



Dunker Church



Union Burial Detail



Aftermath of the Battle, Hagerstown Pike



Lower Bridge (Burnside Bridge)

## Antietam: the bloodiest one-day battle of the American Civil War

### CIVIL WAR—EASTERN THEATER HIGHLIGHTS

#### MARYLAND CAMPAIGN

<i>Secession from the Union begins</i> December 1860	<i>Lincoln inaugurated; Confederates attack Fort Sumter</i> March–April 1861	<i>First Battle of Manassas (Bull Run)</i> July 1861	<i>Second Battle of Manassas (Bull Run)</i> August 1862	<i>Battle of Antietam (Sharpsburg)</i> September 1862	<i>Battle of Fredericksburg</i> December 1862	<i>Emancipation Proclamation</i> January 1863	<i>Battle of Chancellorsville</i> May 1863	<i>Battle of Gettysburg</i> July 1863	<i>Battles of Wilderness &amp; Spotsylvania Court House</i> May 1864	<i>Siege of Petersburg</i> June 1864–April 1865	<i>Lee surrenders; Lincoln assassinated</i> April 1865
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A year and a half into the Civil War, Union victory was far from assured. Confederate forces were fighting successfully in the Eastern Theater (comprising operations mainly in Virginia). After his victory at the Second Battle of Manassas (Bull Run), Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee decided to move his army out of war-torn Virginia. On September 4, 1862, he led his over 40,000 Confederates across the Potomac River and through the lush Maryland countryside to Frederick.

Lee's Maryland Campaign—his first foray onto Union soil—was the most significant in a series of loosely coordinated Confederate incursions along a 1,000-mile front. Lee intended to keep

moving north into Pennsylvania, but his line of supply and communication into Virginia was threatened by the 12,500-man Union garrison at Harpers Ferry, Va. (now West Virginia). Lee therefore divided his army to neutralize this threat. Part of Gen. James Longstreet's command went to Hagerstown, Md., close to Pennsylvania. Three columns led by Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson surrounded Harpers Ferry and held Crampton Gap on South Mountain (see map at right). A third force, Gen. D.H. Hill's command, guarded the South Mountain gaps near Boonsboro, Md.

On September 12, Union Gen. George B. McClellan led the Army of the Potomac into Frederick,

#### PRELUDE TO THE BATTLE OF ANTIETAM (SHARPSBURG)



Md., just as the last Confederate soldiers were departing. Over the next few days a chain of events would draw all of these men together for the bloodiest one-day battle of the Civil War.

On September 13 a Union soldier found a copy of Lee's Special Order 191, his plan of operations for the campaign. This "Lost Order," as it has become known, was taken to McClellan, who realized that this was the time to strike Lee's divided forces. On the morning of September 14, Union soldiers engaged Confederates guarding the gaps on South Mountain. The day-long battle ended with the Confederates being forced from the gaps.

Lee considered returning to Virginia, but on September 15, after learning that Harpers Ferry had fallen, he reevaluated his plans. He would make a stand at Sharpsburg, Md., a quiet, 100-year-old farming community of some 1,200 residents.

*That night we lay in line of battle behind a small brick church called the Dunkers Church, situated on the Hagerstown Turnpike, with arms, and ready to move at any moment*

