

National Park Service  
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## Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park **Battle of Kelly's Ford**

*Below is the text from a park brochure on the Battle of Kelly's Ford (March 17, 1863) including a summary of the battle, directions to the battlefield from the Fredericksburg area and a suggested tour route.*

Following the December 1862 Fredericksburg debacle at Fredericksburg, and the infamous Mud March of January 1863, both sides settled into winter camps on opposite sides of the Rappahannock River. Several cavalry raids and skirmishes broke the dull routine of camp life during the long winter. The largest and most important of these occurred on March 17, 1863, near the Rappahannock crossing at Kelly's Ford.

The Battle of Kelly's Ford was "the first purely cavalry fight east of the Mississippi River" of any appreciable size. The battle was the first opportunity for the Union cavalry to amass a significant force, because the horsemen had been concentrated into a corps only a few weeks earlier.

In early March, Union **Brigadier General William Averell** received orders to leave the main body of the Army of the Potomac, then opposite Fredericksburg. His instructions were to lead his troopers west up the Rappahannock River, cross it at Kelly's Ford, and defeat a Confederate force near Culpeper, 10 miles west of the ford. Averell wanted to impress army commander Major General Joseph Hooker, who had earlier remarked, "Who ever saw a dead cavalryman?" Averell was further motivated by the prospect of defeating his good friend and former West Point classmate, **Brigadier General Fitzhugh Lee**, commanding the Confederate cavalry in that sector.

During the winter, Fitz Lee sent Averell several messages taunting him about the inferiority of Federal cavalry. Lee left an especially challenging message before withdrawing from a raid in late February: "I wish you would put up your sword, leave my state, and go

home. You ride a good horse, I ride better. If you won't go home, return my visit, and bring me a sack of coffee.

With 3,000 cavalymen and a battery of six cannon, Averell set out on March 16th to accept Lee's challenge. Fearing that a significant enemy force to the northwest might threaten his right flank, Averell detached 900 of these troopers to Catlett Station, 15 miles north of Kelly's Ford.

Fitz Lee quickly learned of Averell's movement, but was unsure whether Averell would attempt to cross the river at Kelly's Ford or at Rappahannock Ford, four miles farther upstream and north of Kelly's. Lee reinforced the 20 Confederates guarding Kelly's Ford. His available sharpshooters were poised to move to either Ford. The bulk of Lee's command, 800 horsemen and Captain James Breathed's four-cannon battery, was posted in Culpeper. The Kelly's Ford defenders, about 85 members of the 2nd and 4th Virginia cavalry regiments, found shelter in a dry millrace and blocked the approaches to the ford along both river banks with abatis - obstructions formed by felled trees.

The Federals arrived at Kelly's Ford early on the morning of March 17th. After three failed attempts to cross at the ford, and a futile effort to cross farther downstream, Lieutenant Simeon Browne and 818 members of the 1st Rhode Island Cavalry carrying axes. While only three Rhode Island troopers gained the opposite shore, these survivors and the Pennsylvanians established a foothold. Federal reinforcements splashed across the river and scattered the Virginians.

For two hours the Federals struggled to remove the obstructions and cross the narrow ford. Averell, correctly believing that his aggressive opponent would advance from his camp, decided to rest his horses and await Lee. The cautious Averell slowly advanced about 3/4 mile from the ford and took shelter behind a stone wall. This delay allowed Fitz time to hurry forward and assume a blocking position. Accompanying Lee were Major General Jeb Stuart, his commander, and **Major John Pelham**, the gallant 24-year-old horse artilleryman and hero of Fredericksburg.

Lee ordered the 3rd Virginia to charge toward the stone wall. Under fire from the Federal carbines, the Confederate troopers turned left, riding parallel to the wall and ineffectually firing their pistols at the well-protected Federals. The 5th Virginia, accompanied by Pelham, joined the attack as the 3rd Virginia approached the Federal right. Finding a gap in the wall, the Virginians galloped through in an attempt to turn the Federal right and cut them off from the ford. Pelham reined in his horse, stood in his stirrups, waved his sword and shouted "Forward! Let's get 'em!" Suddenly an exploding shell knocked Pelham off his horse and a sliver of metal penetrated the back of his head. Shortly thereafter, a Federal countercharge drove the Virginians back.

