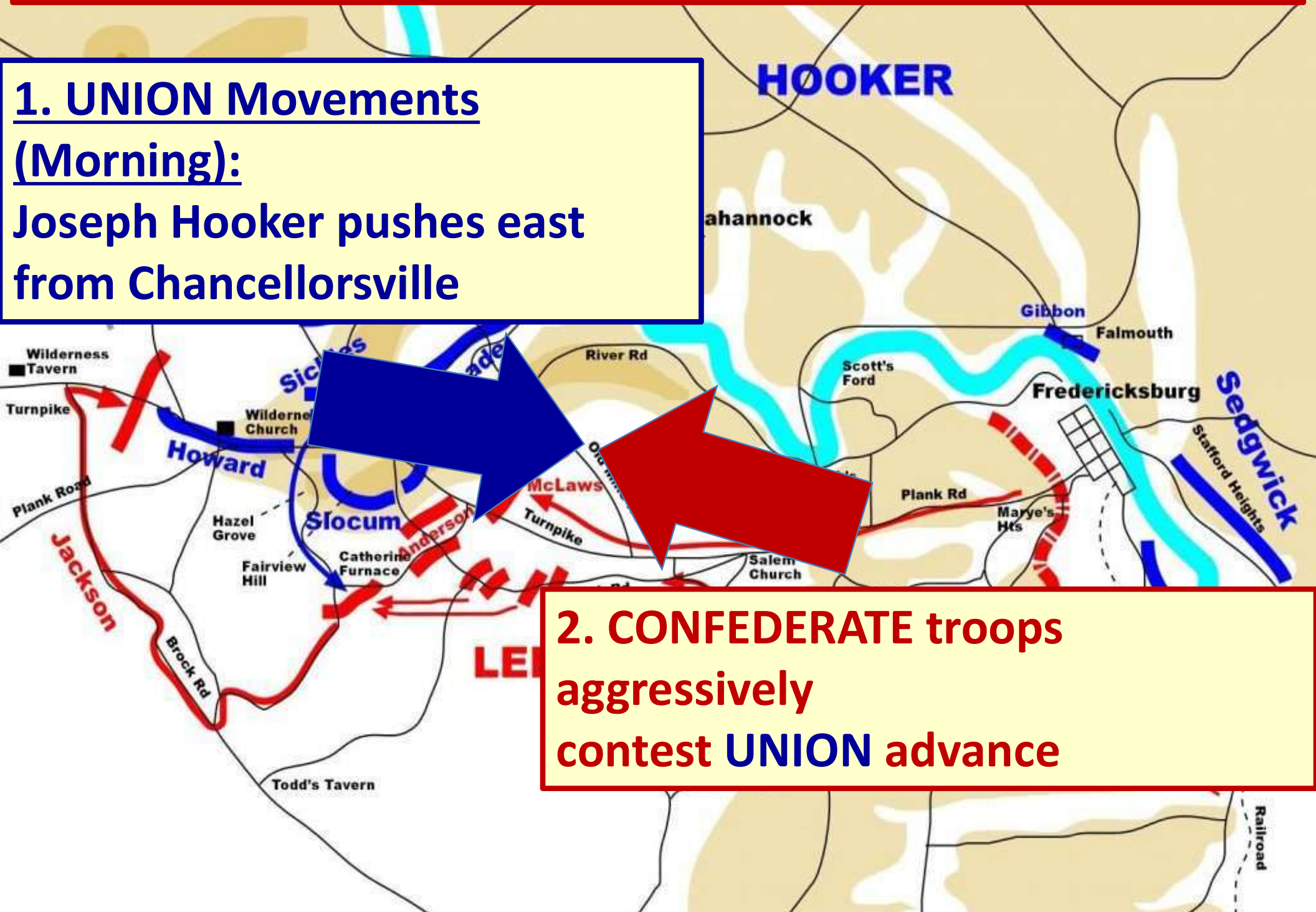


# DAY 1 (May 1, 1863): Maneuver Turns to Missed Opportunity

## 1. UNION Movements

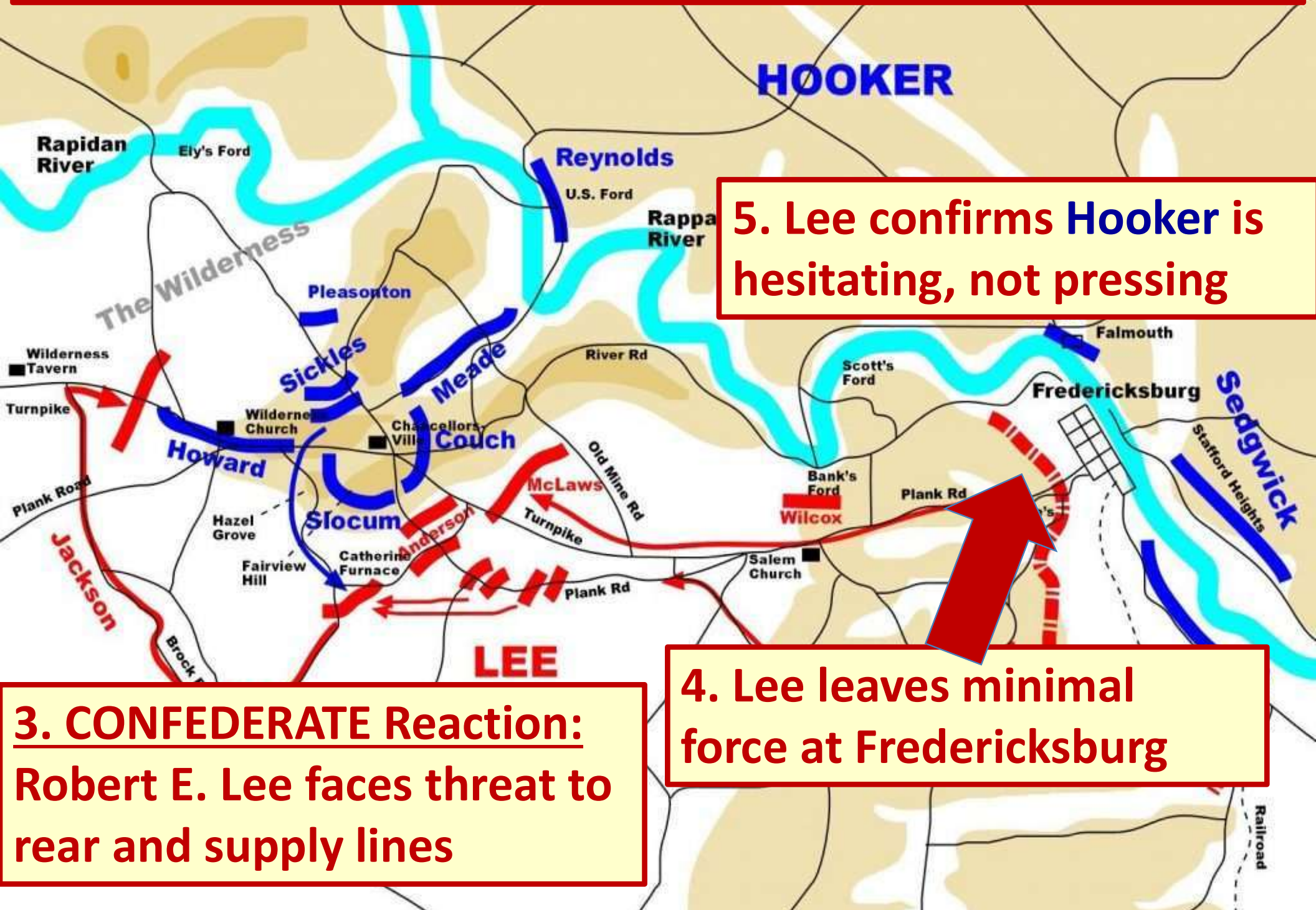
(Morning):

Joseph Hooker pushes east  
from Chancellorsville



2. CONFEDERATE troops  
aggressively  
contest **UNION** advance

