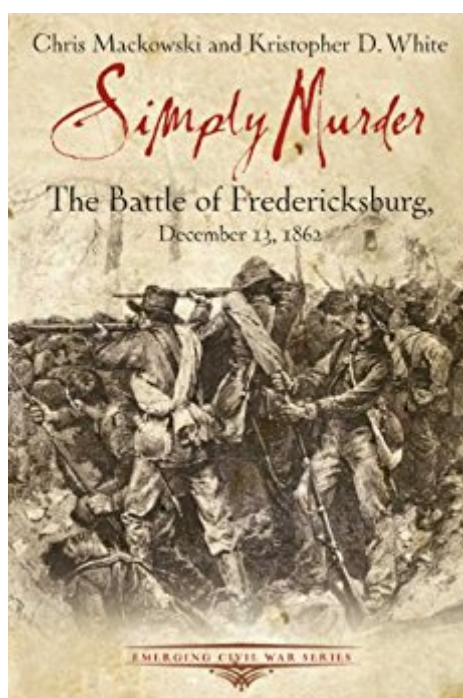


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# Simply Murder: The Battle Of Fredericksburg, December 13, 1862 (Emerging Civil War Series)



## Synopsis

They melted like snow on the ground, one officer said—wave after wave of Federal soldiers charging uphill across an open muddy plain. Confederates, fortified behind a stone wall along a sunken road, poured a hail of lead into them as they charged . . . and faltered . . . and died.

“I had never before seen fighting like that, nothing approaching it in terrible uproar and destruction,” said one eyewitness to the slaughter. “It is only murder now.”

The battle of Fredericksburg is usually remembered as the most lopsided Union defeat of the Civil War. It is sometimes called “Burnside’s folly,” after Union commander Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside who led the Army of the Potomac to ruin along the banks of the Rappahannock River. But the battle remains one of the most misunderstood and misremembered engagements of the war. Burnside started with a well-conceived plan and had every reason to expect victory. How did it go so terribly wrong?

Authors Chris Mackowski and Kristopher D. White have worked for years along Fredericksburg’s Sunken Road and Stone Wall, and they’ve escorted thousands of visitors across the battlefield. *Simply Murder* not only recounts Fredericksburg’s tragic story of slaughter, but includes invaluable information about the battlefield itself and the insights they’ve learned from years of walking the ground. *Simply Murder* can be enjoyed in the comfort of one’s living room or as a guide on the battlefield itself. It is also the first release in the new “Emerging Civil War Series,” which offers compelling and easy-to-read overviews of some of the Civil War’s most important battles and issues.

About the Authors: Chris Mackowski is a professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at St. Bonaventure University in Allegany, New York, and also works with the National Park Service at Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park, which includes the Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania battlefields. Kristopher D. White is a historian for the Penn-Trafford Recreation Board and a continuing education instructor for the Community College of Allegheny County near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He served for five years as a staff military historian at Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park, and is a former Licensed Battlefield Guide at Gettysburg. Longtime friends, Mackowski and White have co-authored several books and numerous articles for various Civil War magazines. They also co-founded the blog *Emerging Civil War*, which can be read at: [www.emergingcivilwar.com](http://www.emergingcivilwar.com).

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## Customer Reviews

This short book was a charming surprise. Frankly, I got it in the recent holiday sale, and I wasn't expecting much. The Fredericksburg battle was a bloodbath, and a lop-sided Confederate victory. The authors provide an informative, concise description of the battle, which suited my needs perfectly. Plenty of quotes from generals, soldiers, and civilians are sprinkled throughout. Sources are provided for those looking for a more scholarly approach to this battle; having just read Sears's "A Landscape Turned Red," I wasn't looking for that level of detail on this battle yet. So, this book provided a good introduction -- just what I wanted. Interestingly, the book focuses on the southern flank, although there is a detailed, lengthy chapter on the more famous, doomed assault on Marye's Heights. The book also provides a type of local history and a battlefield tour. It offers directions from the tour center to the key points of the battlefield. I haven't done the tour yet, but if I did, I would certainly find this book helpful as a refresher and walking guide. Among other things, it certainly is good to know where to find restrooms and where to avoid snakes. There were some excellent appendices on civilians and slaves in Fredericksburg, and how the soldiers celebrated the