Meanwhile, on the Federal left the dashing Colonel Alfred Duffie, acting on his own initiative, moved his brigade forward, hoping to entice a Confederate attack. Lee took the bait and charged. Duffie waited until the Confederates were about 75 yards from his lead regiment,

the 1st Rhode Island, when he ordered them to dash forward. Duffie then sprung his trap, bring forward three other Federal regiments to strike the Southern horsemen on both flanks.

Lee withdrew the entire Confederate line about one mile to a position near Newby's or Dean's Shop, behind Carter's Run. As Averell cautiously approached, Lee's horsemen charged, but only a few made it to the Federal line. Although the attack was repulsed with relative ease, Averell's feeble pursuit halted on the ground of Lee's former line. Fearing that he faced a large enemy force aligned in a strong position, Averell deemed "it proper to withdraw." He left behind two wounded Confederate officers who had fallen into Federal hands, along with a sack of coffee and a message: "Dear Fitz, Here's your coffee. Here's your visit. How do you like it?"

Although technically a Confederate victory, the Battle of Kelly's Ford exacted a high price from the Southerners. They lost 146 men killed, wounded, and missing, compared to a Federal loss of 85. Confederate losses were magnified by the death of the popular and promising young John Pelham, who died about 1 a.m. on March 18th. Stuart wrote Pelham's mother, "I loved him as a brother, he was no noble, so chivalrous, so pure in heart, so beloved."

Despite Averell's lack of aggressiveness, the Federal cavalry demonstrated unprecedented spirit. Averell failed in his objective of routing Lee's troopers, but this action along with the Battle of Brandy Station, three months later, marked a major turning point in the fortunes of Federal horsemen.

## DIRECTIONS TO THE BATTLEFIELD

Follow the directions and map carefully for a tour of the Kelly's Ford battlefield, which has changed little since the war. However, some changes might have occurred since this brochure was written in the late 1980's. *To reach the battlefield from Fredericksburg or Chancellorsville, proceed west on Rt. 3 to Lignum, about 13 miles west of Chancellorsville. Turn right on Rt. 647 and go 0.9 mile. Turn right on Rt. 610, and drive 0.5 mile. Turn left on Rt. 620 and cautiously travel 5.3 miles down this narrow, winding road. Immediately after Rt. 674 intersection, turn right into the parking lot just before a bridge.* Public access to this area and the river are provided by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

**Stop 1 - Kelly's Ford (opening phase).** The river crossing was about 300 yards downstream from the bridge. This west bank of the Rappahannock was occupied by Confederate defenders when the battle began. As you face the river, the remains of a dry mill race which served as a rifle pit for Confederate troopers, can be seen to your left front.

*Drive out of the parking lot and turn left, then almost immediately turn right on Rt. 674 and travel 0.8 mile. Turn right into a gravel parking lot, and walk down the path.* This area is within the Phelps Wildlife Management Area of the Virginia Game Department.

**Stop 2 - Stone Wall and Mortal Wounding of Pelham Monument (middle phase).** Most of the fighting occurred in this vicinity. Union troopers were positioned behind the stone wall along the path to your right, and Confederates attacked across what was an open field on your left. About 300 yards down the path is a marker near the spot of Pelham's fatal wounding. The trail continues several hundred yards to a scenic view of the Rappahannock River near Wheatley's Ford.

*Turn right out of the parking lot and travel 0.6 mile, stopping where two driveways converge.*

**Stop 3 - Level Green - the Brannin House (middle phase).** The original portion of the privately-owned English-style farmhouse to the left was built ca. 1780. Owned by Fielding Brannin during the war, a bloody footstep on every other step of a stairway serves as testimony to its use as a hospital. The 3rd Virginia made its charge against the stone wall across the field to your right and rear.

