

The Chancellorsville Campaign

April 27 – May 6, 1863

Debacle and Deliverance

TVCWRT “Little Round Table,” September 24 and October 22, 2026

Study Questions

The battles of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, occurring less than five months apart, were fought for the same reason: the Union desire to cross the Rappahannock River, defeat the Army of Northern Virginia or force it to retreat, and take Richmond. One battle flowed from the other, with the “Mud March” in between (undertaken for the same reason).

By April 1863, the Army of the Potomac, under Major General Joseph Hooker since January 26 of that year, had recovered from the disaster at Fredericksburg. Hooker had some 130,000 men — over twice Lee's 60,000 — and had devised a sound plan: pin the AoNV at Fredericksburg with a large holding force under Major General John Sedgwick while swinging the bulk of the army around Lee's left flank to strike from the rear near the crossroads hamlet of Chancellorsville.

Hooker thought he had the perfect plan. How close did it come to working?

1. What was the state of the Army of the Potomac's morale and leadership after the Battle of Fredericksburg, and how did this lead to Hooker taking command?
2. What reforms did Hooker implement to improve the army's organization, supply, and morale before the campaign?
3. How about the Army of Northern Virginia?
4. What was the size and condition of the AoNV at the outset of the campaign?
5. Describe the terrain involved in the Chancellorsville campaign (Fredericksburg - the Wilderness - the Rappahannock River and associated fords).
6. How did weather and ambient light affect operations?
7. What was Hooker's plan for the campaign, and how did it differ from Burnside's approach at Fredericksburg?
8. Because Hooker launched his Chancellorsville offensive with incredible speed, Lee was unable to recall Longstreet in time. Elaborate on the speed of Hooker's offensive.
9. Why did Hooker halt his advance and adopt a defensive posture in the Wilderness rather than continue advancing to close the trap on Lee?
10. How did Jackson's flank march on May 2 unfold? Why did Union forces fail to respond to it effectively?
11. Assess the actions of XI Corps during Jackson's flank attack.

13. How did Sickles contribute to the tactical failure on May 2?
14. Why was Hazel Grove critical on May 3?
15. What occurred at Salem Church and Fredericksburg involving Sedgwick's corps on May 3, and how did this affect Hooker's decisions?
16. Explain how Confederate delay allowed Sedgwick to escape across the Rappahannock on May 5.
17. Why did Hooker ultimately decide to withdraw his army back across the Rappahannock?
18. How did the structural changes succeed or backfire during the actual tactical maneuvering in the Wilderness?
19. Assess the impact – the effectiveness – of Stoneman's raid.
20. How well did the Union corps commanders fight?
21. Assess Stuart's performance in command of Second Corps.
22. Assess Edward Porter Alexander's artillery tactics at Chancellorsville.
23. Chancellorsville is often called Lee's perfect battle. Was it? What did Longstreet, for example, think of it?
24. How did the outcome of the battle affect the strategic situation of each side in the Eastern and Western theaters of operations? In other words, what did the outcome of the battle mean to each side?
25. How did the battle influence Lee's tactics at Gettysburg?