

## The Ox Hill Battlefield Park Audio Tour Script

### Male Voice:

This is the Ox Hill Battlefield Park audio tour. The tour starts at the kiosk near the parking lot and then heads up the left side of the hill. When you hear an extended music passage, it's time to move to the next sign. The tour lasts about 25 minutes. Thank you for visiting the park, and enjoy the tour.

### **KIOSK**

### The Tour

### Female narrator:

There was blood on the grass here, where you stand. Over 15-hundred soldiers were killed or wounded near this spot. They fell during a Civil War battle that took place in a thunderstorm that echoed the violence around them.

### Male narrator:

This is Ox Hill. On behalf of the Fairfax County Park Authority, welcome to the site of the only Civil War battle that took place in Fairfax County.

If you were standing where the kiosk now stands on the afternoon of September 1, 1862, you would have physically felt the thunder of cannon, smelled the rising smoke, and heard the wails of the wounded.

**Female narrator:**

The kiosk presents an introduction to the battle and its significance. You'll get some insight into the generals who were on the field that day, some of the men who were wounded on this land and how their injuries were treated.

**Male narrator:**

The Battle of Ox Hill is the Confederate name for what the Union Army called the Battle of Chantilly. It took place at a critical time in the Civil War, between two of the war's most famous and memorialized battles – two days after Second Manassas and 16 days before Antietam.

Although the battle was waged across about 500 acres, the heaviest combat took place on the land you see around you.

**SIGN 1: The Attack and Death of Gen. Stevens**

**Female narrator:**

In May of 1862, Confederate Major General Thomas Stonewall Jackson's army forced Union troops that had moved into Virginia to retreat to Washington. The North's capital city was well protected by a ring of forts.

Late that summer, Jackson wanted to draw Major General John Pope's Union troops out of Washington and

into battle. On August 28, Jackson attacked a Federal column on the Warrenton Turnpike. That triggered the Second Battle of Bull Run, which raged for the next two days about ten miles southwest of here and left 22,180 casualties in its wake. That brings us to Ox Hill.

**Male narrator:**

The Union troops tried to retreat from Bull Run to Washington along the Warrenton Pike, which is now Route 29.

The commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, General Robert E. Lee, wanted to block that Union retreat. He sent Stonewall Jackson on a wide march along Little River Turnpike, what is now Route 50, around the retreating Union troops, trying to gain advantage on Pope's flank. Pope learned about this through skirmishes with cavalry, and he sent troops ahead of Jackson on the Little River Turnpike to block the Confederates on a ridge where Jermantown Road lies today. Pope then sent about 4,000 troops toward Jackson's right flank.

The two Union divisions Pope sent were under the command of General Isaac Stevens and Major General Philip Kearny. It was September 1, 1862, and Stevens' division engaged Confederate troops right where you are now, at Ox Hill.

Ed Wenzel of the Chantilly Battlefield Association:

**Ed Wenzel:**

“The battle of Ox Hill was kind of like a meeting engagement. It was an unexpected clash. As far as the Confederates were concerned, they were surprised. Jackson was surprised. They knew that they had Federal forces in front of them at Jermantown. They had scouted out that position and they realized that on the other side of Difficult Run there was a substantial Federal force. And they also understood that the Federals were retreating from Centreville to Jermantown on Route 29, the Warrenton Pike. But they didn't expect to be hit in the flank, which is what happened when Reno's 9th Corps came up and Stevens launched his assault.”

**Male narrator:**

Historian Mike Henry:

**Mike Henry:**

“They’d been at it now for three days. It’s late August to the first of September. They’re in wool uniforms. They’ve been marching and counter-marching, fighting. They’re exhausted. They’ve had enough. And all of a sudden they’re surprised.”

### Female narrator:

Some 4,000 to 6,000 Union troops were in the area. About 15,000 to 17,000 Confederate troops were nearby. Also playing a key role in the battle that day was a severe thunderstorm.

### **FIRST INTERPRETIVE SIGN:**

### **The attack and death of General Stevens**

The first skirmishes between the armies took place in the afternoon near the Reid family house, a little southwest of the current park boundaries.

That land is behind you if you are facing the first sign. General Stevens saw those Confederate troops in the Reid farm fields.

Stevens decided to attack even though he was outnumbered. At about 4:30 in the afternoon, he sent his troops from the field where the condos now sit up the hill that you are standing on. If you face the interpretive sign, you'll have a view similar to what a Union soldier

saw that day. Stevens' troops were coming uphill from behind you, not realizing what they were heading into.