*Continue traveling down the road 1.4 miles, stopping before the road crosses Carter's Run.*

**Stop 4 - Carter's Run (final phase).** The final charges of the battle occurred across these fields - first a Confederate charge from a position ahead of you, then a Federal counterattack from the ground behind you.

*Continue driving for 0.3 mile, stopping near the intersection of routes 673 and 674.*

**Stop 5 - Newby's or Dean's Shop (final phase).** A blacksmith's shop stood near this intersection during the Civil War. Lee's last charge of the battle began here. The ensuing Federal countercharge and pursuit halted in this area. Averell effectively ended the battle when he retired from this position back to Kelly's Ford.

*Continue straight on Rt. 674 for 1.7 miles. Carefully turn left on heavily traveled US 15/29. Drive 0.8 mile and turn right on Rt. 685. Immediately to the right, in the yard of a privately owned home, is another Pelham memorial.*

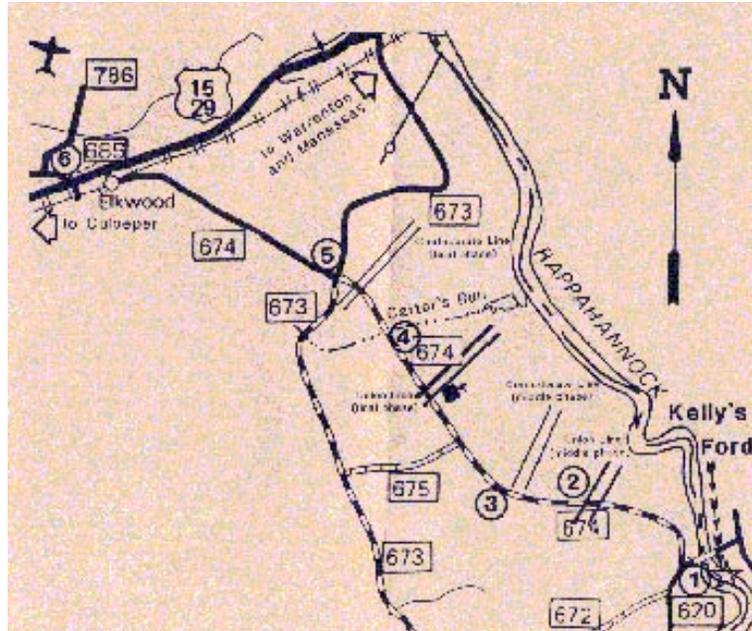
**Stop 6 - Pelham Monument.** This 1926 monument once stood on the battlefield, but the access roads were so bad that it was moved to this front yard.

To return to Fredericksburg, either retrace the steps from this tour, or drive south on U.S. 15/29 toward Culpeper for about five miles, and head east on Rt. 3 about 35 miles. To reach the Manassas National Battlefield Park, which is 35 miles away, travel north on U.S. 29. For more information on touring Kelly's Ford Battlefield including photos, [click here](#).

The battlefields of **Brandy Station, Cedar Mountain, Mine Run, Rappahannock Station** and **Bristoe Station** are also in this area. Written guides on these and other

nearby battlefields are available in the visitor centers at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville and online.

### Return to Civil War Battlefields in Virginia.



Map of Kelly's Ford Battlefield Tour



#### Did You Know?

The battle of Chancellorsville was the biggest mismatch of the war. Yet the smaller Confederate army of 60,000 defeated the larger force of 130,000 - the biggest army of the war.

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## Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park

# Battle of Brandy Station

The Battle of Brandy Station was the largest cavalry battle ever fought on the North American continent. Of the 20,000 soldiers involved, about 17,000 were of the mounted branch. Brandy Station is also the first battle of the war's most famous campaign - Gettysburg.

