

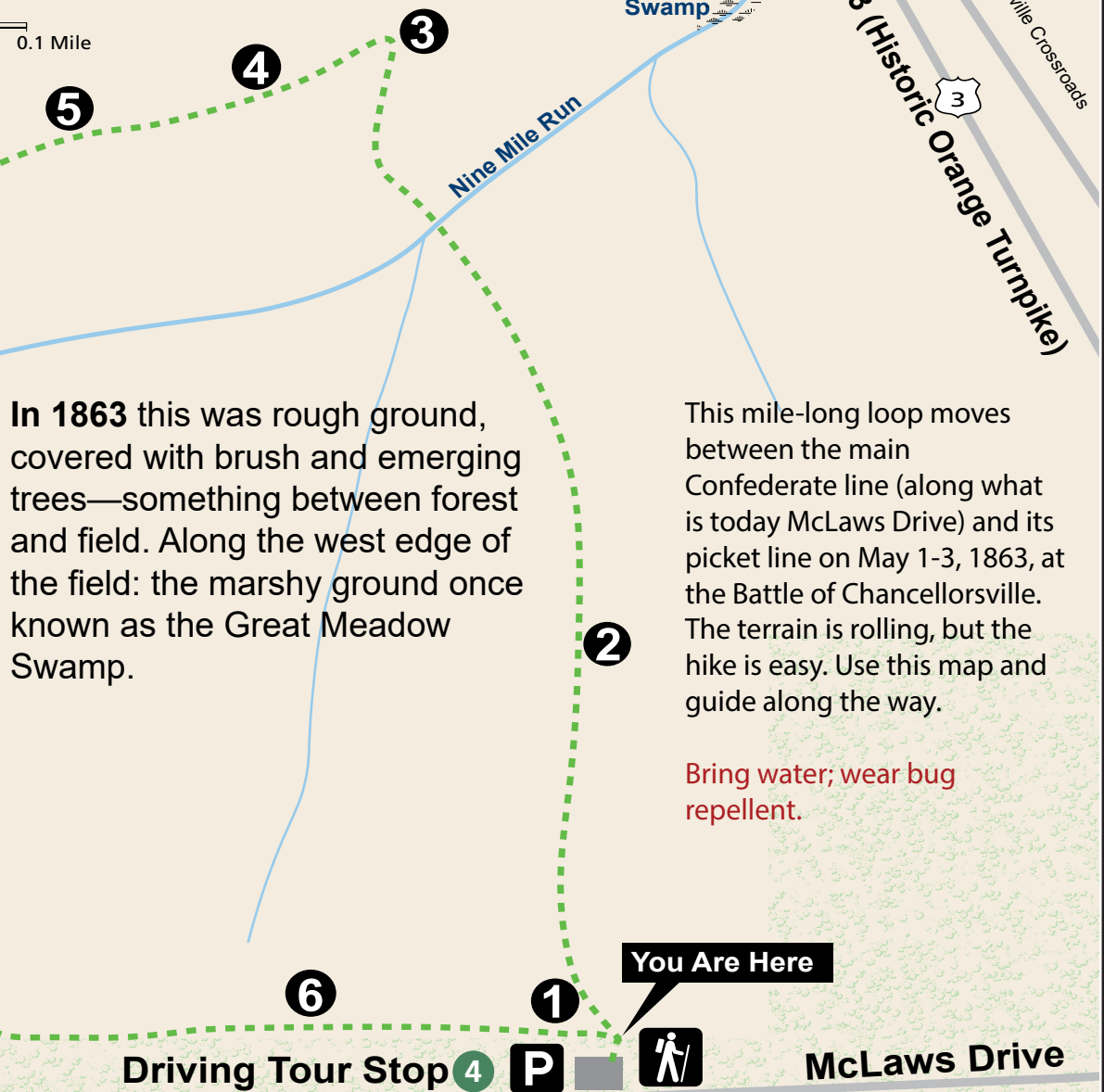
The McLaws - Miles Trail

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania NMP



Trail at the McLaws - Miles Line The Battle of Chancellorsville

0 0.1 Mile



In 1863 this was rough ground, covered with brush and emerging trees—something between forest and field. Along the west edge of the field: the marshy ground once known as the Great Meadow Swamp.