—William Snakenberg  
Private, 14th Louisiana

### MARYLAND CAMPAIGN

Union General McClellan placed in command and leads army out of Washington, D.C. September 2–5, 1862  
 Confederate General Lee crosses Potomac and marches to Frederick, Md. September 4–6, 1862  
 Confederates move toward Boonsboro, Hagerstown, and Maryland Heights September 10, 1862  
 Union forces arrive in Frederick September 12, 1862  
 McClellan obtains a copy of Lee's operations plan, Special Order 191 September 13, 1862  
 Battle of South Mountain; Union takes Crampton, Fox, and Turners gaps; siege of Harpers Ferry September 14, 1862  
 Harpers Ferry surrenders; Lee orders concentration of his army at Sharpsburg Creek, engage Lee's left, 6 pm September 15, 1862  
 Union troops cross Antietam Creek, engage Lee's left, 6 pm September 16, 1862  
 Battle of Antietam (Sharpsburg) September 17, 1862  
 Lee withdraws his army; recrosses Potomac River at Blackford's Ford Evening, September 18, 1862  
 Battle of Shepherdstown September 19–20, 1862  
 Lincoln issues the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation September 22, 1862  
 Lincoln visits Union Army in and around Sharpsburg and around Sharpsburg October 1–4, 1862

### Aftermath and Significance

For the people of Sharpsburg, the battle and presence of thousands of soldiers caused sickness and death from disease, and great property damage. Antietam made feasible the Emancipation Proclamation and reshaped the logistics of field medicine. It also influenced how the nation would memorialize battlefields in the future.



Sharpsburg Lutheran Church was damaged in the battle.



Seeing the bandages, lanterns, and food Clara Barton (above) brought to his Antietam hospital, Surgeon Charles Dunn christened her "The Angel of the Battlefield." In 1881 Barton founded the American Red Cross. She not only provided neutral assistance to soldiers in war but conceived and put into practice the provision of aid to civilians after natural disasters.

*"Comrades with wounds of all conceivable shapes were brought in and placed side by side as thick as they could lay, and the bloody work of amputation commenced."*

—Union Soldier George Allen

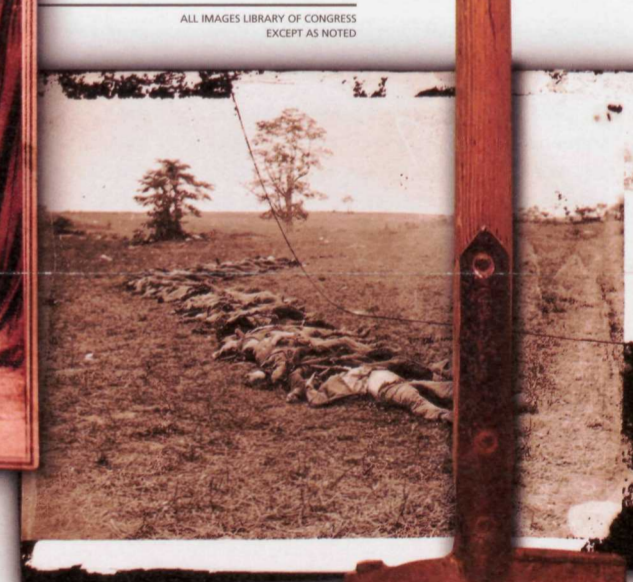


Field surgeon's bone saw

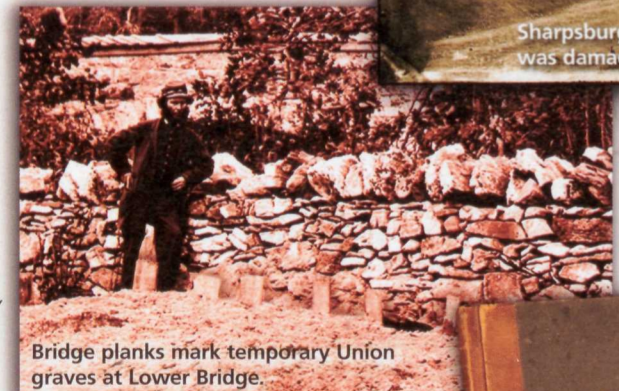
Hospitals were set up in barns, churches, homes, and make-shift tents (below) to care for over 17,000 wounded soldiers. The Hagerstown newspaper called the area "one vast hospital."



The battle created a legion of amputees (above). The shovel (far right) buried many dead, who often awaited burial for days, laid out (right) as though they died in their battle ranks.