The Confederates had planned for June 9, 1863, to be a day of maneuver rather than of battle. Two of the army's three infantry corps were near Culpeper, six miles southwest of Brandy Station, poised to move into the Shenandoah Valley and thence up to Pennsylvania. Major General **J.E.B. Stuart**, at Brandy Station, was to screen this movement with his 9,500-man cavalry division, while the remaining infantry corps held the attention of the Union Army at Fredericksburg, 35 miles southeast of Brandy Station.

The Federals knew that Confederate cavalry was around Culpeper, but its intelligence had not gathered information of the sizeable infantry force behind the horsemen. Army of the Potomac commander, Major General Joseph Hooker, interpreted the enemy's cavalry presence around Culpeper to be indicative of preparations for a raid of his army's supply lines. Accordingly, he ordered his Cavalry Corps commander, Brigadier General **Alfred Pleasonton**, to "break up Stuart's raid in its incipiency."

The Confederates apparently did not expect any harassment from the enemy cavalry, for the day before the important screening mission was scheduled to take place, the Southern troops conducted a grand review for General Robert E. Lee at Inlet Station, just two miles southwest of Brandy Station. Meanwhile, 8,000 Federal cavalrymen organized into three divisions, and about 3,000 Northern infantrymen were preparing to disrupt the Confederate plans.

About 4:30 a.m. on June 9th, Brigadier General John Buford's column on 5,500 soldiers splashed across the fog-shrouded Rappahannock River surprising the Confederate pickets at Beverly's Ford. Nearby Southern horsemen from Brigadier General William "Grumble" Jones' brigade, awakened by the sound of gunfire, rode into the fray partially dressed and often riding bareback. They struck Buford's leading brigade, commanded by Colonel Benjamin F. "Grimes" Davis, near a bend in the Beverly's Ford Road and temporarily checked its progress. In the fighting Davis was killed.

Davis' brigade had been stopped just short of where the Confederate Horse Artillery was camped and was vulnerable to capture. Cannoneers swung one or two guns into position and fired down the road at Buford's men, enabling the other pieces to escape and establish the foundation for the subsequent Confederate line. The artillery unlimbered at the Gee House and at St. James Church -- structures located on two knolls on either side of the Beverly's Ford Road.

Most of Jones' command rallied to the left of this Confederate artillery line, while Brigadier General Wade Hampton's brigade formed to the right. The **6th Pennsylvania Cavalry** suffered the greatest casualties of any regiment participating in the battle, when it unsuccessfully charged across a field to the very muzzles of the guns at St. James Church.

Realizing that the Southern artillery blocking the direct route to Brandy Station was a force to be dislodged, **Buford** determined to anchor his right on the Hazel River and try to turn the Confederate left. But he found Brigade General W.H.F. "Rooney" Lee's brigade blocking his advance with some troops on a piece of high ground called Yew Ridge and some dismounted troopers positioned along a stone wall in front. After sustaining heavy losses, the Federals wrestled the stone wall away from the Confederates. Then, to the amazement of Buford's men, the Confederates began pulling back.

The Southerners were shifting to meet a new threat, adjusting to their second surprise of the day. Brigadier General David M. Gregg's Union division of about 2,800 men had orders to cross the Rappahannock at Kelly's Ford and proceed on roads leading directly into Brandy Station, but discovered his way blocked by Brigadier General Beverly Robertson's brigade. However, Gregg determined that another road network leading to the battlefield by a more circuitous route was completely unguarded. Following these roads, his lead brigade under Colonel Percy Wyndham arrived in Brandy Station about 11 a.m. Between Gregg and the battle taking place between Buford and Stuart was a prominent ridge called Fleetwood Hill. The eminence had been Stuart's headquarters, but the general was at the front and the only force on Fleetwood when Gregg arrived was a 6-pounder howitzer, which had been sent to the rear for want of reliable ammunition. Major Henry B. McClellan of Stuart's staff pressed this

gun into service and sent a desperate plea to his chief for reinforcements. Wyndham meanwhile formed his men into line and charged up the western slope of Fleetwood. As he neared the crest, the lead elements of Jones' brigade, which had just withdrawn from St. James Church, rode over the crown.