**Ed Wenzel:**

"They knew the Confederates were there because they had driven their skirmishers back into the woods, but there was a time frame there where the Confederates were not firing at them as Stevens was organizing his division to attack. And there was conversation back and forth among some of the men in the ranks as to whether the Confederates were there at all. Some of the soldiers thought that they had fled. They didn't understand, they didn't realize that there was an entire Confederate corps on the Little River Pike. The Confederates were waiting for them as they approached. That surprised them."

**Male Narrator:**

Imagine yourself in a blue uniform, moving up this hill, and seeing the gathered storm clouds above you. At that time, off to your left, beyond the wooden fence, was a cornfield. Beyond that were woods. And if you were a

Union soldier, you looked at that corn and those woods and wondered what was in them.

**Female narrator:**

Stevens extended his lines and sent some soldiers into the cornfield. *The 50<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania moved left, supported by the 8<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts and the 100<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania.* Confederate brigades were hastily brought up from Little River Turnpike. Stevens' forces continued to fall, but he rallied his troops and continued the assault. By 5:00, about an hour after the fighting had begun, Stevens' 79th Highlanders had lost five color bearers.

**Male narrator:**

Stevens would be the sixth. He picked up the colors himself, cried "Highlanders, my Highlanders, follow your general!" and charged ahead. During the charge, Stevens was killed by a bullet to his head.

**Female narrator:**

Face the sign, and look straight ahead. You'll see a rail fence. Just shy of that fence is where Stevens fell, draped by the flag he carried.

**Male narrator:**

As Stevens fell amid the thunder, lightning and rain that drenched the battlefield, the 79<sup>th</sup> New York regiment and the right line of the 28<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts crashed into the woods in front of you. They drove Hays' Louisiana Brigade back through the woods that grew beyond the fence in front of you and onto land that is now the shopping center across the street.

**Ed Wenzel:**

"That's why you've got Hays' brigade being commanded now by a colonel who had never commanded a brigade before, and he gets his guys disoriented in the woods. He tries to change some regimental formations and he gets them out of position, and they can't present a front to the enemy – just when the attack hits them, and that's why they're driven back into the woods."

### Female narrator:

A second event occurred just as Stevens died. The storm struck with violent force as he fell.

### Ed Wenzel

“Well, it was a terrifying storm. Most accounts talk about it. Bolts of lightning all over the place illuminating the woods, torrential rains coming down, gale force winds blowing sheets of rain into the faces of the Confederates because the storm was coming from the south. So the storm’s at the backs of the attacking Federals, but it was directly into the faces of the Confederates.”

## **INTERPRETIVE SIGN 2:**

### **THEN AND NOW**

### Male narrator:

The next interpretive sign is titled “The Battlefield of Chantilly: Then and Now. It shows the lay of the land, where the condos and townhomes now sit in front of you,

as it was in the early 20th century. You can get a sense of what the area was like at the time of the Civil War. The land looked much like the land in this photo on the day of the battle. If you face the sign, you could be in a Confederate uniform, looking at Stevens' forces attacking, coming toward you. The cornfield that concealed you and your fellow Confederates extended to your right and behind you. There were more Confederates to your left and behind you, where Monument Drive is now.

### **INTERPRETIVE SIGN 3:**

#### **Attack of General Birney's Brigade**

##### **Female narrator:**

When General Stevens first saw the Confederates, he sent a courier with word of the impending encounter to Federal commands along the Warrenton Pike. General Kearny, who was on the Warrenton Turnpike, ordered a brigade led by General David Birney to go forward. Two other brigades followed. By this time, the rain was falling hard, and woolen uniforms were soaked and heavy.

### Male narrator:

Face the sign titled Attack of General Birney's Brigade. Birney's troops were about 450 yards in front of you, near an orchard. His lead regiments entered the cornfield on your right and met the Confederates. By now, the Confederate troops had regrouped and fought off the Stevens attack. But many were left with mostly rain-soaked cartridge boxes and cartridges. As the fighting and rain continued and darkness fell, small arms became useless.

### Ed Wenzel:

"It's difficult when you've got muzzle loaders trying to keep the water from wetting the paper cartridges, and that happened all over the place. Most relic hunters will tell you that most of the dropped cartridges that they found searching at Ox Hill were unfired bullets. And they're unfired because the powder was wet, and the soldiers would throw 'em on the ground. When most of the muskets were fouled and couldn't be fired, and it was getting dark

and you couldn't see, a lot of the fighting in the cornfield with Birney's troops and General Branch and Pender's troops just degenerated into a disorganized brawl. The only weapons they had were to swing their muskets at each other or stick each other with a bayonet."

