

Bloody Lane Trail

Attack and Defense of the
Sunken Road

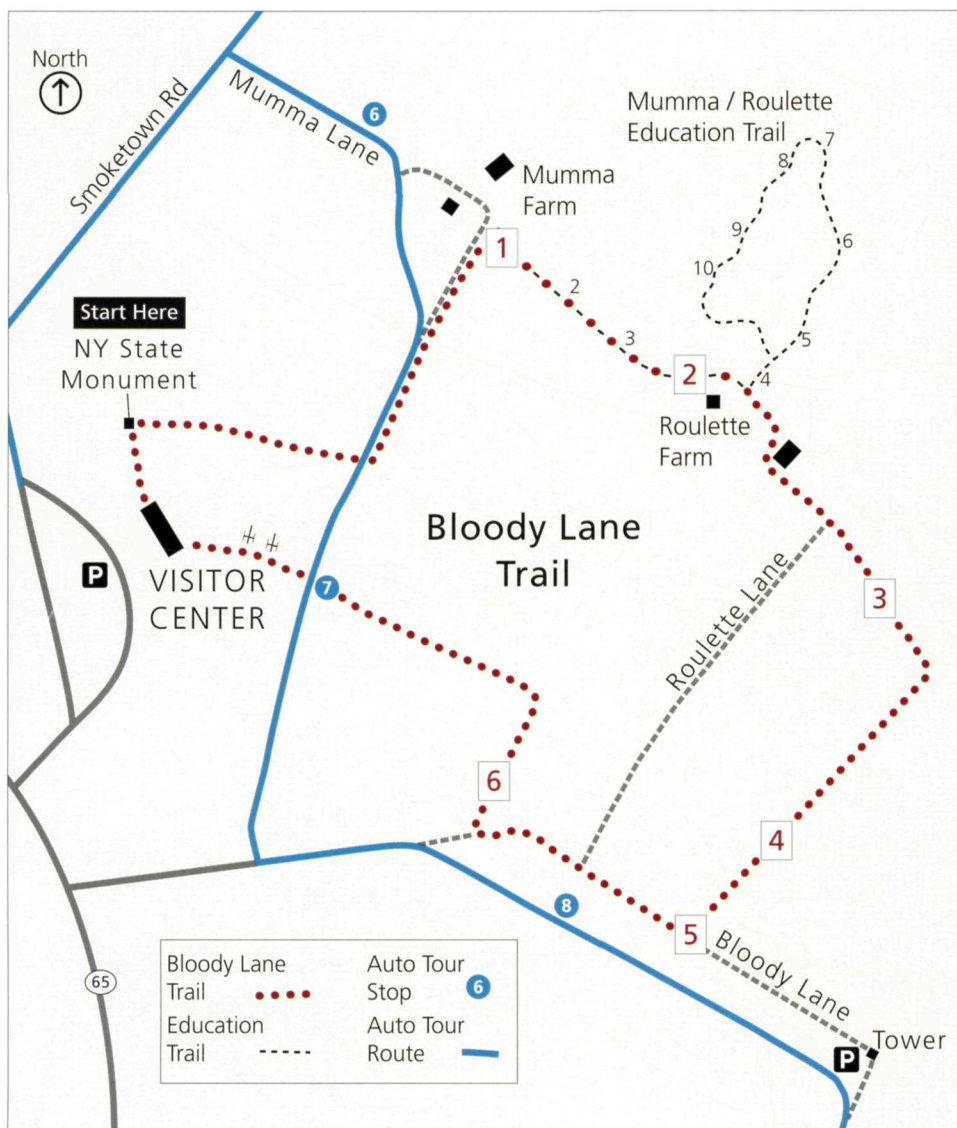


Introduction

The Bloody Lane Trail begins at the New York State Monument and ends near the cannon behind the visitor center. The trail is 1.5 miles long and should take approximately sixty to ninety minutes to hike.

As dawn broke on September 17, 1862, the Union 2nd Corps was

positioned on the eastern side of the Antietam Creek where they awaited orders to advance to the battlefield. At 7:20 a.m. Union Commander Gen. George McClellan directed Gen. Edwin Sumner, commander of the 2nd Corps, to move his three divisions of 15,000 soldiers across the Antietam.

