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## A Summer at FredSpot: Far More Than Answering Phones and Getting Coffee

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## **Abstract**

Going into this summer, I was not quite sure what to expect at [Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park](#). Part of me suspected that since I was an intern, I would do nothing more than answer phones and get coffee. I was prepared to accept this; after all, I do want to work for the National Park Service someday, and if the only way to get my foot in the door was to do menial tasks for two and a half months, so be it. What I actually experienced, however, was something far different and far better.

*[excerpt]*

## **Keywords**

Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Civil War, Gettysburg College, history, tour guide

## **Disciplines**

History | Military History | Public History | United States History

## **Comments**

This blog post originally appeared in [The Gettysburg Compiler](#) and was created by students at Gettysburg College.

# THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

## ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

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### **A Summer at FredSpot: Far More Than Answering Phones and Getting Coffee**

*This post is part of a series featuring behind-the-scenes dispatches from our [Pohanka Interns](#) on the front lines of history this summer as interpreters, archivists, and preservationists. See [here](#) for the introduction to the series.*

*By Jeff Martin '18*

Going into this summer, I was not quite sure what to expect at [Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park](#). Part of me suspected that since I was an intern, I would do nothing more than answer phones and get coffee. I was prepared to accept this; after all, I do want to work for the National Park Service someday, and if the only way to get my foot in the door was to do menial tasks for two and a half months, so be it. What I actually experienced, however, was something far different and far better.



The Sunken Road. Photo courtesy Jeff Martin.

This is not to suggest that all of my experiences were positive; I did have some setbacks, but I like to think I have learned from them. One of the park's permanent staff went on one of my Sunken Road walking tours early in the summer, and I did not give a particularly good tour that day. Afterwards, we sat down and talked about some areas to improve; for example, my tour went far longer than advertised and I talked about a lot of facts that did not tie in to my overarching theme. I would say that I have definitely improved since then, and even towards the end of the summer, I find that I never give the same tour twice.



The “Stonewall” Jackson Shrine. Photo courtesy Jeff Martin.

Some of my more memorable interactions have occurred at the Stonewall Jackson Shrine, the building where Confederate General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson spent the last six days of his life. A lot of people who worship the myth of Jackson come to this place. It is a precarious balancing act: on the one hand, I want visitors to be as accurately informed as possible, meaning that I need to shatter the image of the perfect gentleman and soldier that many people have, yet on the other hand, I do not want to antagonize visitors. I have gotten a lot better with this over the course of the summer. I do not argue in a combative way with visitors, but I try to find a respectful way to inform them that Jackson did have flaws as a commander and that perhaps his death was not the only factor that doomed the Confederacy.

Upon reflection, I find that I am a much better communicator than I was when I left my home. I can explain complex ideas in a way that people without a Civil War or military background can fully understand. I think that my speaking skills have much improved, and I can attribute that to the interpretation department at this park. After a few weeks of training from them, I found that I was much better at talking to groups of people than I ever had been before. I do not stutter or pause as frequently as I used to. I project my voice so that even in large groups, people can still hear me clearly. I enunciate much more clearly than I did during my first week here. All in all, I am a better interpreter than when I first arrived.

While I do look forward to returning to Gettysburg, I also feel a tinge of regret at leaving Fredericksburg. I have learned so much in so little time, and can admit to having felt quite at home in this small city. I hope this was just the first of many summers spent working for the National Park Service, and perhaps I will find my way back down to Fredericksburg soon.

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