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



5. Lee confirms Hooker is hesitating, not pressing

3. CONFEDERATE Reaction:  
Robert E. Lee faces threat to rear and supply lines

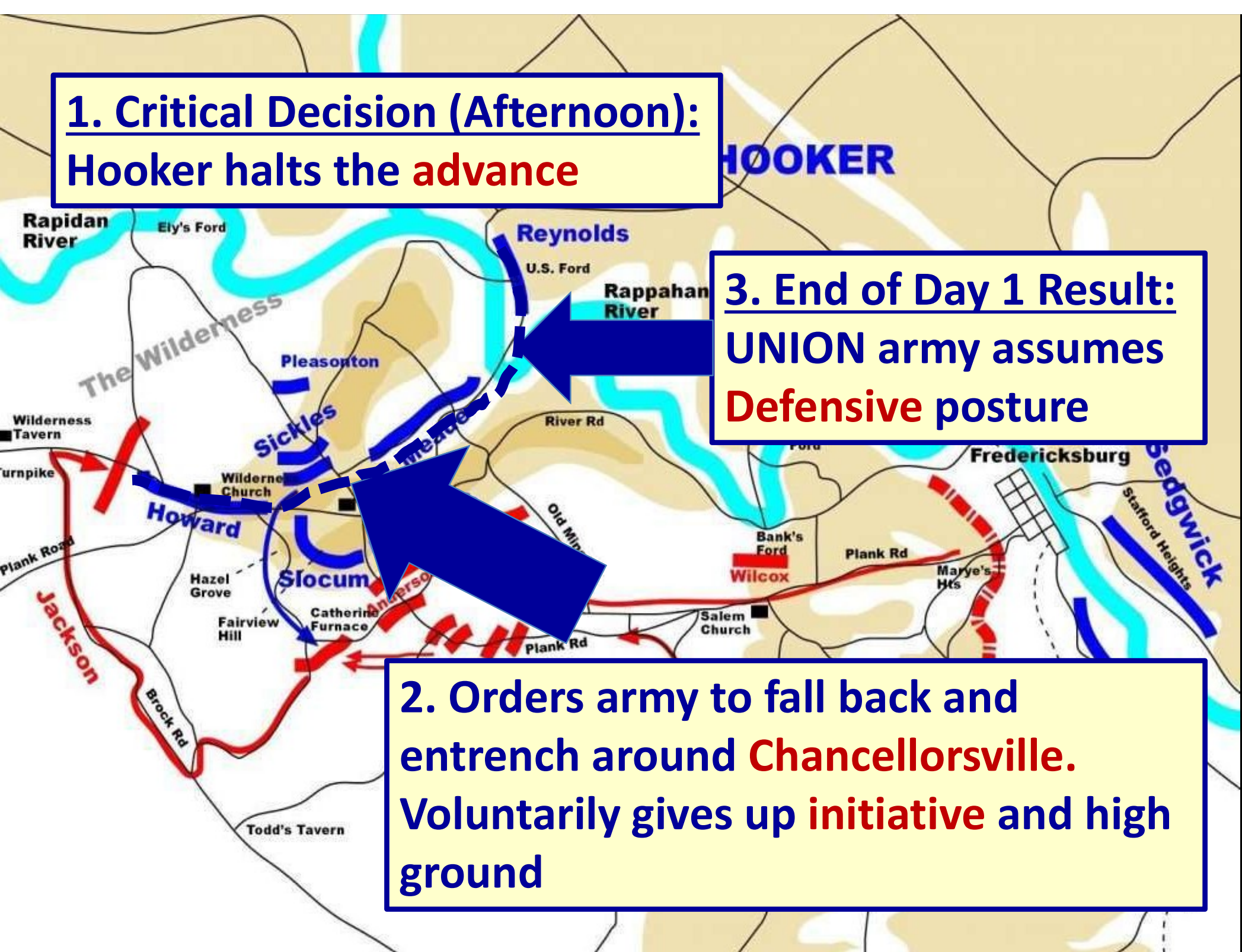
4. Lee leaves minimal force at Fredericksburg



