

Tour Stop 6

Wounding of Nelson Miles

Robert E. Lee maintained the initiative on May 3 despite losing the services of Jackson, who had been wounded. While Jackson's corps pushed east, McLaws' men advanced north and west to tighten the vise around Chancellorsville. General Richard Anderson's division advanced simultaneously on McLaws' left, west of the Orange Plank Road.

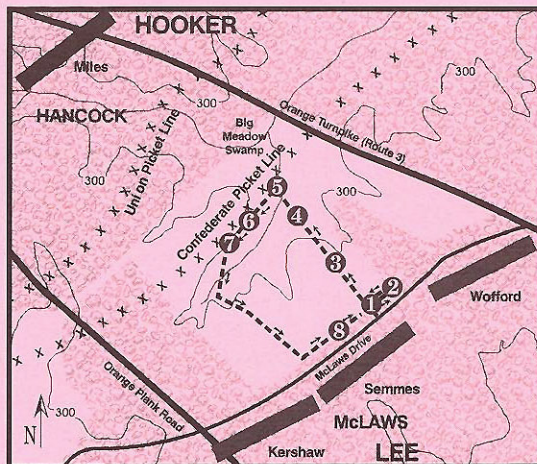
"We left our breastworks and advanced on the enemy through thickest woods you ever saw."

Lieutenant John B. Evans, 53rd Georgia

May 3rd began with a heavy artillery exchange accompanied by mounting pressure from the Confederate picket line. About 9:00 a.m., Colonel Nelson A. Miles rode out to his picket line, where a bullet fired from a soldier in the 10th Georgia struck him in the stomach.

"The result was an instant deathly sickening sensation. I was completely paralyzed below the waist. My horse seemed to realize what had occurred; he stopped, turned, and walked slowly back ..."

Colonel Nelson A. Miles



"I was standing talking with J.M. Dorsey and W.B. Strickland when we saw a Yankee officer come riding down from the Chancellor's house toward us. Dorsey and Strickland both shot at him. He immediately turned his horse and rode back."

Captain A.J. McBride, 10th Georgia

Miles survived the wound to become a well-known Indian fighter and general-in-chief of the United States Army during the Spanish-American War. In 1892 he received the Medal of Honor for his actions at Chancellorsville.

Tour Stop 7

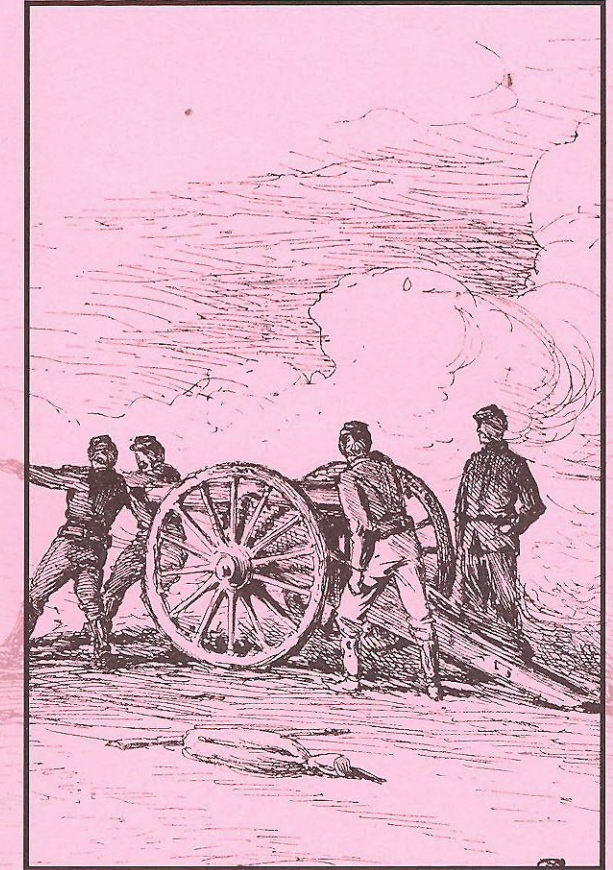
May 3: Confederate Assault

Shortly after Miles was wounded, McLaws pushed his command across this ground. General William T. Wofford's brigade advanced up the Turnpike directly toward Chancellorsville. Semmes and General Joseph B. Kershaw, to his left, directed their brigades northwest, pivoting toward the intersection. Hooker abandoned Chancellorsville and fell back to a new line closer to the river. Hancock's division gallantly covered the retreat.

Tour Stop 8

General Lee Under Fire

General Robert E. Lee had several close calls with death in this vicinity. Artilleryman J.B. Minor remembered that on May 2nd, as Lee stood under a tree with McLaws, "a 10-pound shell cut the tree square off just about a yard above their heads. I could not see that [Lee] noticed it, although General McLaws ducked a little." A few minutes later, Minor recalled, "a shell burst immediately in front of old Traveler, who reared up and stood as straight as ever I saw a man. Captain [Edward S.] McCarthy then ran to General Lee, and I heard him say: 'General, we can't spare you, go back under the hill.' He rode away, and in a few minutes there was a lull just in front of us; but there was heavy fighting some three hundred yards to our right ... and whom did we see sitting on his horse calmly watching the fight but General Lee!"



