

On Richmond's FRONT LINE

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Battle of Frayser's Farm

Frayser's Farm. Glendale. Nelson's Farm. White Oak Swamp. Riddell's Shop. Charles City Crossroads. Each is a legitimate name for the next-to-last battle of the Seven Days Campaign. The confusion in something so simple as the name sets the tone for any study of the June 30, 1862, battle and helps demonstrate just how confusing the day's events were to the participants.

Over the years historians have agreed only on a few simple points. By any yardstick the momentum of the Peninsula Campaign had shifted when the armies reached the June 30 battlefield. Four days earlier, the Federal army could see Richmond and retained the initiative. Ninety-six hours later seven divisions of that same army uneasily prepared their defenses on the roads leading to the key intersection at Riddell's Shop, nearly 15 miles southeast of Richmond. The James River and the safety of Federal warships lay less than three miles to the south. But aggressive pursuit by the Confederate army kept the Union columns from a leisurely march to the river. Instead, those seven divisions, representing four of the

army's five corps, lay scattered around guarding the three roads by which the Southern army might approach the bottleneck at Riddell's Shop.

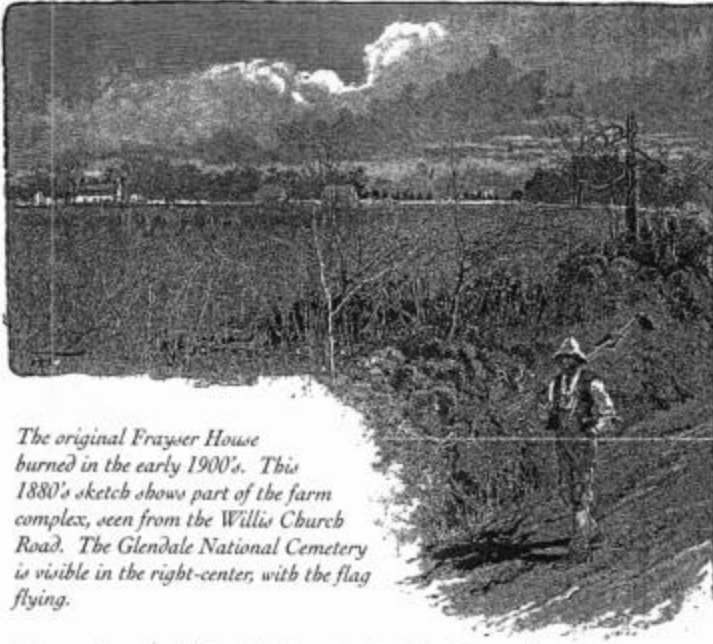
At White Oak Swamp, two miles northeast of the intersection, a pair of Federal divisions blocked the path of a suddenly lethargic Stonewall Jackson. Well to their

ly the Frayser farm but by 1862 the property of the Nelsons.

Whether or not R. E. Lee recognized the significance of the intersection remains debated, yet he surely understood that June 30 represented his last hope of arresting the Union retreat short of the James River. The 30th was Lee's wedding anniversary, and he spent

the day commanding his nation's largest army in its fight to drive away an enemy army from the portals of Richmond. Instead of Mrs. Lee, the general had Confederate president Jefferson Davis as his day-long companion. The anxious president had ridden out from Richmond to monitor the army's progress.

With Jackson stalled at White Oak Swamp and General Benjamin Huger inactive on the Charles City Road, Lee pinned his hopes on the divisions of A. P. Hill and James Longstreet. Pushing eastward up the Long Bridge Road, Longstreet's men found McCall's body of "Pennsylvania Reserves" shielded by a menacing line of artillery on the Whitlock Farm. The



The original Frayser House burned in the early 1900's. This 1880's sketch shows part of the farm complex, seen from the Willis Church Road. The Glendale National Cemetery is visible in the right-center, with the flag flying.

left (Jackson's right), General Henry Slocum monitored the Charles City Road and kept Confederates there from reaching the intersection. Still farther to the left, generals Kearny, McCall and Hooker eyed the Long Bridge Road and the direct approaches from Richmond. John Sedgwick's Second Corps division gathered in reserve around "Glendale," former-

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A Cannon Speaks

In recent months a fine account of the June 30 fight from the pen of a Confederate officer has surfaced. Lieutenant E. W. Cannon served in the Sixth South Carolina Infantry of Micah Jenkins's brigade. Some of the better portions of his memoir are excerpted here:

"Late in the evening we were ordered to assemble...and charge the enemy....About this time Wilcox came up with his Alabama Brigade and asked which troops we were. He said General Anderson who was in charge of Division had ordered him to charge the enemy. We joined him and went forward at a run.