1. Critical Decision (Afternoon):  
Hooker halts the **advance**

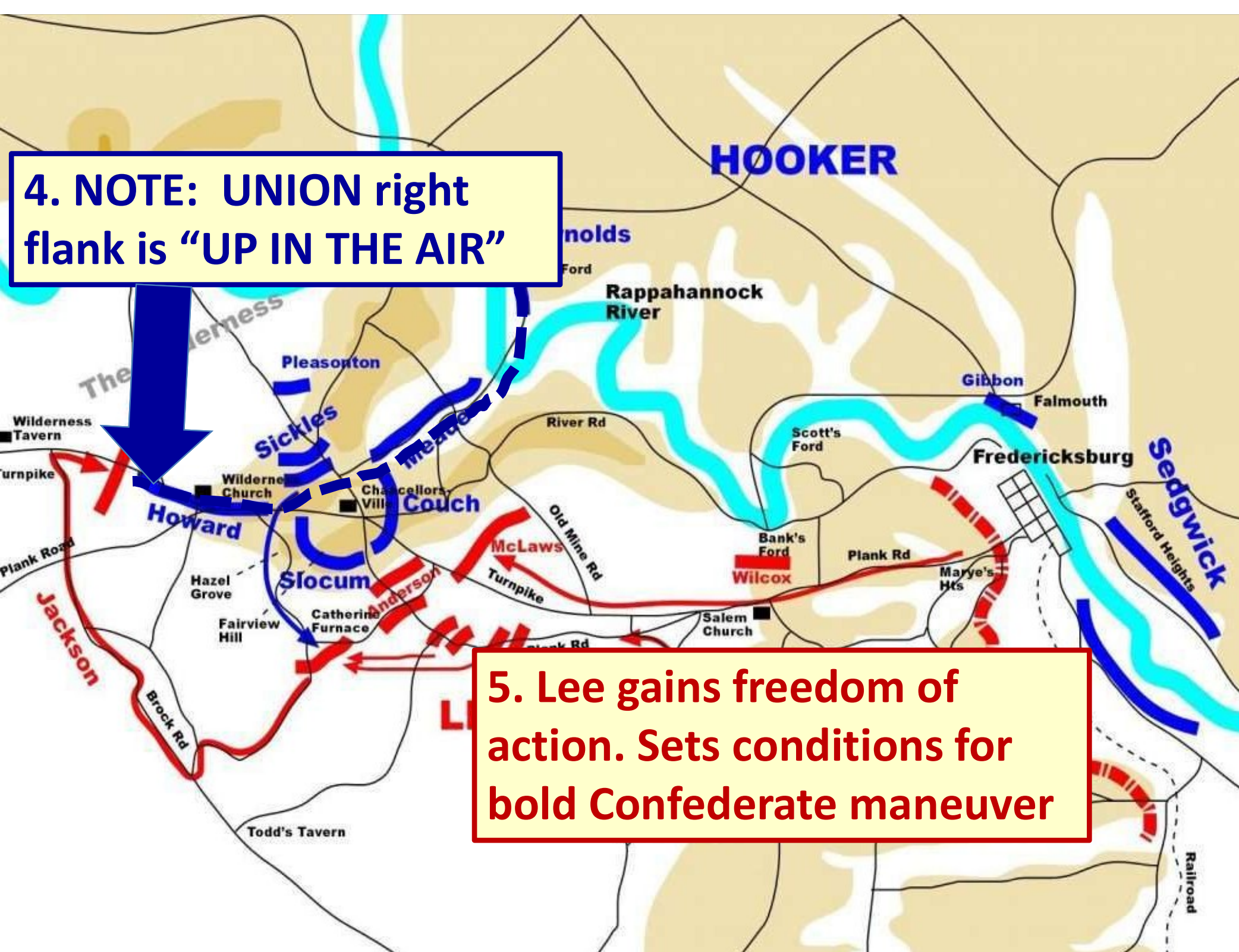
3. End of Day 1 Result:  
UNION army assumes  
**Defensive** posture