Gregg's next brigade, led by Colonel Judson Kilpatrick, swung around east of Brandy Station and attacked up the southern end and the eastern slope of Fleetwood Hill, only to discover that their appearance coincided with the arrival of Hampton's Confederates. A series of confusing charges and countercharges swept back and forth across the hill. The Confederates cleared the hill for the final time, capturing three guns and inflicting 30 casualties among the 36 men of the 6th New York Light Artillery, which had attempted to give close-range support to the Federal cavalry

Colonel Alfred Duffie, with a small 1,2000-man division, was delayed by two Confederate regiments in the vicinity of Stevensburg and arrived on the field too late to participate in the action.

While Jones and Hampton withdrew from their initial positions to fight at Fleetwood Hill, "Rooney" Lee continued to confront Buford, falling back to the northern end of the hill. Reinforced by Colonel Thomas Munford, commanding the brigade of the ailing Fitzhugh Lee, "Rooney" Lee launched a counterattack against Buford at the same time as Pleasonton had called for a general withdrawal, and the battle was over.

Despite being surprised by his adversary twice in the same day, Stuart was able to retain the field. Union losses numbered 866; Confederate casualties were reported at 575. But the overwhelming superiority that the Confederate cavalry once enjoyed was gone.

## **Directions to the Battlefield**

Follow the directions and map carefully for a tour of the Brandy Station battlefield. please respect the rights of private landowners when visiting the field. To reach the battlefield from Fredericksburg or Chancellorsville, proceed west on Rt. 3 to Stevensburg, about 17 miles west of Chancellorsville. Turn right on Rt. 663 and go 3.8 miles to Brandy Station, where the main road will become Rt. 700. Follow Rt. 700 for only 0.2 mile. Turn left on Rt. 669 and go 0.1 mile. Turn left on Rt. 762. After traveling 0.5 mile, an historical marker (A) will be on the left side of the road. Another 1.5 miles farther, turn right on Rt. 342 and pull in the visitor parking area of the Virginia State Police area office.

**Stop 1 - Grand Review Site.** The site of two Confederate cavalry reviews, including the June 8th affair held for Robert E. Lee, occurred on the other side of the state police building. The fields trampled over by Southern horsemen were owned by the prominent Unionist John Minor Botts.

Turn left on Rt. 762 and backtrack to Brandy Station. Turn left on Rt. 663 and go 0.2 mile, carefully crossing Rt. 15/29. Turn right on Rt. 685 and go 0.3 mile, pulling off on the shoulder to the left, adjacent the carnival grounds.

**Stop 2 - Gregg's Attack** The ridge before you is Fleetwood Hill. The prominent building to your left is the Barbour house, called "Beauregard" (B). Gregg's lead brigade under Wyndham attacked over the ground in front of you -- primarily on the ground to the right of the road. Gunners of the 6th New York Light Artillery manning three cannon suffered heavy losses on the slight knoll (C) just across Flat Run.

Continue ahead for 0.6 mile and park on the right side of the road where steps lead up to a United Daughters of the Confederacy historical marker.

**Stop 3 - Fleetwood Hill.** Stuart's headquarters were on this site the eve of the battle, and it was here that H.B. McClellan ably directed reinforcements to counter Gregg's attack. While facing the marker, Kilpatrick's attack came from your left front, and the 1st Maine Regiment of that brigade charged all the way to the Barbour house (9B), at a time when General Robert E. Lee was observing the battle from the structure.

Continue straight ahead for 0.8 mile and turn left on Rt. 676. Then 0.6 mile down the road, Rt. 676 will turn to the left, and Rt. 677 will continue straight ahead. Follow Rt. 677 for 1.2 miles to a slight bend in the road. (Caution: The hard surface road will change to gravel, which can be muddy during wet weather.)

