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Chris Mackowski and Kristopher D. White. *That Furious Struggle: Chancellorsville and the High Tide of the Confederacy, May 1-4, 1863*. El Dorado Hills: Savas Beatie, 2014.

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## Book Review

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The Chancellorsville battlefield was a confusing and chaotic place during the bloody days of May 1-4, 1863. The difficulty of navigating the terrain led to one of the Confederacy's greatest setbacks: the death of General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson. In 2014, the fields at Chancellorsville can still bewilder those trying to maneuver around them. The shifting battle lines and multiple fronts of the campaign (including the adjoining and connected Second Battle of Fredericksburg) can easily disorient a visitor. This is the case for several of the battlefields of the old Virginia Wilderness region—complicated further by modern urban sprawl. In *That Furious Struggle: Chancellorsville and the High Tide of the Confederacy, May 1-4, 1863*, Chris Mackowski and Kristopher D. White attempt to solve that problem of battlefield navigation while providing an in-depth story of Robert E. Lee's greatest Pyrrhic victory.

It is critical to remember the central purpose of *That Furious Struggle*. This is not meant to be the definitive study of the Battle of Chancellorsville (perhaps the most significant historiographical argument of the book is suggested by the subtitle—identifying Chancellorsville as the Confederacy's High Tide rather than the Angle at Gettysburg). It reads much like a high quality tour with a guide, which is fitting considering the backgrounds of the two authors, who have both served as historians at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. Rather than as a simple linear narrative of the action, the story of the battle is told in a manner that corresponds with tour stops, which sometimes disrupts the sequence of events; however, the authors make these disruptions perfectly clear, and their sensibilities to the needs of the common tourist will be appreciated by the standard reader of this book. As the authors state: "The organization of this book and tour reflects knowledge of those roads [and] takes into consideration related information such as park facilities and the availability of parking" (x). The book functions as a terrific navigator for exploration of the field. Each section concludes with meticulous directions to the next tour stop, including traffic patterns and GPS

coordinates. Those who do not wish to go on frustrating reconnaissance missions through the woods will surely benefit from these details.

All of that is not to suggest that there is not quality history included within the book. The text paints a picture of the battlefield in the manner that an efficient tour guide can do, and the text is aided by over one hundred photographs, which add depth to the scene. Presumably drawing its information from a collection of books listed at the end of the volume—but not providing any citations—as well as from the authors’ professional experience at the Park, *That Furious Struggle* conveys stories that inform and intrigue the reader. While the images immerse the reader in the scene, the text brings it to life; there is almost a Ken Burns effect to the whole experience of reading the volume, as the images move between the direct and peripheral vision while reading the sweeping descriptions and quotes from first-hand accounts. To be entirely honest, it makes one truly yearn to be standing on the field—a feat that some other field guides surprisingly fail to achieve.

As already stated, this is not necessarily the book to delve into for the full story of the fight at Chancellorsville. In fact, as mentioned, the book directs readers to several deeper investigations of the battle in its appendices, and uses the opportunity to offer the authors’ opinions of those books, including a swipe at Stephen W. Sears as an “unabashed Joe Hooker apologist” who goes to “implausible” lengths for that purpose in his *Chancellorsville* (173). The most valuable appendix for the intended audience of the book—the battlefield tourist—is a full Order of Battle, which is always useful for quick reference on a trek across a battlefield. Also, although not the focus of the book, there are allusions to the other battles fought in the area of Chancellorsville, including directions to the spot where General James Longstreet was wounded by his own men in 1864. All of this adds to the complete picture that the authors were aiming to develop.

Mackowski and White have produced an invaluable resource for the tourist of one of the Civil War’s largest and most critical battles. The most refreshing thing about *That Furious Struggle* is that it consistently remains loyal to its purpose. Never aiming to become the definitive book about the Battle of Chancellorsville, it stakes a claim for itself as the definitive book about the battlefield at Chancellorsville. Darkness and the fog of war caused disastrous results for the Army of Northern Virginia in May of 1863; in 2014, one does not need to worry about feeling lost and confused on the fields of Chancellorsville with the assistance of *That Furious Struggle* by Mackowski and White.