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





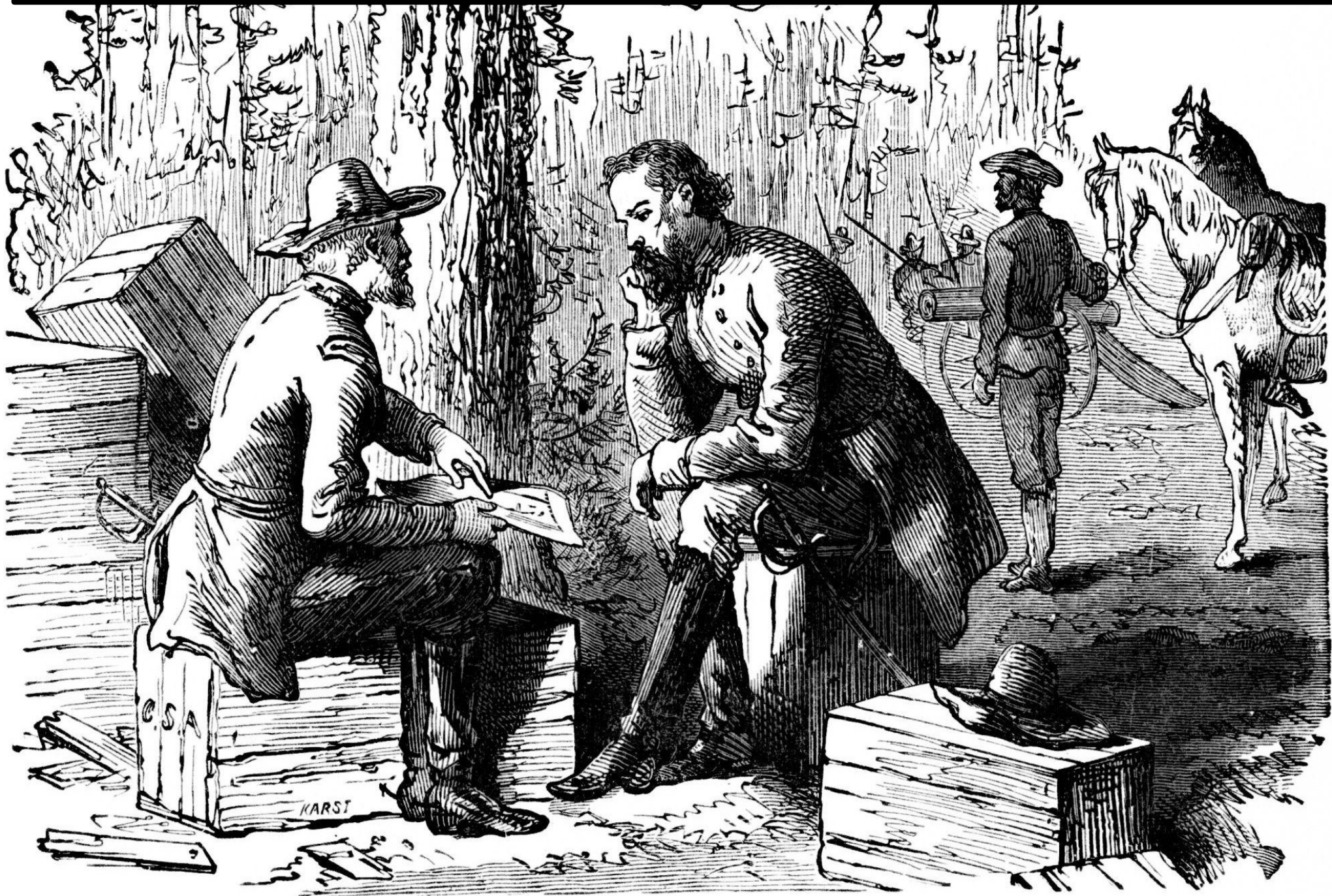
**4. NOTE: UNION right flank is "UP IN THE AIR"**



**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

LEE AND JACKSON PLANNING THE BATTLE OF CHANCELLORSVILLE.