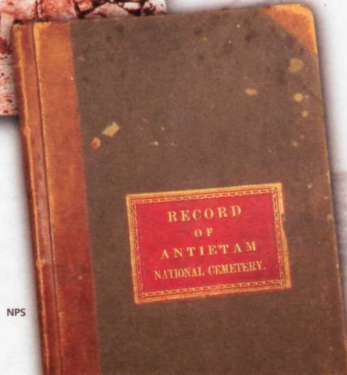


A revolution in combat medical care was put in place just weeks before this battle. Dr. Jonathan Letterman, chief medical officer, Union Army of the Potomac, established an ambulance corps to evacuate the wounded. He also adopted triage—a system of prioritizing casualties by the severity of their wounds.

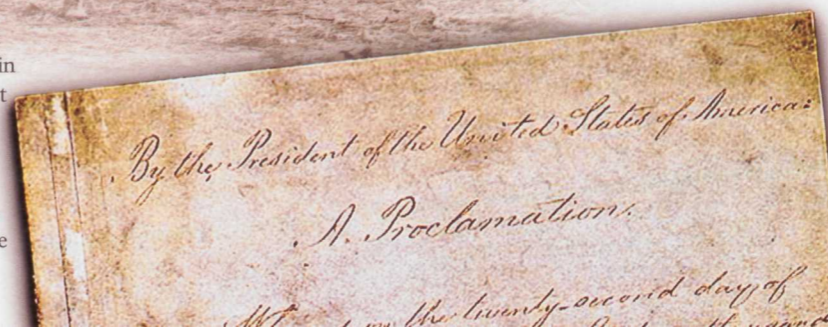


Bridge planks mark temporary Union graves at Lower Bridge.

Immediately after the battle over 3,500 dead were buried in farm fields surrounding Sharpsburg (background photo at right). Eventually Confederate soldiers were moved to three local cemeteries. Union men were re-interred in Antietam National Cemetery, their names (if known) recorded in the book at right.



The Emancipation Proclamation (right), released January 1, 1863, reshaped the war, freeing slaves in states in rebellion and giving the Union war effort two goals: preserve the Union and end slavery. Slaves could flee to Union camps and freedom or even join U.S. fighting forces. Lee's repulse at Antietam enabled the proclamation, and the two events kept Great Britain from intervening for the Confederacy.



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“... when bullets are cracking skulls like eggshells, the consuming passion ... is to get out of the way.” — Union Pvt. David L. Thompson

# The Battle of Antietam

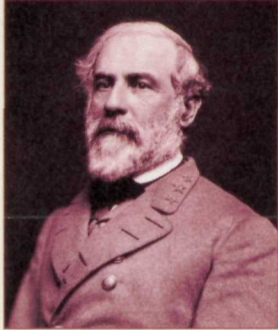
On September 15, 1862, Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee positioned his army along a ridge west of Antietam Creek. Confederate Gen. James Longstreet commanded the line's center and right, and Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson held its left. Behind them a Potomac River ford allowed retreat to Virginia. On September 15 and 16 Union Gen. George B. McClellan deployed his forces east of the creek. His plan: attack Lee's left and when "matters looked favorably" attack the Confederate right. Succeeding in either he

hoped to strike Lee's center. His plan was good but his instructions to commanders ambiguous. The 12-hour battle began at dawn, September 17. Three morning Union attacks struck the Confederate left, north to south. Gen. Joseph Hooker's First Corps made the initial assault, followed by Gen. Joseph Mansfield's Twelfth Corps. Part of Gen. Edwin Sumner's Second Corps made the final attack. McClellan's battle plan broke down in uncoordinated advances.

