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All-Access Battlefield Tours for Wheelchair Travelers

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Nestled on the banks of Virginia's Rappahannock River is the historic town of Fredericksburg and the storied county of Spotsylvania. Four major Civil War battles took place in this area leaving behind acres of significant sites. Debuting in the fall of 2011, **ALL-ACCESS BATTLEFIELD TOURS (LLC)** is a new private tour service designed especially for wheelchair travelers who wish to fully explore and experience these hallowed grounds.

AABT's all-accessible individual or group tours take visitors, their families and friends directly to historical hotspots while moving at their own pace. In order to provide a safe and comfortable expedition, visitors have the option of being transferred to customized travel wheelchairs that feature special wheels and canopies. These rugged outdoor chairs, combined with portable ramps, enable visitors to traverse fields, trails and roads that are otherwise inaccessible. Each experience includes complete accessibility assistance and the highest quality tours, featuring a unique staff of experts made up of local historians, authors and preservationists.

Founded by local Civil War historian and documentary film producer Michael Aubrecht, AABT is the area's only tour service specifically catering to wheelchair travelers. Aubrecht explained the genesis of the business. He said, "I have a few friends in wheelchairs who are also history enthusiasts. Until recently, I had no idea how difficult it was for them to enjoy a battlefield-trekking experience. After some consideration, I decided to put together a special service that focused on them. I selected three or four locations at each battlefield that could be managed safely and then developed special tours that still present the whole story." He added, "For example, our Fredericksburg Battlefield package includes a complete tour of the Sunken Road, Prospect Hill and the Slaughter Pen Farm. That's a three-hour trek that is safe, comfortable and paced for wheelchair travelers and their families. We tell the whole story, even though we can't get them to every hiking stop."

Grateful for all of the support that he has received, Aubrecht credits the generosity and help of others in establishing AABT. Mark Jones, a local wheelchair-bound historian, and his wife Christine provided their experience and expertise by testing out battlefield locations, consulting on the accessibility requirements and identifying safety concerns. Mark is also assisting Michael as a guide. Local historian and author John Cummings will be lending his expertise at the Spotsylvania Battlefield and Bill Oberst Jr., a friend of Aubrecht's and the actor who played General William T. Sherman in the History Channel's "Sherman's March," has accepted an invitation to act as the spokesperson for the organization. Other sponsors include Right Stripe Media LLC, the independent film company that produced the documentary "The Angel of Marye's Heights," and The National Civil War Life Foundation.

The Fredericksburg/Spotsylvania National Military Park Service approved AABT's permit to conduct the specialized tours. "The good folks at the local National Park Service have always been a tremendous help

to me in all my endeavors, from books - to films - and now this. They are the gold standard for battlefield tours and I am studying very hard to live up to their expectations." He adds, "I don't think I've researched like this since I wrote my last book. We are using NPS staff historian Frank O'Reilly's outstanding title *The Fredericksburg Campaign* as the reference source for our presentations."

Troy Technologies, a travel wheelchair company based out of Los Angeles, generously donated two custom-made Pioneering Spirit Wheelchairs complete with the accessories required to make battlefield trekking on four wheels an enjoyable experience. "None of this could have happened if we didn't have the proper accessibility gear," Aubrecht said. "When I was starting to develop the concept, I sent petitions out to twelve wheelchair companies, asking for their support. Nathan Watkins, the president at Troy Technologies Inc. was the first to call me back." He added, "I was immediately impressed by the durability and quality of their product line, as well as Nathan's enthusiasm and willingness to help. Troy Technologies really came through for us and I look forward to sharing a long relationship with them. They are also dedicated to expanding the freedom and mobility of wheelchair travelers and we are truly kindred spirits. Many folks will want to use their own wheelchairs, and if they are suitable, they may. However, others may not have the proper equipment for traversing the fields, farms and roads associated with these tours. In that case we have these special chairs available for a very minimal rental fee that are safe and comfortable." Portable ramps are also available to further enable touring comfort and mobility. All of AABT's tour stops are fairly level, with minimal grades and are adjacent to parking.

For a small fee to cover guides and operating costs, AABT is offering a primary three-hour wheelchair tour to Fredericksburg Battlefield, as well as optional trips to Chancellorsville, The Wilderness and Spotsylvania Battlefields. Stops among these choices include the Spotsylvania Confederate Cemetery, Salem Church and Ellwood. Special site requests may be accommodated if safety permits. AABT guides meet and greet patrons on site, at their location (home or hotel), or at one of the Visitor Centers.

Additional AABT plans are to offer special tours to the Wounded Warriors Project and find ways to benefit the Civil War Trust by bringing awareness to the importance of preserving battlefields. Thankful for the opportunity to share the past in the present, Aubrecht summed up the philosophy behind All-Access Battlefield Tours. He said, "Our goal is to make sure that visitors go where they want to go, see what they want to see, and experience what they want to experience."

All-Access Battlefield Tours officially opens for business on September 1, 2011 and will immediately begin booking weekend dates for the month of October. Tours will then run until mid-December, break for the winter season, and start up again in the spring. For more information, please visit www.pinstripepress.net/AABT.html, view [AABT's tour package brochure](#), or call 540-845-2767.

For more information on Troy Technologies custom, travel-ready wheelchairs, visit their website at www.travelwheelchair.net.

CONTACT BIO: Michael Aubrecht has been hiking Civil War battlefields ever since his parents surprised him with a weekend trip to Gettysburg at the age of 6. For the last 18+ years, he has lived here in Spotsylvania. Among Michael's books are two regional titles: *Historic Churches of Fredericksburg*, *Houses of the Holy* and *The Civil War in Spotsylvania*, *Confederate Campfires at the Crossroads*. Michael has written dozens of historical articles for the area's newspaper *The Free Lance-Star* and most recently, he co-wrote, appeared in, and produced the critically acclaimed documentary [The Angel of Mary's Heights](#). Michael is the vice-chairman of the locally-based National Civil War Life Foundation, He has provided the voiceovers for local Hometown History Quick-takes on AM1230 radio, lectured at nearby Mary Washington University, and given private tours on and off for the last 5 years.