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



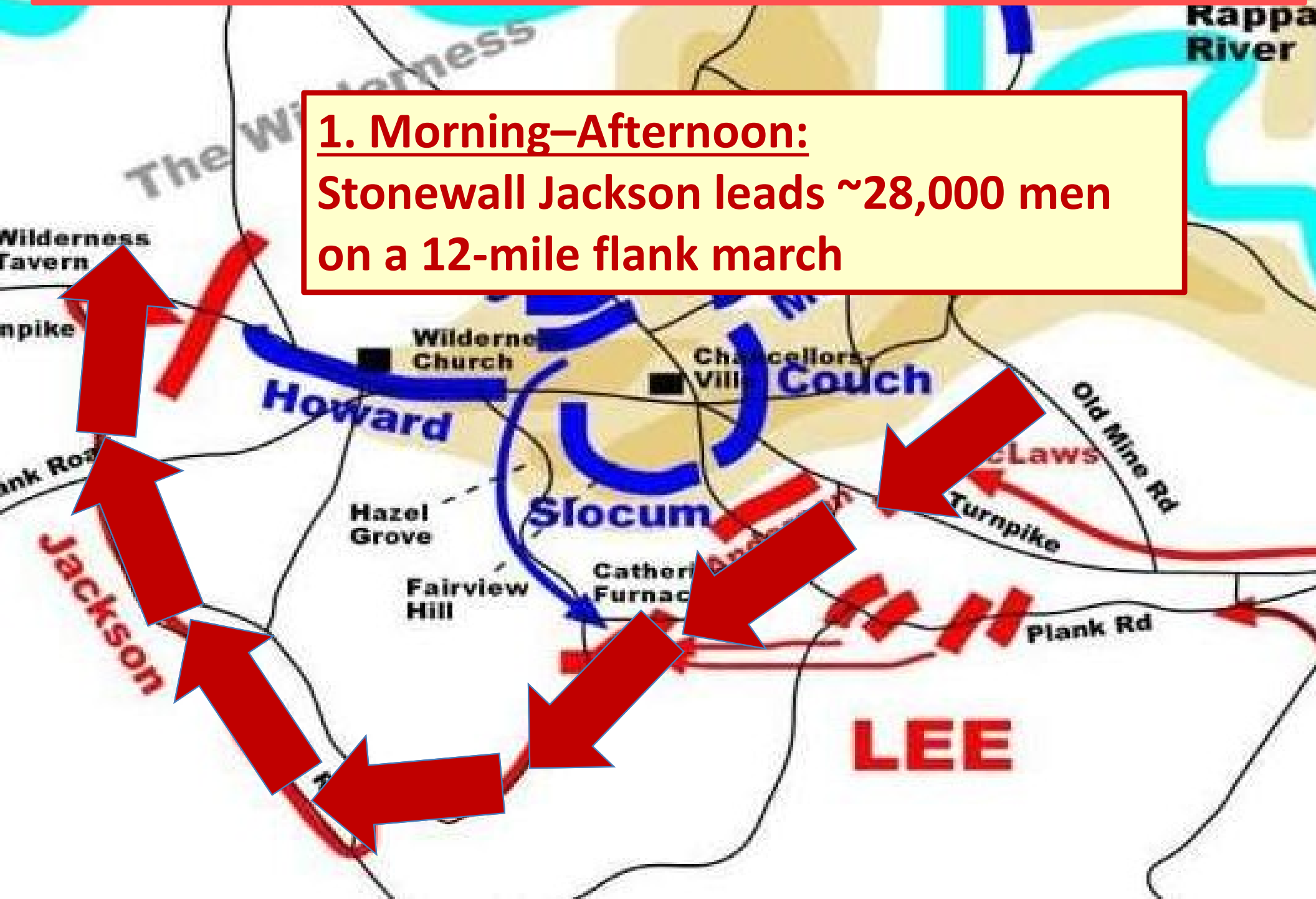
*This plan only works if **Hooker** does nothing — and that is exactly what happens.”*

