



The Greatest Civil War Battles: The Battle of Spotsylvania Court House

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures of the battle's important generals.

*Includes several maps of the battle.

*Includes accounts of the fighting written by generals and soldiers.

*Includes a Bibliography for further reading.

"The appalling sight presented was harrowing in the extreme. Our own killed were scattered over a large space near the "angle," while in front of the captured breastworks the enemy's dead, vastly more numerous than our own, were piled upon each other in some places four layers deep, exhibiting every ghastly phase of mutilation. Below the mass of fast-decaying corpses, the convulsive twitching of limbs and the writhing of bodies showed that there were wounded men still alive and struggling to extricate themselves from the horrid entombment. Every relief possible was afforded, but in too many cases it came too late. The place was well named the "Bloody Angle." – Horace Porter, Campaigning with Grant

At the Battle of the Wilderness (May 5-7, 1864), Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee had fought to a standstill in their first encounter, failing to dislodge each other despite incurring nearly 30,000 casualties between the Union Army of the Potomac and the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. Despite the fierce fighting, Grant continued to push his battered but resilient army south, hoping to beat Lee's army to the crossroads at Spotsylvania Court House, but Lee's army beat Grant's to Spotsylvania and began digging in, setting the scene for on and off fighting from May 8-21 that ultimately inflicted more casualties than the Battle of the Wilderness. In fact, with over 32,000 casualties among the two sides, it was the deadliest battle of the Overland Campaign.

Although the Battle of Spotsylvania technically lasted nearly 2 weeks, it is best remembered for the fighting that took place on May 12 at a salient in the Confederate line manned by Richard S. Ewell's corps. Known as the Mule Shoe, a Union assault on the salient produced 24 hours of the most savage fighting conducted during the war, forever christening that point in the line as the Bloody Angle. Although Winfield Scott Hancock's II Corps established a temporary breakthrough, the Confederates were ultimately able to repulse the Union soldiers in bloody hand-to-hand fighting.

After their inability to break Lee's line on May 12, Grant continued to probe Lee's line for weaknesses, attempting to gain a perceptible advantage. However, by 1864 Civil War soldiers had become adept at digging in and building the kind of trenches that would dominate the fighting of World War I 50 years later. By winning the race to Spotsylvania, the Confederates had enough time to dig in and prepare for the kind of defensive fighting that made assaults futile. On May 20, Grant began the process of disengaging from his lines and marching the Army of the Potomac further south, forcing Lee into another race toward the North Anna River. The two armies had suffered a combined 50,000 casualties in about 15 days of fighting, but the Overland Campaign was still only half finished.

The Greatest Civil War Battles: The Battle of Spotsylvania Court House comprehensively covers the events that led up to the battle, the fighting itself, and the aftermath of the battle. Accounts of the battle by important participants are also included, along with maps of the battle and pictures of important people, places, and events. You will learn about the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House like you never have before, in no time at all.



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