McLaws Trail

A Walking Tour

Unique among Chancellorsville sites, this recently acquired tract of land saw action on each of the three major days of fighting during the Chancellorsville Campaign. On May 1, 1863, Union commander Joseph Hooker pulled his men back from this ridge to the Chancellorsville intersection. The Union commander's decision to retreat surrendered the initiative to General Robert E. Lee. The next day, Southerners here held Hooker's attention while General "Stonewall" Jackson struck the Union army's exposed right flank. Finally, General Lafayette McLaws' Confederates attacked across this terrain on May 3 in a combined attack on Chancellorsville.

From the Chancellorsville Visitor Center, drive out the east end of the parking lot and turn left on Route 3. Proceed 2.0 miles to McLaws Drive and turn right. Continue approximately 0.3 miles to the small gravel parking area on your right. Do not block the farm road leading into the field. Walk to the edge of the clearing and face west so that Route 3 is on your right.

Tour Stop 1

Union Advance and Retreat

The Union army's vanguard reached Chancellorsville, a mile in front of you, on the afternoon of April 30. General George Sykes' division of the Fifth Corps camped in the woods in front of you. The Federals started east the next day and encountered Confederates near Zoan Church, two miles behind you. Sykes fell back to this ridge. Here he met General Winfield S. Hancock, whose division supported Sykes on the Orange Turnpike (modern Route 3). Sykes and Hancock favored defending this strong position, but they were overruled by Hooker who ordered them back to the low ground around Chancellorsville. Hooker's decision was a turning point in the battle. An angry General George S. Meade is said to have remarked: "... if we can't hold the top of a hill, we certainly can't hold the bottom of it."

 *Follow the path on your right along the edge of the field.*

Tour Stop 2

The Wilderness

Much of the fighting at Chancellorsville occurred in thick woods known as the Wilderness. This area had been heavily logged earlier in the century to provide charcoal for iron furnaces and boards for the Orange Plank Road. By the 1860s a young forest with dense underbrush, similar to the woods in front of you, dominated the landscape west of Fredericksburg and south of the Rapidan and Rappahannock rivers. The open field in front of you was a tangled maze of small trees and dense undergrowth in 1863.

 *Backtrack to stop 1 and follow the mowed path west into the field to stop 3. From there, follow the mowed path to reach the other tour stops.*

Tour Stop 3

Preservation of the Battlefield

The Central Virginia Battlefields Trust (CVBT) purchased this 99-acre field in 1997. The organization later sold the land to the National Park Service. Without the timely intervention of the CVBT, you might now be standing in a shopping mall parking lot.

Tour Stop 4

May 1st: Confederate Charge

After being ordered back to Chancellorsville by Hooker, Sykes took a position in the woods ahead of you, with Colonel Patrick O'Rorke's brigade holding the left. Hooker's withdrawal from the high ground to your rear puzzled the Confederates. General A.P. Hill ordered three brigades of General Henry Heth's division from the Orange Plank Road, to your left rear, to support McLaws on the Turnpike, to your right. When Heth reached the area where you are now parked, he discovered that McLaws' division was nearly a mile behind him. Heth rashly determined to attack Chancellorsville alone, but a staff officer persuaded him to make a reconnaissance first.

Forming the 14th South Carolina north of the Turnpike and Orr's (South Carolina) Rifles on this side of the road, Heth probed towards Sykes' flank. Colonel O'Rorke responded by wheeling his brigade east to face the charging South Carolinians.

"The enemy paused a moment on the top of the ridge, and, as if to nerve them for the onset, gave one of their proverbial demonic yells, and came down on the double-quick, shooting, capturing, and literally running over the pickets, who scrambled behind all sorts of obstructions."

Soldier in the 5th New York, O'Rorke's brigade

Two charges convinced the Confederates that Hooker had made a stand at Chancellorsville.

Tour Stop 5

Confederate Picket Line

That night, Hooker withdrew Sykes' men closer to Chancellorsville. Meanwhile, McLaws' Confederates, with ten guns, occupied the ridge behind you. Faint remains of their trenches can still be seen in places on the east side of McLaws Drive. The fighting resumed on May 2. While Union and Confederate guns engaged in a noisy duel, McLaws advanced pickets across the then-wooded terrain to this ridge. The 10th Georgia Infantry of General Paul Semmes' brigade occupied this portion of the picket line.

Throughout the day, McLaws' skirmishers actively engaged Union pickets led by Colonel Nelson A. Miles. This fighting helped distract Hooker while "Stonewall" Jackson marched around the Union army's right flank.

"He [Semmes] ordered us to advance cautiously till we saw the Yankee pickets, then charge with a yell and drive them in, and to give them no rest until further orders. During that day and night and the next morning I think we drove in their pickets ten or twelve times."

Captain A.J. McBride, 10th Georgia

When Jackson launched his attack late that afternoon, McLaws reinforced his picket line and pushed forward. Although repulsed, he prevented Hooker from fully reinforcing his collapsing flank.