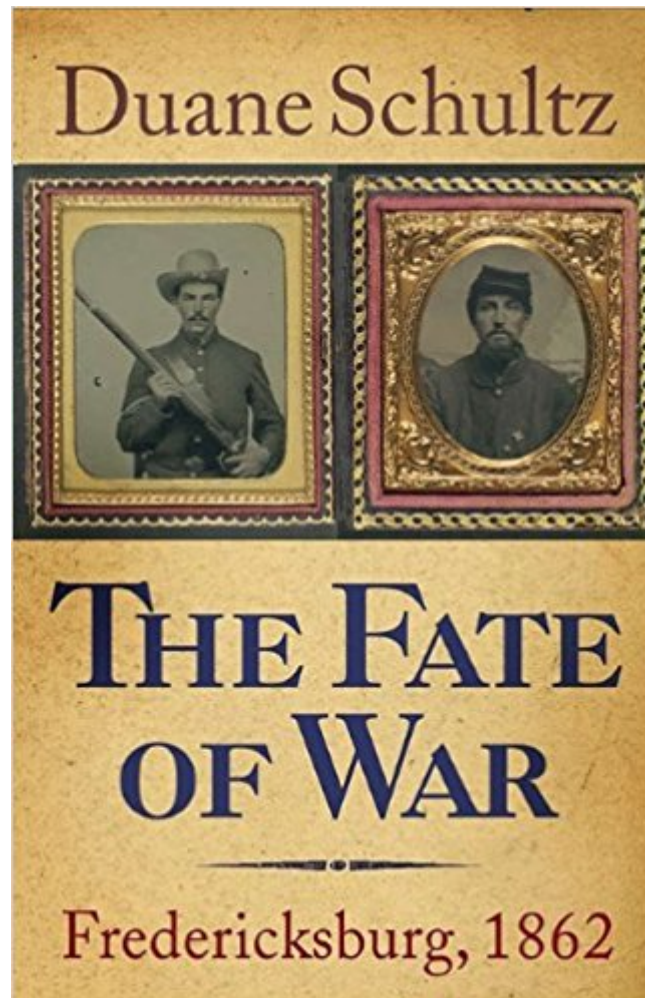




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# The Fate Of War: Fredericksburg, 1862



## Synopsis

An Exploration of the Human Experience in One of the Civil War's Most Important and Devastating Battles

The Union assault on the critical Confederate stronghold of Fredericksburg, Virginia, along the Rappahannock River in December 1862 was one of the most significant and storied battles of the Civil War. It was fought in order to secure confidence in the North for Lincoln's administration after 18 months of Confederate victories, Union setbacks, and directionless Northern leadership. The result was a complete and stunning Confederate victory and one of the bloodiest losses for the Union Army. Federal General Ambrose E. Burnside and his Army of the Potomac planned to overrun Fredericksburg and move on to Richmond, the Confederate capital. The opposing general, Robert E. Lee, and his Army of Northern Virginia prepared Fredericksburg's defense. Thousands of Union troops were able to successfully cross the Rappahannock River despite withering small arms fire and proceeded to brutally sack the city, terrorizing its remaining civilian inhabitants while the Confederates fell back to a line of heights to the west. Burnside soon ordered his generals to attack with the intention of flanking the Confederate defenders. Unable to dislodge or go around the enemy, Burnside was forced to withdraw without a victory after suffering appalling casualties.

In *The Fate of War: Fredericksburg, 1862*, historian and professional psychologist Duane Schultz uses this key moment in Civil War history to address how soldiers and civilians react to the stress of war. Rather than a traditional military history and there are a number of excellent accounts of troop movements and strategy at Fredericksburg, *The Fate of War* explores the human element in battle; the motivations, passions, and emotions of the people who fought on both sides. Using letters, diaries, and memoirs, including those of Clara Barton and Walt Whitman, Schultz reveals what individuals can force themselves to do in the name of duty, patriotism, and dedication to a cause, or the ultimate fear of letting down their friends. Schultz's account, grounded in careful research, is a record of the triumph and failure, courage and cowardice, compassion and cruelty of the people—the ordinary and high-ranking, soldier and civilian, men and women—who came together one terrible day.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

DUANE SCHULTZ, a distinguished psychologist and history writer, is the author of a number of professional and trade books and articles, including *Into the Fire: The Most Fateful Mission of World War II* and *Crossing the Rapido: A Tragedy of World War II*, both available from Westholme Publishing.

