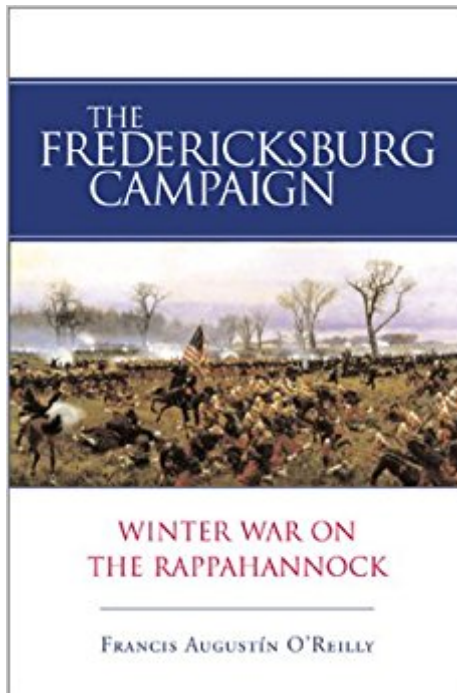


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The Fredericksburg Campaign: Winter War On The Rappahannock



Synopsis

The battle at Fredericksburg, Virginia, in December 1862 involved hundreds of thousands of men; produced staggering, unequal casualties (13,000 Federal soldiers compared to 4,500 Confederates); ruined the career of Ambrose E. Burnside; embarrassed Abraham Lincoln; and distinguished Robert E. Lee as one of the greatest military strategists of his era. Francis August O'Reilly draws upon his intimate knowledge of the battlegrounds to discuss the unprecedented nature of Fredericksburg's warfare. Lauded for its vivid description, trenchant analysis, and meticulous research, his award-winning book makes for compulsive reading.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Frank O'Reilly aims for - and achieves - a detailed military history, down to the regiment and battery level, laying out precisely the what, where, and when of combat operations. Fully 60 percent of his 500-plus page text is devoted to the action of December 13, 1862. This is not, however, a merely dry recounting of maneuver and sequence; O'Reilly takes care to maintain the vitality of his narrative by addressing the experiences and fates of individual officers and soldiers caught up in the fighting. The maps are clear and informative, although I do wish there had been a few more provided when describing some of the intricacies of the attacks and counterattacks in the Prospect Hill fighting. There is one curious omission: In books of this type, it has long been standard to list the Orders of Battles of the contending armies, something very useful as a quick reference when a reader wishes to check to what brigade the 121st Pennsylvania belonged or which subordinate units reported to Winfield Hancock. Oddly for a detailed military history tables of this information are not

included in "The Fredericksburg Campaign"; perhaps the publisher wished to trim a few pages from this quite large book (yes, that information can certainly be readily obtained elsewhere, but it would be far more handy to have it in this volume). Although O'Reilly provides a passable description of events leading up to this short campaign and a discussion of its aftermath, he does not evaluate the performance of the various senior officers as extensively as I had expected, only quickly summarizing their merits or flaws - mostly flaws, in the case of the Union generals. In O'Reilly's estimation, clearly George Meade was the best Northern commander on the field, while Franklin, Birney, and Reynolds earn his sharpest censure.

In my humble opinion Frances O'Reilly is one of the foremost experts in the study of the Battle of Fredericksburg. I had never heard of the man until I read this book but his this book is clear proof of his expertise. As an added bonus, the author has a clear and concise writing style and he keeps his story interesting even while spouting vast amounts of minute information. From the very beginning it should be understood that this is not a book for the Civil War novice or the casual reader. Much of the information in this book is very detailed and it would turn off or confuse anyone who is not very familiar with the armies involved in this campaign. Not only do names fly at the reader at a rapid pace but there is also the behind the scenes politics of both the nation and the armies along with exact regimental placements. This is also not a book for anyone with a weak stomach for O'Reilly goes into great detail in describing many of the more horrendous wounds suffered by many of the participants. Over and over the author relates stories of flying blood, brains, and intestines. This is not to say that the gore takes away from the story for it indeed brings home the very nature of war and one can't understand Fredericksburg or the Civil War without a sense of the horrors these men were facing. O'Reilly also adds depth to his book by including many stories from the common soldier on the field, stories that are both humorous and poignant. On the other hand, the author covers the big picture in a very complete way and he pulls no punches. It is made very clear for example that much of the blame for the carnage at Fredericksburg rests with Abraham Lincoln and that Lee and Jackson made a terrible mistake in placing their line, a mistake that almost led to a major Union victory.

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