This mile-long loop moves between the main Confederate line (along what is today McLaws Drive) and its picket line on May 1-3, 1863, at the Battle of Chancellorsville. The terrain is rolling, but the hike is easy. Use this map and guide along the way.

Bring water; wear bug repellent.

The Confederate line here served as an anchor that allowed Lee and Jackson to maneuver and launch a devastating attack on May 2, two miles to the west. On May 3, Confederate troops here joined in Lee's final assault.

- 1** Union Advance & Retreat
May 1, 1863

This land saw combat on all three days of major fighting at Chancellorsville. On May 1, 1863, after battling the Confederates near Zoan Church, two miles behind you, troops of the Union Fifth Corps fell back to this ridge. Commanders on the ground favored defending this strong position, but General Hooker ordered them back to the low ground around the Chancellorsville crossroads, a mile in front of you. An angry General George G. 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." As the Union army retreated, the Confederates pushed ahead and took this ridge (their earthworks are still visible along McLaws Drive). For most of the next two days, Confederates here exchanged constant fire with the Union troops, and then On May 3 joined the grand assault against Union positions around Chancellorsville.

- 2** Confederate Charge
May 1

On May 1, three brigades of General A.P. Hill's Confederate division occupied this line astride the Orange Turnpike (modern Route 3, visible to your right). Late that day, Hill ordered a reconnaissance to confirm the Union positions in front. As the Confederates started across this field, Union troops of the Fifth Corps, in the distant woods, wheeled to meet them. One Confederate wrote, "We swept forward as if on dress parade, really not having an idea we would meet anybody until we got well into the forest. We had hardly got halfway across the field when rifles and cannon opened on us." Twice the Confederates charged the distant woods. Twice the Federals repulsed them.

McLaws - Miles Trail



3 Confederate Picket Line, May 1-3

You are now standing on what was the Confederate skirmish line—a loose formation of men intended to prevent surprises and spot opportunities. The main Confederate line, with ten cannon, occupied the ridge behind you. Throughout the day on May 2, the shells of Union and Confederate cannon whistled overhead, while the skirmishers of General Lafayette McLaws's Division actively engaged Union skirmishers led by Colonel Nelson A. Miles. This noisy, almost continuous fighting here helped distract Union General Hooker while "Stonewall" Jackson marched around the Union army's right flank, to the west. One Confederate remembered, *"I think we drove in their pickets ten or twelve times."*

When Jackson launched his flank attack that evening, McLaws reinforced his picket line here and pushed forward. His efforts helped prevent Hooker from moving troops away from this front to reinforce his collapsing flank—crushed by Jackson's assault.