From 6 am until 10 am savage combat raged across the Cornfield, East Woods, and West Woods. By late morning fighting shifted toward the Confederate center (Sunken Road) in a three-hour stalemate that left the road forever known as "Bloody Lane." Most contested of the three bridges Union forces used to cross Antietam Creek was the Lower. At 10 am Union Gen. Ambrose Burnside's Ninth Corps began its assaults on the Lower Bridge. By 1 pm Federals had driven the Confederates from the bluff overlooking

the creek. Over the next two hours Burnside moved his men across the bridge and deployed them. When he again advanced on the Confederate right, Gen. A.P. Hill's reinforcements, arriving in late afternoon from Harpers Ferry, stopped him. The battle ended about 6 pm. The lines of battle had not shifted significantly from that morning. Of nearly 100,000 soldiers engaged in battle, about 23,000 were killed, wounded, or missing. Late on September 18, Lee forded the Potomac to Virginia. The Union Army held the field.

## CONFEDERATE LEADERSHIP



Robert E. Lee



Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson



James Longstreet



Daniel H. Hill



Ambrose P. Hill

## UNION LEADERSHIP



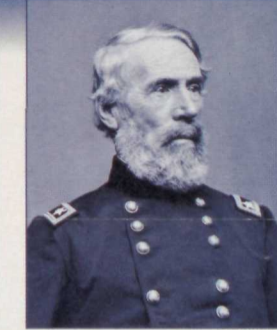
George B. McClellan



Joseph Hooker



Joseph K.F. Mansfield



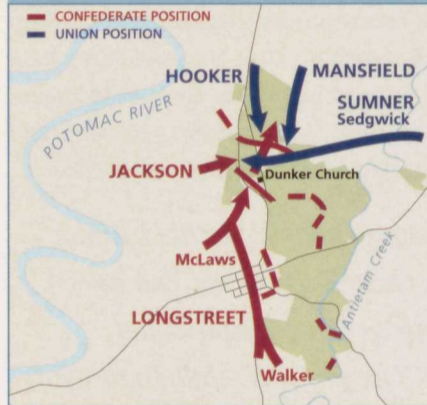
Edwin V. Sumner



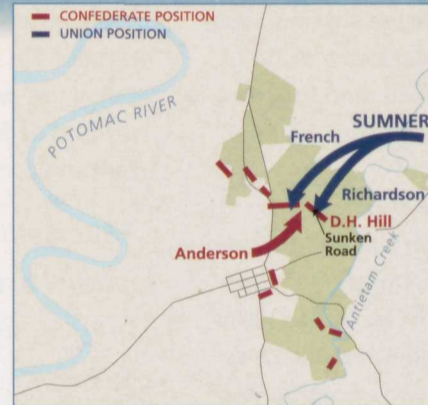
Ambrose E. Burnside

## TOURING ANTIETAM BATTLEFIELD

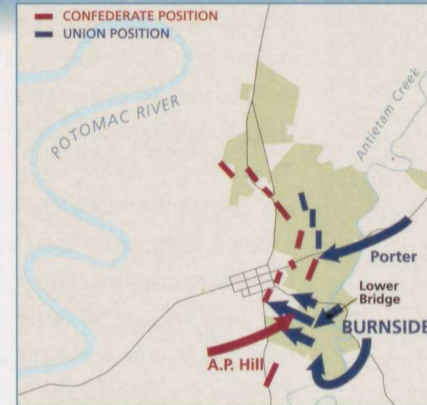
### Cornfield and West Woods



### Sunken Road (Bloody Lane)



### Lower Bridge (Burnside Bridge)



**1 Dunker Church** Built in 1852, this modest house of worship for pacifist German Baptist Brethren became a focal point for Union attacks the morning of the battle.

**2 North Woods** Union Gen. Joseph Hooker's men spent the night before the battle on the Poffenberger farm. At first light the Union attack advanced south from here toward Jackson's lines. "The stars were still shining when [Hooker's] skirmishers became engaged," a soldier would later recall.

**3 East Woods** A small engagement took place in this area the night before the battle. The fighting also opened here early on September 17 as Union and Confederate soldiers exchanged deadly musket volleys, vying to control these woods.