**Mike Henry:**

"When rain hits the muzzle-loading weapon, it turns it from being a rifle into a club. A wet musket is absolutely functionless. If you're going to use your musket as a club or the other end as a bayonet, you've got to be in close proximity to your foe. If you let your foe get that close, you've already screwed up. By the time the battle degenerates into the hand-to-hand combat, both sides are so tired of it. Both sides realize that it's better to pull back and fight another day. There is no advantage to be pressed when you're looking at hand-to-hand combat."

***INTERPRETIVE SIGN 4: KEARNEY'S DEATH***

### Female narrator:

Birney sent word to Kearny that Stevens' original attacking troops had withdrawn. Kearny wasn't so sure, and he made a fateful decision to investigate that report.

### Male narrator:

In the early evening rain, as darkness increased, Kearny rode across the field in front of you, moving right to left. He then headed up the hill you stand upon where Stevens' troops had first attacked. He found remnants of the 21<sup>st</sup> Massachusetts and ordered them into the cornfield to protect Birney's flank. They protested that the cornfield, off to your right, was full of rebels. Kearny ordered the troops forward, and when they met resistance in the dim evening light, he said they were shooting at their own men. His soldiers brought forward two Confederate captives as proof that there were rebels were in the cornfield.

### Ed Wenzel:

"Kearny says, 'Damn you and your prisoners,' and he takes off on horseback around the left of the 21<sup>st</sup>

Massachusetts, and he rides straight into the corn, almost vanishes from sight, because now, it's really getting dark."

**Male narrator:**

In moments, he met the 49<sup>th</sup> Georgia. Kearny turned to ride back. Because he had only one arm, he lowered his head to reach his single arm around his mount's neck.

**Ed Wenzel:**

"Charles Walcott says, 'I saw Kearny's horse rear up, and I saw the general turn and try to flee. He was killed instantly, shot from his horse.'"

**Male narrator:**

Accounts of the battle say fighting continued near the cornfield until about 6:15 or 6:30, and some accounts claim Kearny was not killed until about 9 p.m., after the battle had ended. Nevertheless, both sides began to withdraw, and darkness stopped further fighting.

**Female narrator:**

At the top of the hill, along Monument Drive and behind the bench, are two cast aluminum Virginia state historic markers and a Virginia Civil War Trails sign.

Standing by those signs and looking into the park, you can get a perspective that would be similar to what the Confederates saw as they looked through the woods toward the Union lines.

***INTERPRETIVE SIGNS:***

***Bounders and Quartz Stone***

***Kearny and Stevens Monuments***

***Kearney's Stump***

**Male narrator:**

As you walk around the top of the hill, the path curves around a stretch of fencing on your left. At the end of that fence line, near the sign titled "Bounders and Quartz Stone," is a mound of rocks and a quartz stone standing a little over two feet high. They were placed there after General Stevens' son, Hazard Stevens, who was at the

battle, returned to the site. Hazard Stevens joined Captain Charles Walcott of the 21<sup>st</sup> Massachusetts and identified the spot where his father had fallen.

A Confederate veteran named John Ballard owned the land at the time, and it was Ballard who marked the spot with the stones.

### Female narrator:

In 1874, 12 years after the Battle of Ox Hill, John Ballard married Mary Reid Thrift, who had inherited the land. In 1915, John and Mary Ballard deeded a small plot of land to commemorate the Ox Hill battle.

That land is here, by the sign titled "Kearny and Stevens Monuments." Two granite memorials are surrounded by a low iron rail. The monuments were dedicated in 1915 by the First New Jersey Brigade Society. The memorials honor the two Union generals who died here. These are not headstones. There is no evidence of any burial sites in the park.

Though Kearny's stone says he was killed on this spot, he actually died in the cornfield, about 100 yards west of here. That's to the right, if you're looking straight at the monuments – and outside of the current park boundaries.

**Male narrator:**

The history of the small, granite marker a few yards down the path past the monuments is uncertain. It's marked "Kearny's stump." Tradition says there was a tree here and that this was either the place where Kearny was killed or where his body lay after the battle.

However, we know that Kearny was killed in the cornfield west of here, and that the Confederates took his body to the Chantilly House, which was the Confederate field hospital.

The stump became the origin point for the deeded land and the survey of the monument lot. It was replaced by this granite surveyor's stone in the shape of a tree stump. Because it is close to the place where General

Stevens fell, some have speculated that it might mark the spot of Stevens' death. No one knows for certain.

### Female narrator:

The chaotic fighting at Ox Hill lasted a little more than two hours and ended as a stalemate, although it did spoil Confederate plans to cut off the retreating Union forces from Washington and destroy Pope's army. But it was fierce fighting under horrific conditions, as noted in the writings of those who were there.