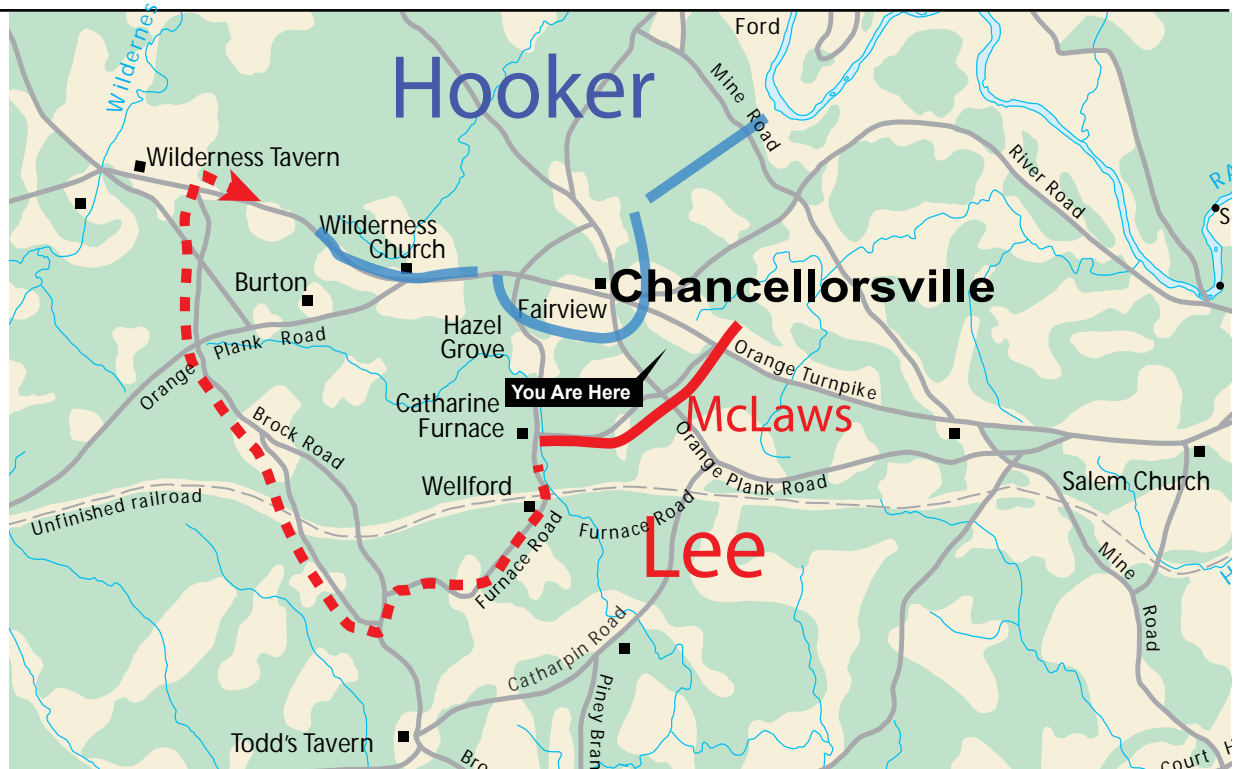
The Situation May 2



Lafayette McLaws



Nelson A. Miles



4 Union troops Hold Their Ground May 2

The woods in front of you—beyond the "Great Meadow Swamp"—swarmed with Union skirmishers. Late in the day on May 2, as they battled McLaws's Confederates here, the troops suffered a second shock when soldiers fleeing Jackson's Flank attack (fully two miles west) came rushing through the lines here. Colonel Edward Cross of the 5th New Hampshire, whose troops occupied part of the skirmish line, saw the moment as a crisis. Cross wrote, *"I have no hesitation in saying that had our line broke at that time the army would have been ruined! The commander of Knap's Battery came to me and said, 'What are you going to do?' 'Stay here, sir!' said I. 'Then I'll stay with you,' said he."* Some of the soldiers fleeing Jackson's attack passed through the Union lines here and into the Confederate lines atop the ridge, becoming prisoners.

5 Wounding of Col. Miles May 3

Skirmishing started anew the morning of May 3, heavier than before. About 9 a.m. Union Colonel Nelson A. Miles rode out to his skirmish line, in the woods not far from this spot. A bullet fired from a soldier in the 10th Georgia struck him in the stomach. Miles remembered: *"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."* Miles survived the wound, and his commander declared him "worth his weight in gold." Though he had no formal military training, Miles rose through the army over the coming decades and concluded his career as general-in-chief of the U.S. Army during the Spanish-American War.

6 Confederate Assault May 3

At mid-morning on May 3, Lee launched a general assault against the Union lines around the Chancellorsville intersection. McLaws's Division, here, rose up and surged across this ground, using the Orange Turnpike (Route 3) as its guide. Fighting roared in the woods just to your west. The Union lines in front soon collapsed. The Union troops of Hancock's Second Corps hastily formed a rear-guard, grudgingly giving ground while the rest of the army took a new line north of Chancellorsville itself. By day's end, the Confederates held Chancellorsville, and Hooker's Union army held a powerful line anchored on the Rapidan and the Rappahannock.