

**GEN. WILLIAM B. FRANKLIN AND  
THE OPERATIONS OF THE LEFT  
WING AT THE BATTLE OF  
FREDERICKSBURG, DECEMBER 13,  
1862**

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Gen. William B. Franklin and the operations of the left wing at the battle of Fredericksburg,  
December 13, 1862 by Jacob L. Greene

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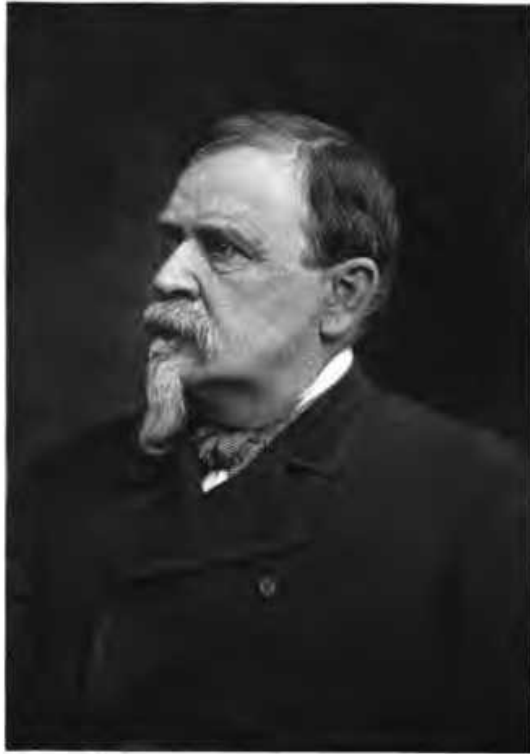
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**JACOB L. GREENE**

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W. F. Franklin.

# GEN. WILLIAM B. FRANKLIN

AND THE

## **Operations of the Left Wing**

AT THE

## BATTLE OF FREDERICKSBURG

DECEMBER 13, 1862

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BY JACOB L. GREENE

*Brevet Lieut.-Col. U. S. V.*

UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

BELKNAP AND WARFIELD

HARTFORD, CT.

1900

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PREFATORY

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THE origin of this paper was on this wise: Many years ago the writer came into such relations with General Franklin as to make him thoroughly aware of the extent of his possession of those qualities which make a man trustworthy under any test. This knowledge of the man led to a wondering curiosity as to the real basis of the charges against him by the Committee on the conduct of the war, of the prejudice which grew thereout and which affected the minds of many unfamiliar with the facts, or knowing them only partially and in distortion.

During the past winter the writer had occasion, in connection with another matter, to review the facts relating to the battle of Fredericksburg; and so clearly and indisputably in his own mind were the conclusions of this paper established, and so in harmony with the man's character were his actions on that day, that he could not repress the desire to set them forth in their orderly sequence of time and logical force. He was the more moved to this from the knowledge common to all who have passed through periods of war, that in every military misadventure the public is apt to believe there was some unpardonable fault, and in the hurry and rush of events, does not wait to learn fully and judge fairly, but is easily satisfied with any plausible statement bearing



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the semblance of authority, and passes on to forget the old in the excitement of the new, but carrying in its mind a prejudice against the victim of the moment, fatal to justice in the present and a bar against patient hearing and fair judgment later. He knew something of the shadow of this prejudice on General Franklin's fame even among those who would have realized its injustice had they but stopped to consider the man as they knew him. And so, out of a deep personal regard, was born that which follows.

The immediate occasion of its preparation was this: Until his feeble health prevented, General Franklin was a punctual member of a small association called "The Hartford Monday Evening Club." This paper was recently written for that club. That will account for its introductory passages, which, under the circumstances and with this explanation, the writer prefers to leave unchanged.

Its reception by that club and by others knowing the facts, have suggested its possible use in more widely clearing away some unwarranted misapprehensions respecting him to whom it is most affectionately dedicated.

HARTFORD, June 19, 1900.

## GENERAL WILLIAM B. FRANKLIN AT FREDERICKSBURG.

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On the 13th day of December, 1862, the Army of the Potomac, under the command of Major-General Ambrose E. Burnside, fought the battle of Fredericksburg, and met defeat with the loss of over 12,000 men. Four months later the Congressional Committee on the conduct of the war uttered its opinion to the world that Major-General William B. Franklin was responsible for the loss of that battle in consequence of his disobedience to the orders of General Burnside. Probably no finding ever announced by that remarkable body occasioned more surprise; and none was ever more promptly and completely controverted; but it darkened the soul and marred the career of the man it falsely and infamously accused. The slow pen of history has cleared and will ever more surely clear his pure fame, and his name will stand secure among the posterities. But, for us whose lives have happily touched his through the long years since those eventful days, and to whom his rare intelligence, his dauntless heart and perfect truth and loyalty are as familiar as the constant stars, it is but a due tribute from our friendship and our faith in a manhood that we have never seen fail in any test, to read again

the story of that disastrous day, note his part and bearing therein, and the cause and the manner of that most cruel and wanton injustice : to learn how it came to be that the true patriot, the trained soldier, devoted to his profession, proud to bear its high obligations, and jealous of its honor, who won distinction on every field of action, whose wide knowledge, great skill, clear, sound judgment, and transparent sincerity made him the constant and trusted counsellor of every superior and the reliable lieutenant of every commander, who shared the brunt at Bull Run, who fought the rear-guard battles from the Chickahominy to the James, and held the pass of White Oak Swamp against half Lee's army on the critical day of Glendale, who won at Crampton's Gap "the completest victory gained up to that time by any part of the Army of the Potomac,"—to learn how it came to be that this man was accused of that to which his every quality and act gave the absolute lie.

On assuming command of the Army of the Potomac, General Burnside had formed his army into three Grand Divisions, each consisting of two infantry corps and a division of cavalry. The First Grand Division, commanded by General E. V. Sumner, was composed of the 2d corps under General D. N. Couch, with Hancock, Howard, and French as division commanders, and the 9th corps under General Wilcox, with Burns, Sturgis, and Getty as division commanders. The Second Grand Division, commanded by General Joseph Hooker, was composed of the 3d corps under General Stoneman, with Birney, Sickles, and Whipple as division commanders, and the 5th corps under General But-