### Second male narrator:

"During the afternoon, a violent thunderstorm set in, and a perfect hurricane blew at sunset. But the `pressive work was such that under the deluge of rain, the work of amputation was continued in the open air."

### Ed Wenzel

"Many of the men wondered how they came out of the battle uninjured. One soldier of the 5<sup>th</sup> Louisiana

had a bullet splinter his musket stock as he took aim, had four balls rip through his clothing and had most of his pants blown off by a shell.”

***INTERPRETIVE SIGN:***

***General Reno's Probe East of Ox Road***

**Female narrator:**

Some of the fighting on September 1, 1862, took place east of here, near Fair Oaks Mall. General Jesse Reno had a division there that was involved in a deadly battle described on the sign titled “General Reno’s Probe East of Ox Road.”

The 21<sup>st</sup> Massachusetts was seeking the enemy in a darkening woods. About 100 yards east of the woods and in heavy rain, they halted to dress their lines. Captain Charles Walcott later wrote about what happened.

**Second male narrator:**

“One of the deadliest volleys ever fired rolled upon us from our right and front, and in the sudden

anguish and despair of the moment, the whole regiment seemed to be lying, bleeding on the ground.”

**Female narrator:**

Nearly 100 men fell in a single volley from Trimble’s brigade. But Trimble’s men then saw Hays’ brigade being driven back, and they briefly pulled back as well. As you face the sign, that fighting took place in front of you and to your left.

***INTERPRETIVE SIGN:***

***Aftermath: The Invasion of Maryland***

**Female narrator:**

*Some of the wounded from Ox Hill were cared for by American Red Cross founder Clara Barton. Union casualties at Ox Hill are uncertain because some are believed to be included in the totals from Second Manassas. Historians believe at least 1,000 Union troops were killed, wounded or captured. The Confederates counted 516 casualties in the battle of Ox Hill.*

### Ed Wenzel:

It was the place where Lee tried to bring battle again to destroy Pope. It didn't work out, and he immediately went forward with his Maryland Campaign, the tactics that he had been thinking about all along, taking the war to the Union in Maryland."

### Male narrator

After Ox Hill, General Pope realized his army was still in danger, and he ordered the Union retreat to continue toward Alexandria and toward the defensive forts that were guarding the city of Washington. Pope's army pulled back during the early morning hours on the day after the Battle of Ox Hill.

### Mike Henry

"Pope was not up to the task, I think it's fair to say. He was a political appointee. A decent man, but not up to Lee's expertise, not up to the challenge, as Lee proved very quickly."

## Ed Wenzel

“In a period of 90 days, from June to September 1862, Robert E. Lee had driven the Union army from the gates of Richmond and into the fortifications of Washington. Here in Fairfax County, between Ox Hill and Chantilly, rested Lee's entire army, the Army of Northern Virginia. The Confederacy was at the flood tide of its power and poised to invade the north, a move that Lee hoped would bring European recognition and support and that could have changed the course of the war.”

## Female narrator:

Lee could not threaten Washington. At the beginning of the war, troops that gathered in the Capital City had little to do, so they had been put to work building a ring of forts around the capital. 68 forts and 93 batteries were constructed -- most of them on private land. Washington had become the most fortified city in the world.

### Male narrator:

This was the peak of Confederate military success in the Civil War. Three months earlier, Lee had been put in charge of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia in the summer of 1862.

### Ed Wenzel:

“And where were they? He was fighting off General McClelland on the outskirts of Richmond. And in 90 days, Lee had turned the tables completely on the Union government. He had driven McClelland’s army off the peninsula, a second Union army had been formed, Lee had split his force, had moved northward, had engaged Pope’s army at Cedar Mountain, had flanked him again at Second Manassas, had battled him at Second Manassas, and in the attempt to cut him off as he was retreating from Second Manassas, they collided again at Ox Hill. Ox Hill is the end of the Second Manassas Campaign. ”

### Female narrator:

Sixteen days after Ox Hill, there were 23,000 casualties at Antietam. The confrontation at Antietam on September 17, the single bloodiest day in American military history, was strategically a Union victory. It drove Lee's Army of Northern Virginia back into the Old Dominion. It changed the course of the war and led to the issuance of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation.

### Male narrator:

Civil War preservationists stepped forward in the 1980s to protect this plot of about five acres of land. The site now is owned and maintained by the Fairfax County Park Authority.

### Female narrator:

We hope you enjoyed your tour of Ox Hill Battlefield Park. Thank you for visiting, and we invite you to see more of the 400-plus park sites managed by the Fairfax County Park Authority.