Christmas of 1862. There was also interesting analysis of how the battle of Fredericksburg has evolved in the collective memory. In that section, and throughout the book, the authors point out various details about the battlefield and how its memorialization has changed over time and to suit various purposes; fitting the rest of the book, it's an appropriately light critique. For example, the authors point out that the Irish Brigade gets a lot of attention for its assault on Marye's Heights, but that's mainly because the Irish themselves publicized their participation in it. The authors even defend Burnside at points, who they argue was pressured by Lincoln to secure a victory before the Emancipation Proclamation. Lee, in comparison, didn't do much with the victory (just like his prior victory, at Antietam), probably because he couldn't, or maybe didn't have to. All of these events, details, and viewpoints are buttressed by an amazing array of diaries, letters, and so forth, which help bring the battle (and all of its awful consequences) to life. I couldn't find footnotes for these citations, but I didn't let that bother me. I read the Kindle version, and there were many distracting typos (not reflected in my star rating). Making up for this were plenty of photos and quite excellent battle maps. The maps, and some photos, were easy to read on my Kindle, which was much appreciated. Photos of the modern battlefield were mixed with historical illustrations and photos of the actual sites of the time. To sum up, "Simply Murder" is like a long magazine article or two with sidebars. All in all, the book packs a lot in and is a good starting point for exploring the battlefield itself and for deeper reading.

A fascinating introduction to a battle that has invited a number of contradictory interpretations. The intended audience is those who want to visit the site, but the account is very readable and ought to be of interest to anyone who doesn't already know quite a bit about the campaign. The sources quoted include soldiers' letters, local inhabitants' diaries, etc., so this is not just a straight narrative of the events. A follow-up section recounts the post-war lives of the main characters, the fate of the city in later years, etc. This series of books overall is wonderful for its completeness and satisfying approach to the Civil War battles.

The first time I visited Fredericksburg, Va was in May of 1960. Standing at the stone wall of the Sunken Road, I looked down and saw where the Federals attempted to break Lee's line. I was 13. Once again 20 years later I was there. But the entire story of the battle had not been discovered yet. Now it has and you can read about it in this book. Historians have reevaluated the battle that, in his defeat, cost Burnside his military fame only to be remembered for the term "side burn". Today, one can look back and see that he virtually had little if any chance of victory, McClelland and Hallack

had seen to that and to some extent Lincoln himself. But any chance he did have was dashed by "the puzzle of the map" which I will let the reader discover for himself. Interestingly, this book throws doubt on the Generalship of two Lost Cause icons who are memorialized in granite on the face of Stone Mountain, Georgia. Both Lee and Longstreet approved a battle line with a fatal flaw in it that could have turned the battle against them both. Reynolds, who would die at Gettysburg the following July 1 is also heavily criticized for under performance under fire. Again, Burnside was defeated by his own side. Based on this book, I am planning to revisit Fredericksburg soon. I will be seeing it from a totally different point of view now. This book will guide me around, for after all, it is primarily a guidebook with driving directions going from stop to stop along with battle descriptions thereof. The only criticism I have is that the two authors and editor did not do a good job of proof reading. There are quite a few obvious errors that should have been easily caught, they take nothing away from the story. See how many jump out at you!

If you intend to tour the Fredericksburg battlefield and want a visitors guide to points of interest, this is the book for you. On the other hand, if you want a serious description and evaluation of the battle, don't bother.

The Battle of Fredericksburg is really written for someone wishing to take a trip around the battlefield. Directions are given for parking, moving from spot to spot and so on. There is a discussion of the events of the Battle of Fredericksburg in each chapter. A few of the major characters are studied in some detail. I liked that part the best. I think the locations and directions could have been handled in an Appendix. Some interesting insights and facts concerning the actual field itself and its geography. Always a major concern in an Civil War battle.

A good book. Was looking for something a little more in depth, but that is my fault as I didn't look closely enough at the book before purchasing. This book would be an excellent source for someone DRIVING to different highlights of the battle as it gives precise instructions on how to get from one point of the battle to another. It even includes easy places to park. If you are driving/touring the battlefields of the Civil War this series of books would be an excellent resource (hence why I gave it 5 stars, even though for my purposes it only deserves 3 but that is my fault and not the authors). When or if I have the time and resources to travel the Civil War battlefields by car I will definitely be purchasing the rest of this series.

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