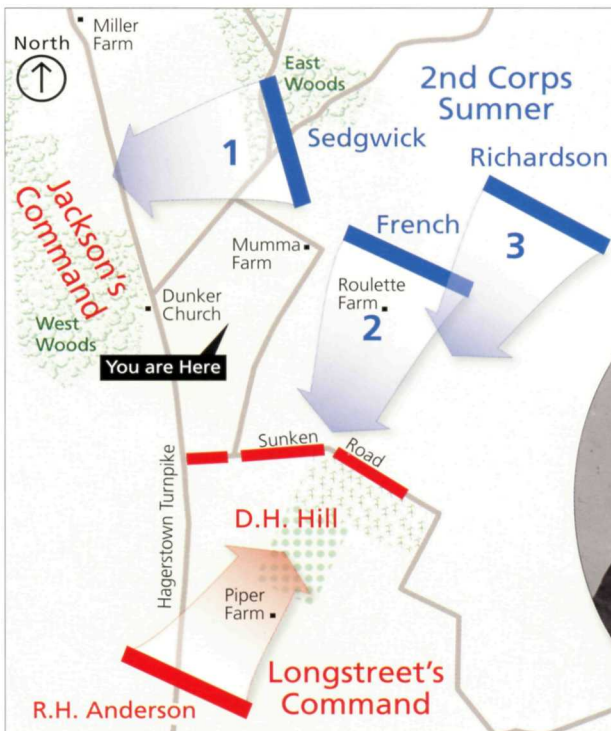


Gen. John Sedgwick, commanding the first division of over 5,000 men, waded the creek at the Pry Mill Ford. General Sumner personally led them toward the West Woods attempting to crush the Confederate left flank. **1** Sedgwick's Division was routed within twenty minutes when Confederates counterattacked into their flank, inflicting 2,200 casualties.

The next division to reach the field, commanded by Gen. William French, was about thirty minutes behind. Separated by time, distance and the difficult

terrain, French spotted a thin line of Confederate infantry and a few battle flags off to the south and moved to engage them. **2** Approximately one hour later the third division of the 2nd Corps, commanded by Gen. Israel Richardson **3**, moved to support French and both divisions engaged Gen. D. H. Hill's Confederate forces posted in the Sunken Road.

After more than three hours of appalling combat, 5,500 men were killed or wounded. The Sunken Road was forever after known as the Bloody Lane.



Born in 1797, Gen. Edwin Vose Sumner had served over 40 years in the Army when he led the 2nd Corps across Antietam Creek and into battle.



Walk down the hill, then left on the park road to the Mumma Farm. Look for the bulletin board just past the first outbuilding on the right.

Stop 1 - Mumma Farm

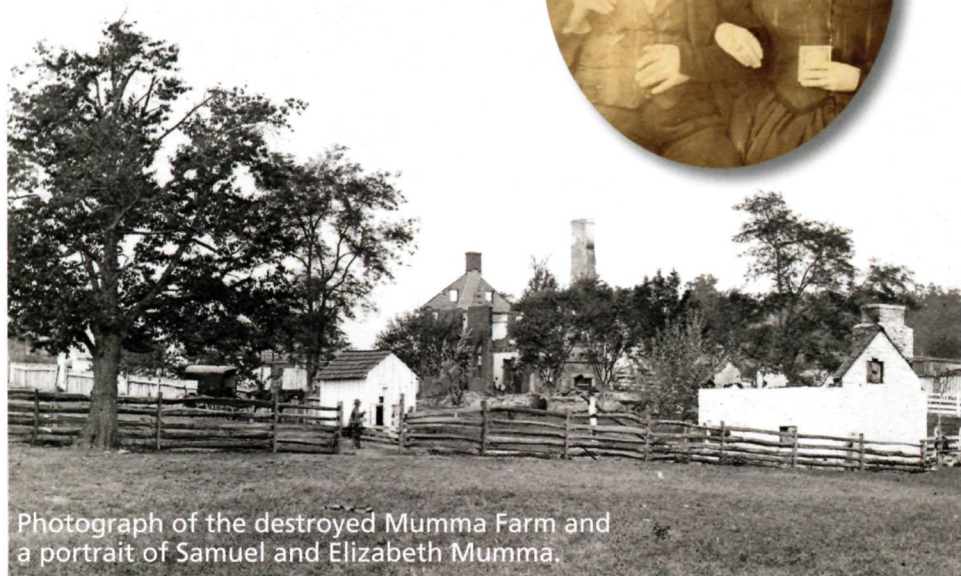
“...a set of farm buildings in our front were set on fire to prevent them being made use of by the enemy.”

Confederate General Roswell S. Ripley

The story of the Mumma and Roulette families demonstrates how they, as well as others in the community, suffered severely when the opposing armies converged on Sharpsburg.

Before the battle, Samuel and Elizabeth Mumma and their ten children fled the farm. As dawn broke on September 17, 1862, Confederate commanders feared Federal soldiers might capture the Mumma Farm and use the buildings as cover to fire at their men. Because of this, soldiers from North Carolina were instructed to set the home on fire. Throughout the morning of the battle, combatants from both sides wrote of the smoke and fire billowing from the home.