**4 Cornfield** This 24-acre cornfield saw some of U.S. history's most horrific fighting. For nearly three hours Hooker and Mansfield's Union forces battled Jackson's Confederates. Many regiments on both sides were cut to pieces. Hays' Louisiana Brigade suffered over 60-percent casualties in 30 minutes.

**5 West Woods** Around 9:30 am Gen. Edwin Sumner's Union soldiers advanced into the West Woods. The combined firepower of Confederate artillery and attacking infantry drove them back. In 20 minutes over 2,200 Union soldiers were killed or wounded.

**6 Mumma Farm and Cemetery** The only deliberate destruction of property during the battle was the burning of this farm. Confederate soldiers were ordered to burn these structures to prevent their use by Union sharpshooters. Fortunately, Samuel Mumma and his family had fled to safety before the battle. The Mumma family rebuilt the home in 1863.

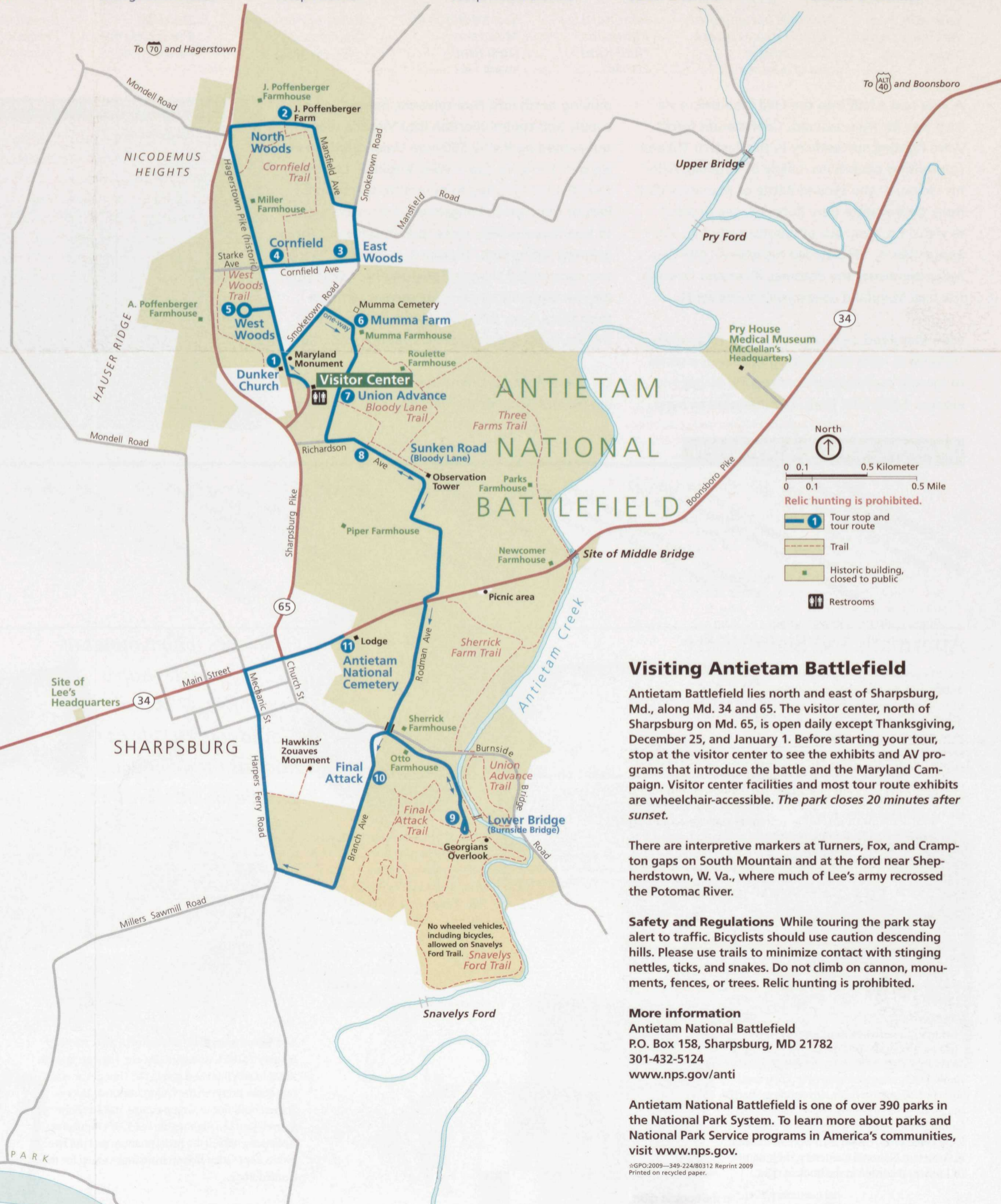
**7 Union Advance** During mid-morning nearly 10,000 Union soldiers moved across the Mumma and Roulette farms toward the Confederate center at Sunken Road. Two Union soldiers were awarded Medals of Honor for bravery in these attacks.

