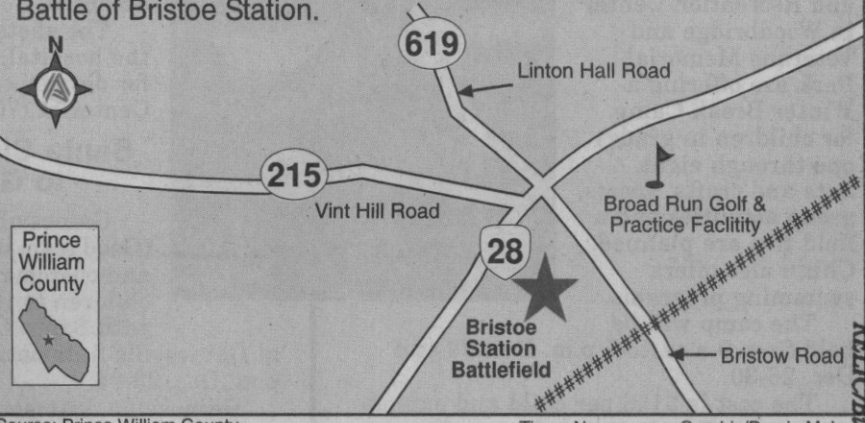


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Broad Run Regional Library

# Bristoe Station Battlefield

Historians are planning to create a heritage park on the site of the Battle of Bristoe Station.



Source: Prince William County

Times Newspapers Graphic/Damie Malor

# Saving Bristoe Battlefield to become county's newest park

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It's been more than 150 years since armies marched into Bristow. Since that time, hundreds of miles of asphalt have been paved across the county. Open fields where soldiers tramped have been replaced by townhouses and luxury homes. Even the names have changed — Bristoe Station got a new spelling, trading in the "e" for a "w."

But historians and officials have been working to ensure that some of the county's past is preserved, even as development continues at breakneck speed. And in their current preservation efforts, they've been aided by one of the area's largest developers.

On Tuesday, the Board of County Supervisors officially took possession of the Bristoe Station Battlefield in western Prince William.

According to Brendon Hanafin,

the county's historic preservation manager, the 127-acre parcel was proffered in 2001 by Centex Homes. Centex made the donation as part of the deal to win approval for its New Bristow Village development and, in 2004, gave the property to the Civil War Preservation Trust.

Now, the trust is giving that property to the county, to be used as a "heritage park."

"We're extremely pleased to actually have control over the property," said Board of County Supervisors chairman Sean Connaughton (R). "After First and Second Manassas, this is the third largest battle to have occurred in the county."

## The past

According to the National Park Service, Confederates who fought in

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HISTORIC SITE FILE: BRISTOE STATION BATTLEFIELD  
PRINCE WILLIAM PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM  
REDFORD Run Reg Lib Manassas, VA

# BRISTOE

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the battle referred to the clash at Bristoe Station as an "ill-judged attack," a "rash enterprise," and a "gross blunder." After the Battle of Gettysburg in the fall of 1863, both armies were decimated and withdrew into Virginia to recuperate.

Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee was the first to resume the offensive, leading his army across the Rapidan River in Culpeper to cut off the Union army from its supply base in Centreville.

But his opponent, Union Gen. George Meade, anticipated the strategy and retreated, with Lee in hot pursuit. On Oct. 14, Lee caught up with Meade at Bristoe Station, a stop on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad.

The battlefield is in and around the triangle now made by Bristow Road, Route 28 and the railroad tracks, just west of the airport. The battle started when the Confederates, led by Lt. Gen. A.P. Hill, prepared to attack Meade's army from behind at Broad Run. But as the Southerners advanced, another group of Union soldiers appeared on the right by

the railroad tracks and Hill gave the OK to change course — his Confederate troops wheeled around to attack these troops instead.

But Hill hadn't waited to see how many Union troops he was up against. Connaughton explained Tuesday that the Federal soldiers were lying in wait on and around the railroad tracks, which in those days were cut into deep trenches. That meant the Union army was almost hidden from view in a ditch that was about 10 feet deep. Hill, on the higher ground, couldn't see how many opponents he was up against.

"The Confederates had no idea how many were there," Connaughton said, adding that they knew some Union soldiers were by the tracks, but not that an entire brigade was waiting for them. "They just got slaughtered."

Nevertheless, the Southerners temporarily seized a portion of the railroad before being blasted back by Union cannons. After awhile, however, they were completely overwhelmed; most either

retreated or surrendered.

Eventually, Confederate reinforcements arrived and fought the Union to a standstill at dusk. But Lee had lost more than 1,300 men without any strategic gain. Meade's Union army suffered only 546 soldiers.

Hill was considered responsible for the Confederate defeat, since he had attacked the Federal troops without first stopping to reconnoiter the ground. According to the National Park Service, Hill tried to explain his decision to Lee the next day as the two surveyed the dead on the battlefield.

"Well, well, General," Lee reportedly said. "Bury these poor men and let us say no more about it."

## The future

That story is the one visitors will hear and read about when the park is opened to the public.

The county's Historic Preservation Division is currently working with the trust and with Centex Homes to install a trail system and his-

toric signs throughout the park.

The plans include not only the 127 acres donated by Centex, but also a much smaller key parcel, called the Faxon Estate tract. That six-acre site, located on the west side of Bristow Road, by the railroad tracks, was purchased by the Civil War Preservation Trust from a private owner for \$135,000.

The trust is selling that parcel, at cost, to the county as well. County officials said Tuesday that they will use proffer money donated by Centex to cover most of the cost of that purchase.

It's all part of the supervisors' concerted efforts to buy up and preserve as much of the county's historic property as possible. The next items on their agenda are the Civil War batteries along the Potomac in eastern Prince William and the battlefield at Buckland in western Prince William.

But first, they have to finish Bristoe Station.

"We expect to open the site to the public in the fall of next year," Hanafin said.