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

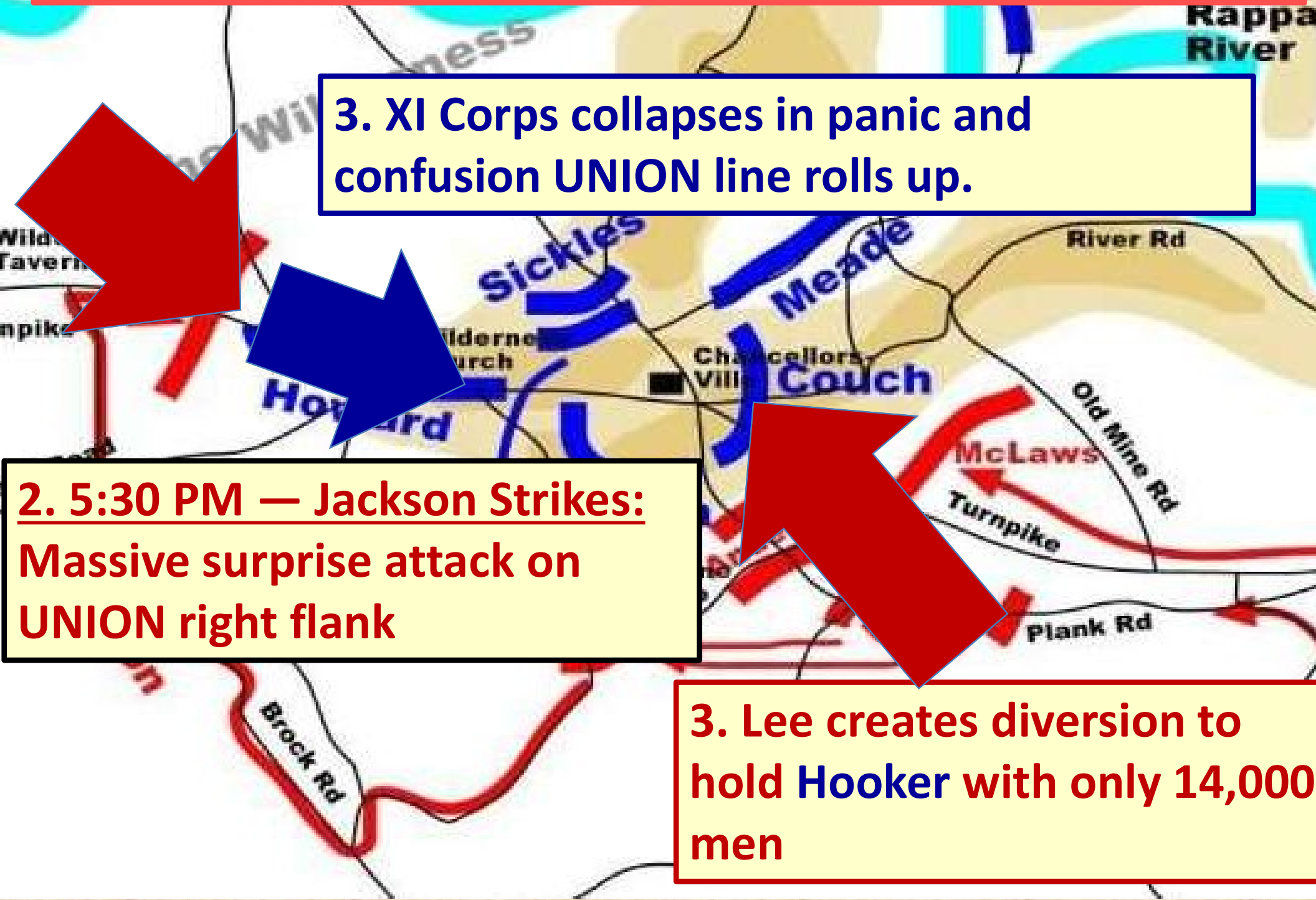


# Flank March & Devastating Surprise (May 2, 1863)

3. XI Corps collapses in panic and confusion UNION line rolls up.

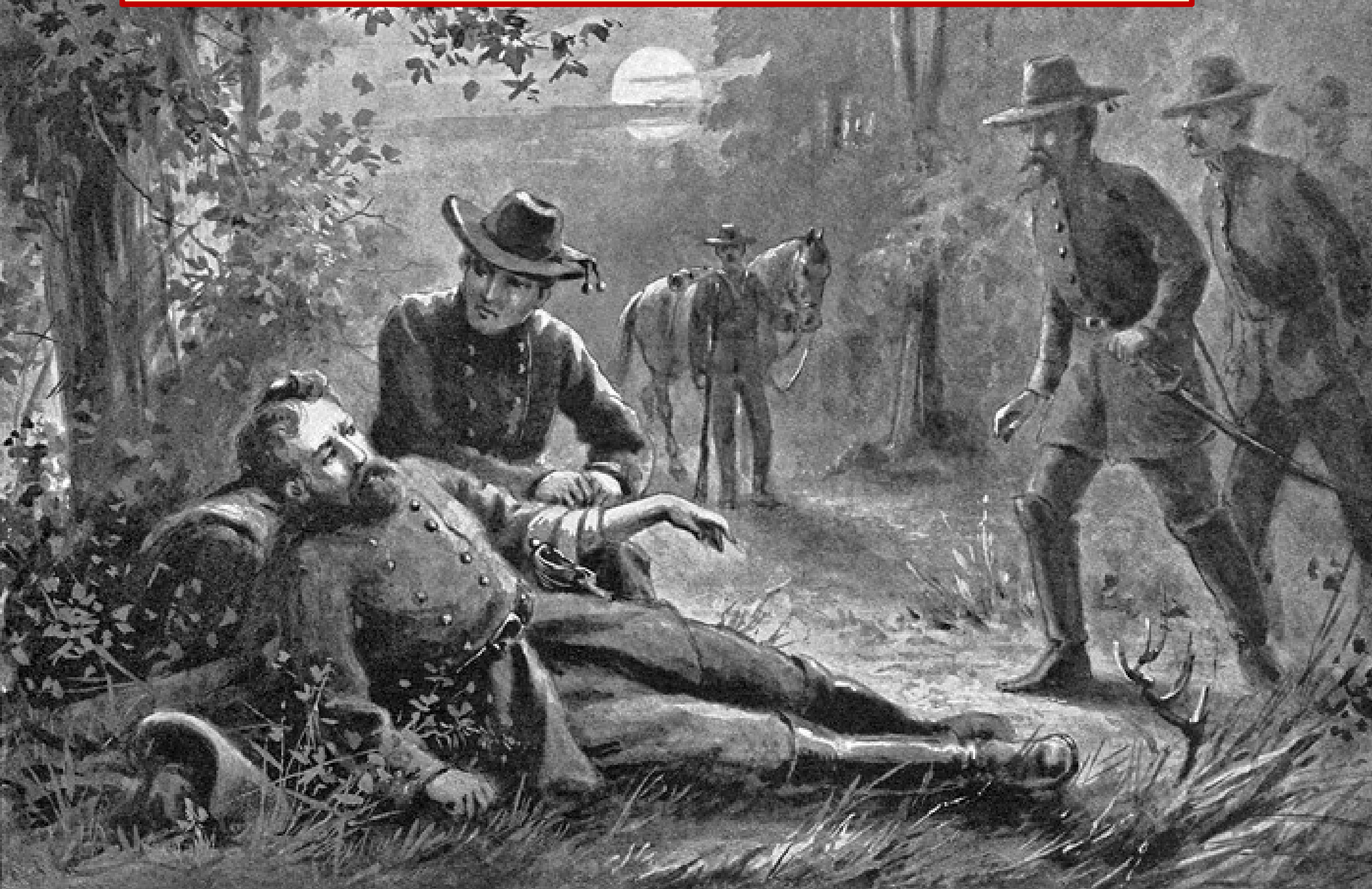
2. 5:30 PM — Jackson Strikes:  
Massive surprise attack on  
UNION right flank