**8 Sunken Road (Bloody Lane)** This farm lane served as a breastwork for the Confederate center. For about three hours 2,200 Confederates, later reinforced by additional troops, held off the attacks of a combined Union force numbering nearly 10,000. Finally, just after noon, this thin gray line collapsed and fell back several hundred yards to the Piper Farm. The Union attackers had suffered too many casualties to pursue their advantage. Seeing the dead in the road an observer wrote, "They were lying in rows like the ties of a railroad, in heaps like cordwood mingled with the splintered and shattered fence rails. Words are inadequate to portray the scene."

**9 Lower Bridge (Burnside Bridge)** About 500 Confederate soldiers held the area overlooking the Lower Bridge for three hours. Burnside's command finally captured the bridge and crossed Antietam Creek, which forced the Confederates back toward Sharpsburg.

**10 Final Attack** After taking the Lower Bridge, Burnside moved across these fields from east to west, pushing back the Confederate right flank. Just as it appeared that Lee's line was breaking, Confederate Gen. A.P. Hill's Light Division arrived from Harpers Ferry to drive Burnside back to Antietam Creek.

**11 Antietam National Cemetery** This hill was occupied by Confederate artillery—neither this nor the town cemetery across the road were here in 1862. At first the dead were buried where they fell on the battlefield. Later they were reinterred here, along with Union soldiers who died in combat or in hospitals throughout the region. A total of 4,776 Union soldiers rest here along with dead from four other wars. Separate even in death, Confederate soldiers were buried in Hagerstown and Frederick, Md. and Shepherdstown, Va., now West Virginia.



## Visiting Antietam Battlefield

Antietam Battlefield lies north and east of Sharpsburg, Md., along Md. 34 and 65. The visitor center, north of Sharpsburg on Md. 65, is open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Before starting your tour, stop at the visitor center to see the exhibits and AV programs that introduce the battle and the Maryland Campaign. Visitor center facilities and most tour route exhibits are wheelchair-accessible. *The park closes 20 minutes after sunset.*

There are interpretive markers at Turners, Fox, and Crampton gaps on South Mountain and at the ford near Shepherdstown, W. Va., where much of Lee's army recrossed the Potomac River.

**Safety and Regulations** While touring the park stay alert to traffic. Bicyclists should use caution descending hills. Please use trails to minimize contact with stinging nettles, ticks, and snakes. Do not climb on cannon, monuments, fences, or trees. Relic hunting is prohibited.

**More information**  
Antietam National Battlefield  
P.O. Box 158, Sharpsburg, MD 21782  
301-432-5124  
[www.nps.gov/anti](http://www.nps.gov/anti)

Antietam National Battlefield is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

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