It is at this point that my experience as a wounded Confederate Soldier begins. We captured all the Artillery, and killed all the horses. Some of the Artillerymen stood to their guns and fired even in our faces. We were now about ten feet from the guns and those Artillerymen who were not killed, fled behind the Infantry and opened on our ranks....It was at this time as I finished replacing my large seven chambered pistol, having emptied it at short range, that my right leg was broken by a minnie ball....

I had a perfect horror of being captured and although I had only one leg I started back with our line and kept up pretty well for seventy five yards or more, when from the loss of blood and the fact that my foot was dangling as I hopped, I felt like fainting and stopped and laid down. I was soon in the hands of the enemy....One crowd got my pistol, but they had already gotten the contents. Another crowd took my sword belt and appeared delighted when they saw S. C. Vol. on the buckle. I had on my hat the letters 6th S.C.V. which attracted considerable attention. They would see it and say, 'This fellow is from South Carolina, let's talk to him....' A fresh line came up at double quick and halted about eight or ten feet from me. I had nothing to do but to watch them, they soon got in perfect line, dressing to the right. They were a fine looking set of men and appeared to be under good discipline. In battle, scenes change; I heard in the woods from which we

had charged a short time before, the old 'Rebel Yell.' I could see our men emerging from the woods with line broken, but yelling as if in a fox hunt.....

All this time the officers of this fresh line were calling to their men to be steady. The command was given to fire by file. This command was so different from our way of firing in time of battle that I watched

Our line passed over me and drove the enemy from their position. Night coming on a feeling of helplessness and loneliness came over me."

[surgeons amputated Lieutenant Cannon's leg in Richmond. Just twenty years old at the time of the battle, he survived to attend the 1896 Confederate reunion in Richmond]



A well known sketch, executed at the time, showing infantry and artillery of Slocum's division blocking the progress of Benjamin Huger's division on the Charles City Road.

them very closely. It was now late in the evening and the cartridges used then was powder and ball wrapped with paper. You had to bite off the powder end and ram [the] cartridge down. Being directly in front of their line the fire from the burning paper was falling all over me. My hat was by my side, so many having examined it. My face being uncovered, a tall soldier with auburn hair and a large mustache stepped out of ranks, handed my hat to me and said, 'put it over your face to keep the fire out....' When the line broke I could not help raising up and giving a good old 'Rebel Yell,' helping on the stampede. They were reinforced and rallied at the woods about three hundred yards from where I lay. I was now between the fire of both armies in an open field. I watched our boys coming at a run yelling for all they were worth. I then received my second wound another ball shattering my right hip passing down my thigh-coming out just above my knee. About the time I got through examining myself to see if the ball had gone through my body a third ball struck my good foot tearing the bottom off my shoe, but only cutting a line across the ball of my foot.

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Frayser's Farm/Glendale

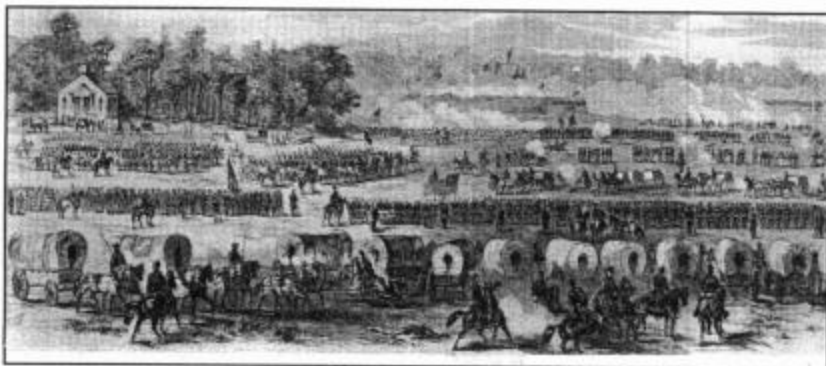
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At that time, for a few hours at least, it counted as the third largest battle in American history. Malvern Hill would supplant it the following day.

The battlefield today largely is unchanged. Individual homes and planned developments are springing up all around the battlefield, but

none has yet ruined the primary portion of the battlefield. The National Park Service owns nearly 100 acres on the battlefield's south-

ern tip, where Hooker's division fell upon an exposed Confederate flank at one point during the battle. But the frantic pace of development



A good view of the Battle of Frayser's Farm/Glendale. The sketch shows Second Corps troops facing west, toward Confederate infantry surging out of the trees on the Whitlock Farm. Willis Church (site of the RBA's annual meeting) is on the left.

has prompted the Civil War Preservation Trust to place the Frayser's Farm battlefield on its 2004 list of the nation's ten most endangered battlefields. The permanent fate of this field will be decided in the very near future.

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