3. Lee creates diversion to  
hold **Hooker** with only 14,000  
men





# 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.”***



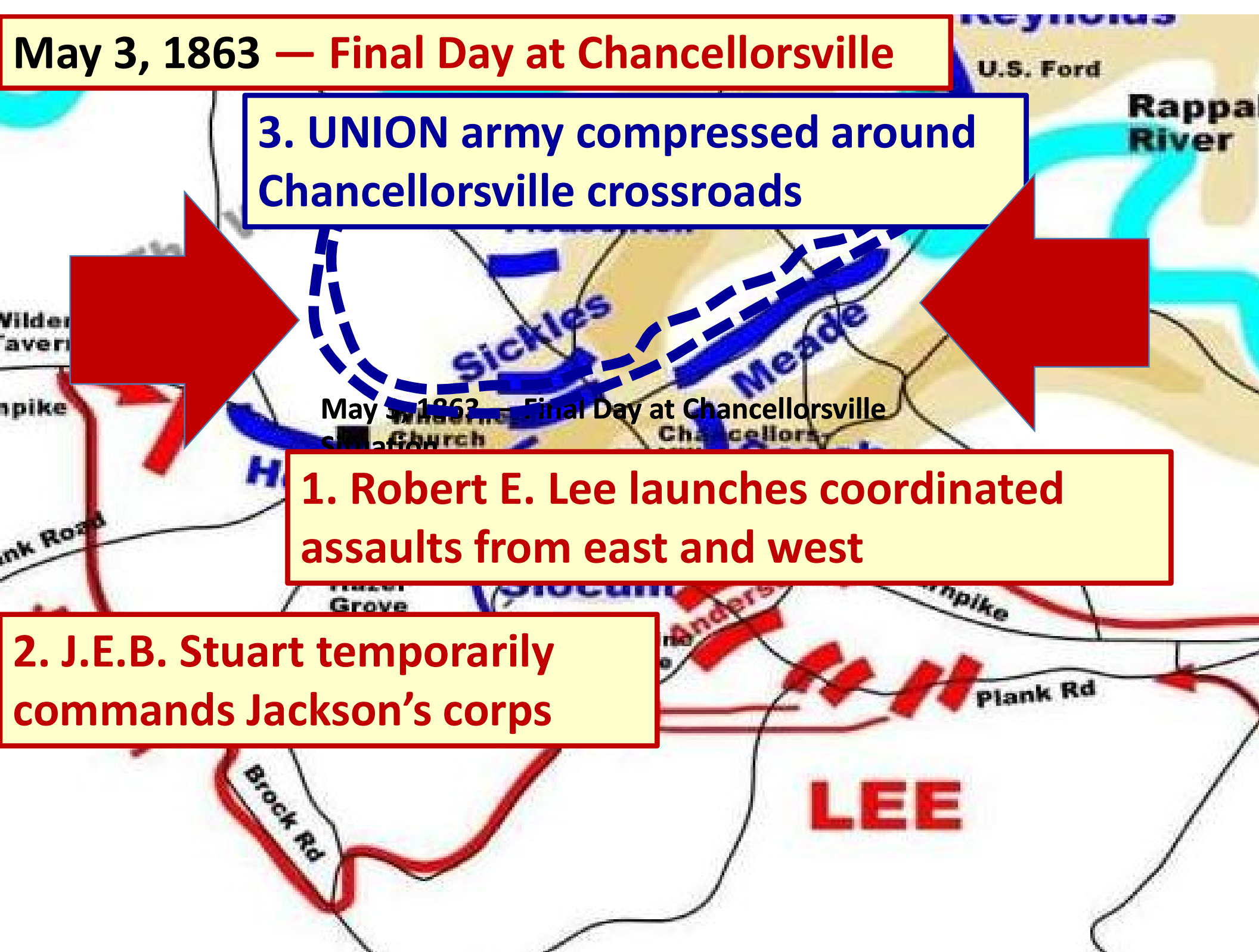
**May 3, 1863 — Final Day at Chancellorsville**

**3. UNION army compressed around Chancellorsville crossroads**

May 3, 1863 — Final Day at Chancellorsville  
situation

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

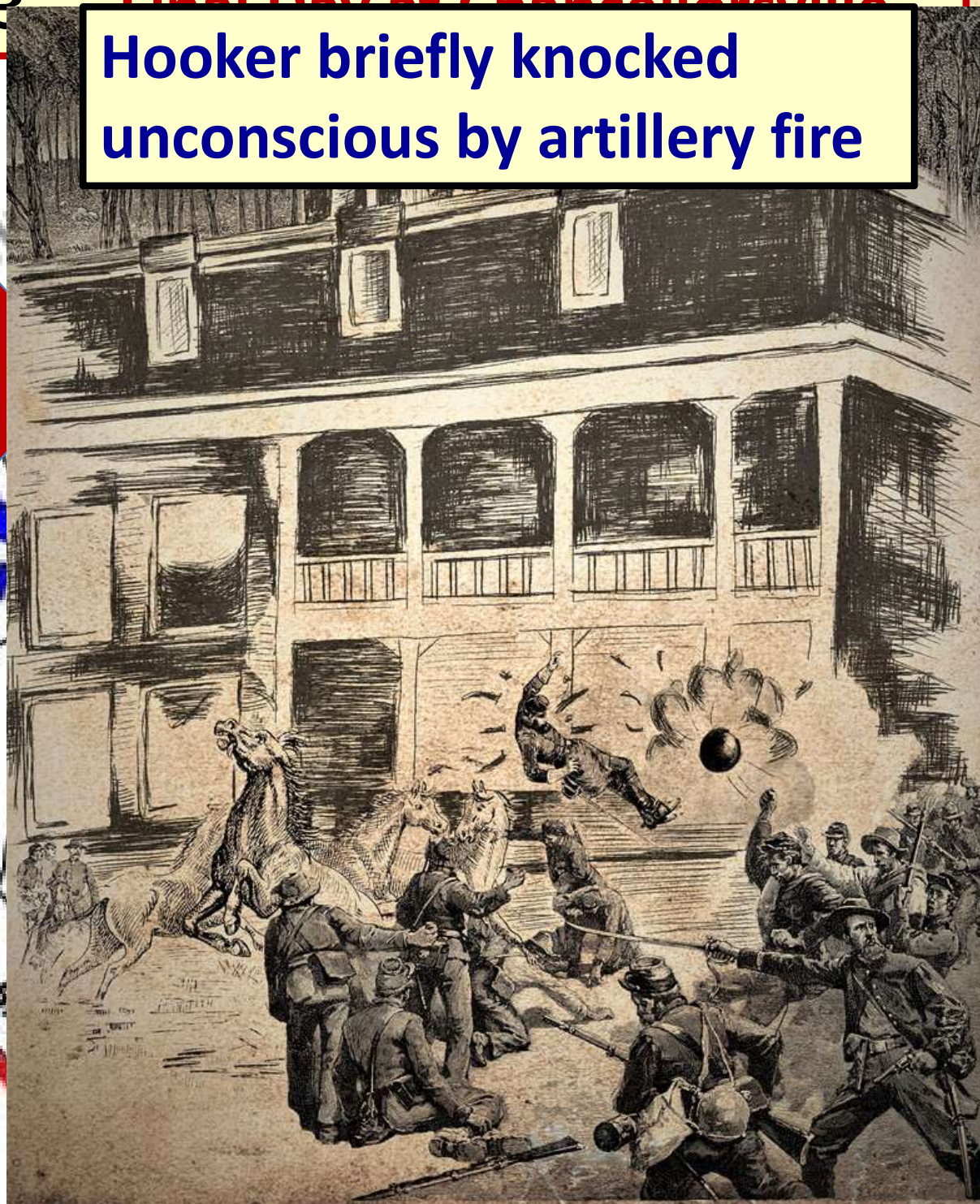
**2. J.E.B. Stuart temporarily commands Jackson's corps**