**Stop 4 - Mortal Wounding of "Grimes" Davis** This road continues across private property to Beverly's Ford. Buford's division, with "Grimes" Davis brigade in the lead, crossed the ford early on June 9th and advanced to this bend in the road, where it was assailed by "Grumble" Jones' Confederates. In the brief melee Davis was shot from the saddle. Startled and momentarily leaderless, Davis' men took cover, giving Stuart time to prepare a defensive line near St. James Church.

Turn around and drive 1.2 miles to the junction of Rt. 676. Turn right and go 0.2 mile, stopping at the far edge of the woods on your left.

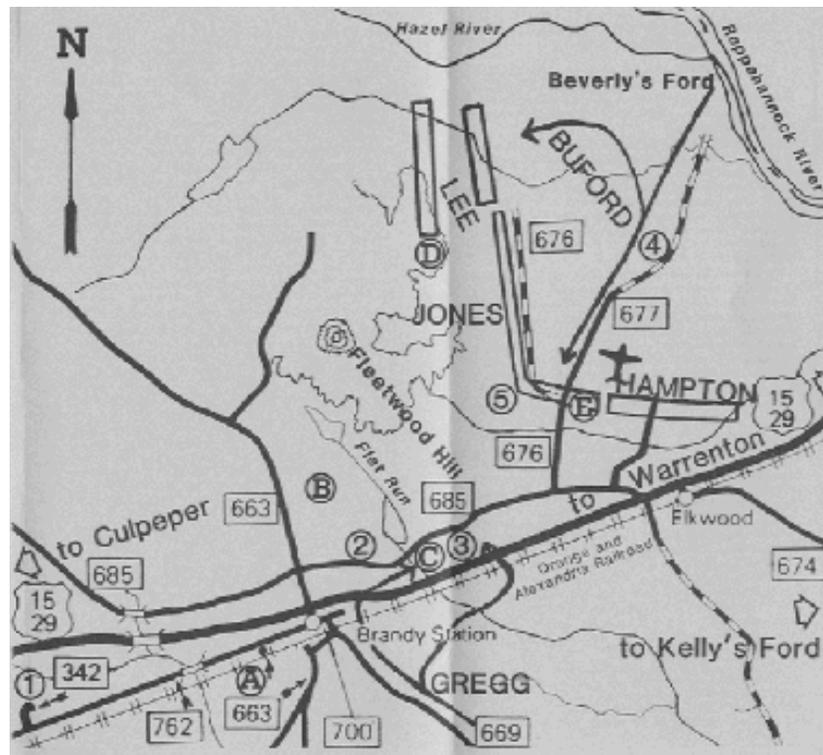
**Stop 5 - St. James Church.** The church stood in the woods to your left-rear, and several pieces of Major Robert F. Beckham's horse artillery were posted here. The charge of the 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry was made across the field to your right. "Rooney" Lee's Yew Ridge position (D) is visible in the distance to your left-front.

Select a place to turn around and return to the intersection of Rts. 676 and 677. Ahead of you, as you face the intersection, is Gee House Hill (E), another key Confederate artillery position during the battle

This concludes your tour. The battlefields of **Cedar Mountain, Bristoe Station, Kelly's Ford, Mine Run** and **Rappahannock Station** are also in this area. Written guides are available for those as well at the visitor centers at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville.

To return to Rt. 15/29, turn right and continue on Rt. 676, proceed to the end of the road, and turn left on Rt. 685. When you reach Rt. 15/29, turn right to reach Culpeper and left to go toward Warrenton.

For more information on the battle and preservation of the battlefield, see **Brandy Station Foundation's website.**



Map of Brandy Station Battlefield Tour



Fleetwood Hill on the Brandy Station Battlefield



**Did You Know?**

The Graffiti House is the headquarters of the Brandy Station Foundation. It contains graffiti left by Civil War soldiers.

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