The Fate of War: Fredericksburg, 1862 Author Duane Schultz has done it again, another fascinating, compelling and highly readable story of a battle. Like his recent World War II books - "Crossing the Rapido," and "Into the Fire" about the Ploesti raid, his new book about the Civil War battle at Fredericksburg, is a stirring account of a doomed mission that could not possibly succeed, because of totally inept and blundering leadership. The men who have to fight and die there know they are doomed but they bravely charge the impenetrable Confederate defenses and leave 12,000 casualties at the end of a horrifying day. Schultz "takes you there," in intensely vivid descriptions of the battle and the aftermath when the killing, but not the dying, is over. Schultz does not give us an encyclopedic account of troop movements. It's not that kind of book. Instead he focuses on people on both sides, from the senior officers like Burnside, Hooker, Meade, Lee, Jackson, and Longstreet and makes them come alive as human beings, good and bad, down to noncoms and eager young lieutenants, men you've never heard of but won't easily forget. He tells the misfortunes of the civilians caught in the middle when their town was shelled and the Union troops went berserk, vandalizing and looting. I highly recommend "The Fate of War," which is a very apt title. You'll come away with a feel for the dreadful human costs of war and it should give you a sense of wonder and awe at what men were able to force themselves to do that day at Fredericksburg--for duty, country, and their friends.

The book; "The Fate of War", starts off with this account of one man at the beginning of the battle at Fredericksburg in 1862: On Saturday, December 13, 1862, Sgt Thomas Plunkett of the 21st Massachusetts Infantry lost his arms. Only minutes before, the regiment had calmly dressed ranks and formed a straight line, prepared to charge the Confederates. The Northerners knew what they were facing. They had watched wave after wave of their fellow soldiers attempt to dislodge the rebels from their heavily defended position at Fredericksburg's stone wall. Each successive attack had failed. Now it was up to the men from North Oxford, Massachusetts. The North Oxford men moved out. Rebel artillery opened fire. A Confederate shell decapitated one man. His body remained upright for an instant while blood spurted from his neck; his head bounced to the ground like a ball. As wounded men fell, those remaining closed ranks, surging toward the Confederate line with Sergeant Plunkett waving the regimental banner. A shell exploded overhead, killing three men near him. Plunkett's arms were crushed, mangled, and he swayed on his feet, clinging to the flagstaff. To drop the colors would be to dishonor them. He anchored the base of the wooden pole on the ground, propped it against one of his feet, and held the banner aloft with the bleeding stump of his right arm. "Don't let it fall boys!" he shouted. "Don't let it fall." Straight as a ramrod amid the rain of shells and bullets Plunkett held the flag high until another soldier eased it from him..... The book then allows us to follow soldiers like Plunkett and others from both sides along with Generals like Burnside, Meade, Hooker, Lee, Longstreet and many more in the build up to this frightful battle. This is not a standard military account of this battle but more a look at the men who fought there and why. To me Fredericksburg is one of the bloodiest and worse battles of the American Civil War, a terrible and futile battle and books on this battle always hold a fascination for me. How did the Union soldiers find the courage and strength to continue to try and storm Marye's Heights against such terrible odds? Don't expect a detailed and in-depth account of the battle, it is more about the events leading up to the battle and the people involved in the fighting but overall this book offers an interesting account of this terrible event. In the final chapter we learn of what happened to Sgt Plunkett: On March 30, 1866, he was awarded the Medal of Honor for saving the colors at Fredericksburg. In 1869, the state of Massachusetts gave him a job as a messenger at the State House. He married, had two children, and died in 1885 at the age of forty-five. At his funeral service, the battle-scarred flag he had saved from touching the ground at Fredericksburg was placed next to his casket.

History sees Fredericksburg as a bloody debacle wasting men's lives for no advantage. The battle "proves" Burnside is unfit to command a major army. For many, this is just another attempt at

finding competent men to command the Army of the Potomac. Fredericksburg is an important battle in many ways. This is the first time the United States Army forced the crossing of a major river. Additionally, this is the last battle where the "old army" senior officers hold significant commands. By Gettysburg, only about six months in the future, the brigade and division commanders hold all the significant commands. Most of these officers will finish the war as senior commanders in the Army of the Potomac. Duane Schultz provides a unique view of the battle. The book is a full history as seen through the words and experiences of the common soldiers. This could result in a disjointed narrative in the hands of a less skilled author. The author's skill results in a very readable and informative story that is fun to read. This book's notes are not numbered and the Notes section is by chapter. Most of the notes are on direct quotes. The Bibliography is extensive and the book has a complete index. Illustrations and maps are in the right place without intruding on the narration. The publishers produced a handsome quality book that is as pleasing to hold, as it is to read.

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