May 3, 1863

Final Day at Chancellorsville

Hooker briefly knocked unconscious by artillery fire



Keynotes

U.S. Ford

Rappahannock River

Old Mine Rd

Plank Rd

Wilderness Tavern

pike

Chancellorsville Rd

Jackson

**May 3, 1863 — Final Day at Chancellorsville**



May 3, 1863

Situation

Chancellorsville

**Outcome:**  
**UNION retreats May 5-6**



May 3, 1863

Final Day at Chancellorsville

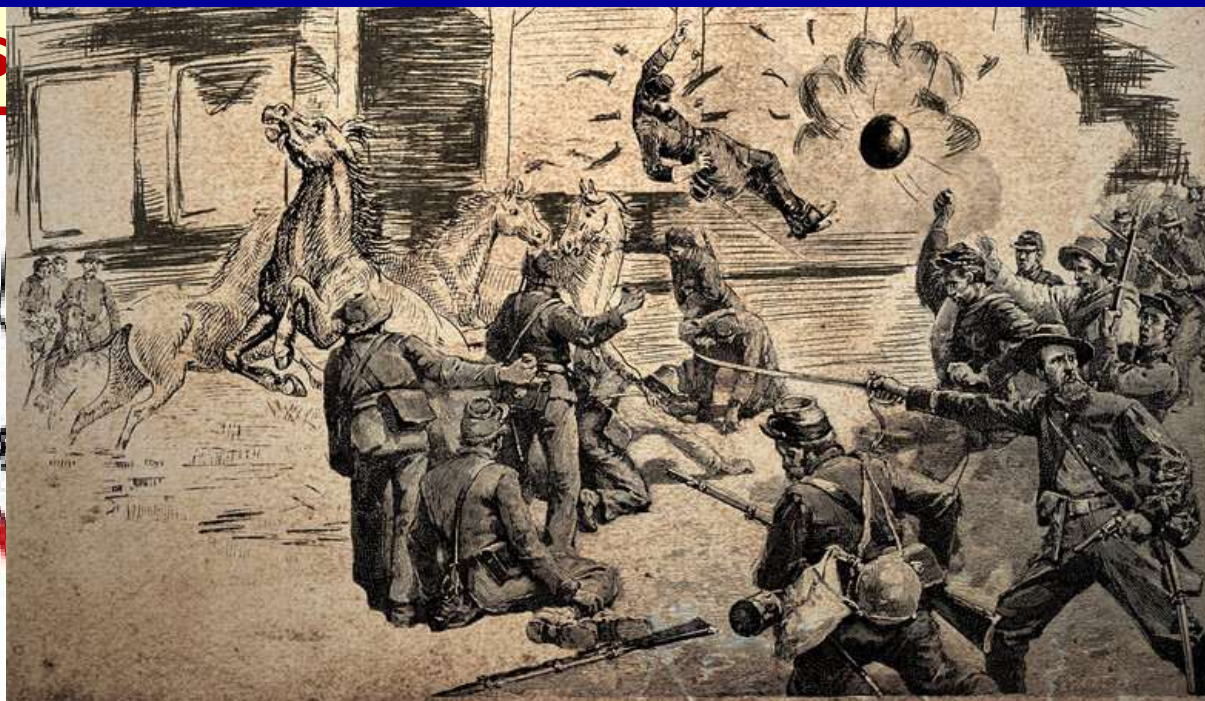
Hooker briefly knocked

UNION Union lines collapse under fire  
Chancellorsville sustained pressure

Outcome:

UNION retreats May 5-6

J.E.B. Stuart  
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**