

## Battle of High Bridge

General Robert E. Lee had chosen a night march for the fifteen miles into Farmville. Earlier, Lee's nephew Fitz Lee and his cavalry intercepted the small Yankee force of about 900 infantry and cavalry who had been sent to burn the High Bridge over the Appomattox River. The High Bridge had a span of over 2,400 feet and was 125 feet in height. This bridge supported the South Side Rail Road in Cumberland County then re-crossed the river into Farmville. In a brief but brutal skirmish, the Southerners bested the bridge burners, capturing most and saving the structure. It would be costly; Confederate General James Dearing would be mortally wounded and die on April 23<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>1</sup>

Lee then ordered his troops to cross the High Bridge and then to burn it and the lower wagon bridge. Fast marching Yankees from the II Corps reached the two bridges just as the final Southerners were crossing. Three spans of the enormous railroad bridge were in flames, but the lower wagon bridge had just been fired. The Yankees managed to extinguish that fire, along with cutting away the fourth span of

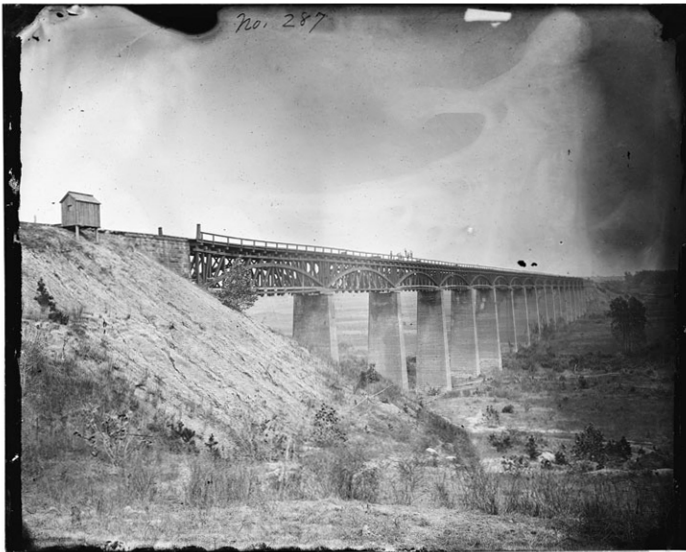


Photo of The High Bridge under Re-construction courtesy of Chris Calkins, Sailors' Creek State Park.

the High Bridge. Rapidly pursuing the rebels, an entire enemy corps would now be on the north side of the river with Lee. One division chased the Confederates down the railroad into Farmville, skirmishing along the way. At one point, the lead ball of a sharpshooter would rip through the face of General Thomas Smythe. He would die on April 9 at Burkes Tavern, the last Union general killed in the Virginia fighting. The other two Federal divisions moved westward along a different route hoping to come into contact with the Confederate line

of march to Cumberland Church. While Lee was moving his army across both High Bridge and the adjoining lower wagon bridge that night, another part of his army was moving westward from Rice's Depot.

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<sup>1</sup> The Fox and Hound: On the Road to Appomattox by Chris Calkins, Sailor's Creek Battlefield Historic State Park