

On December 11, 1862, for the first time in history, a telegraph from the Phillips House transmitted orders from a rear headquarters to a front-line unit actively engaged in maneuver and, eventually, battle. At 3 a.m. that morning, at the Phillips House, the first messages on a newly-strung line to a was tapped out to a mobile receiver with Union General William B. Franklin's Left Grand Division, which would soon cross the Rappahannock River downstream from Fredericksburg. For the next three days, the mobile receiver would go where Franklin went. All the while, Franklin remained in direct communication with Burnside's headquarters at the Phillips House.

The following day, another line would be run from the Phillips House a mile to Chatham (the Lacy House). While the line was eventually extended across the Rappahannock into Fredericksburg, the receiver in fact never left Chatham. Still, by virtue of the war's first mobile telegraph, General Burnside was able to maintain almost instantaneous contact with both wings of the Union army engaged at Fredericksburg. This advantage did Burnside little good.



Phillips House (*Above: Before Destruction Below: After Fire*)