To receive compensation from the government, families had to prove that the damage suffered was caused by Union soldiers. Since the fire was started by Confederates, the Mummans received no money for their losses. With the help of other local families, the Mummans rebuilt their home and continued to live on their 186 acre farm until they sold it in 1885. Over the years it changed hands a few more times until the National Park Service purchased the property in 1961.



Photograph of the destroyed Mumma Farm and a portrait of Samuel and Elizabeth Mumma.

Stop 2 - Roulette Farm

“The battle caused considerable destruction of property here.” William Roulette

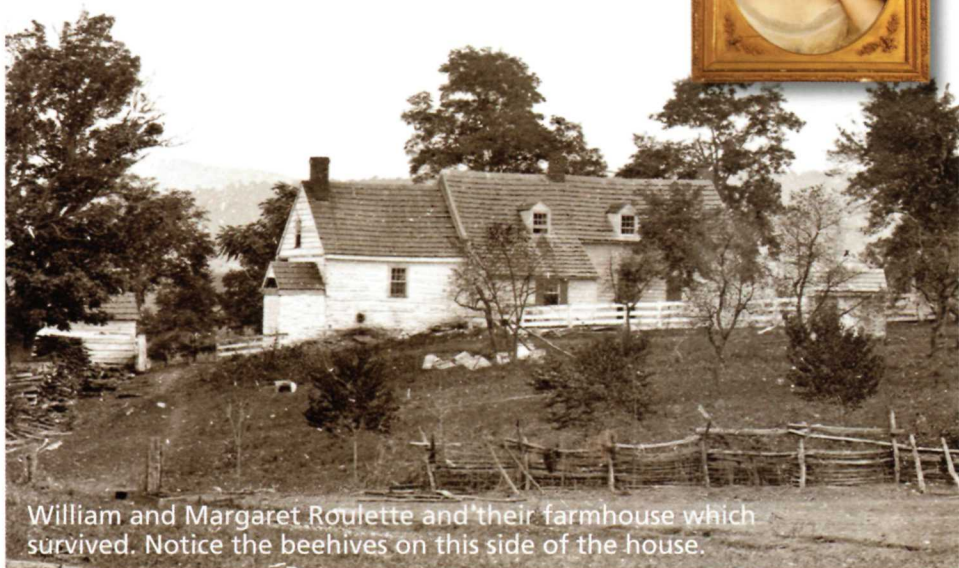
Thousands of Union soldiers tramped though the Roulette Farm as they marched toward the Sunken Road. As the troops from the 130th Pennsylvania neared the house, an artillery round smashed through the family beehives on the west side of the house. Pvt. J.D. Hemmingen remembered, *“The little fellows resented the intrusion and did unceremoniously charge upon us, accelerating our speed through the orchard toward the entrenched position of the enemy.”*

Extensive damage was caused by Union forces. William Roulette filed a claim and received compensation for damage to the beehives, fences, crops, and the use of the farm as a hospital. His claim also stated that

700 dead soldiers were buried on this farm.

The Roulette family suffered an even greater tragedy when their youngest daughter Carrie May died from disease brought by the armies.

Follow the gravel lane around the barn. Where it bends to the right, continue straight along the stone wall to stop 3.



William and Margaret Roulette and their farmhouse which survived. Notice the beehives on this side of the house.

Stop 3 - Uphill to the Sunken Road

You are standing at the center of the Union battle lines that were over 700 yards wide. French's Division advanced first and was mostly to the right, Richardson's Division followed and extended the line to the left. Every step taken, from here to the Sunken Road, will be in the footsteps of Union soldiers who made this advance to their unknown fate. In French's Division, 70% of the men had never experienced the horror of combat.

One of the soldiers in French's Division remembered how, *"an occasional shell whizzed by or over, reminding us that we were*



approaching the debatable ground. The compressed lip and set teeth showed that nerve and resolution had been summoned to the discharge of duty. A few temporarily fell out, unable to endure the nervous strain which was simply awful."

General French reported that upon *"encountering the enemy's skirmishers, charged them briskly, and, entering a group of houses on Roulette's farm, drove back the force, which had taken a strong position for defense."* Captain Sumner, son of the Second Corps commander, arrived carrying orders for French *"to press the enemy with all my force."* The General ordered his three brigades forward and his soldiers *"soon crowned the crests of the hills on our left and right, flaunting the regimental banners in defiance to those of the rebels who, flushed with a supposed victory, dared to face us."*

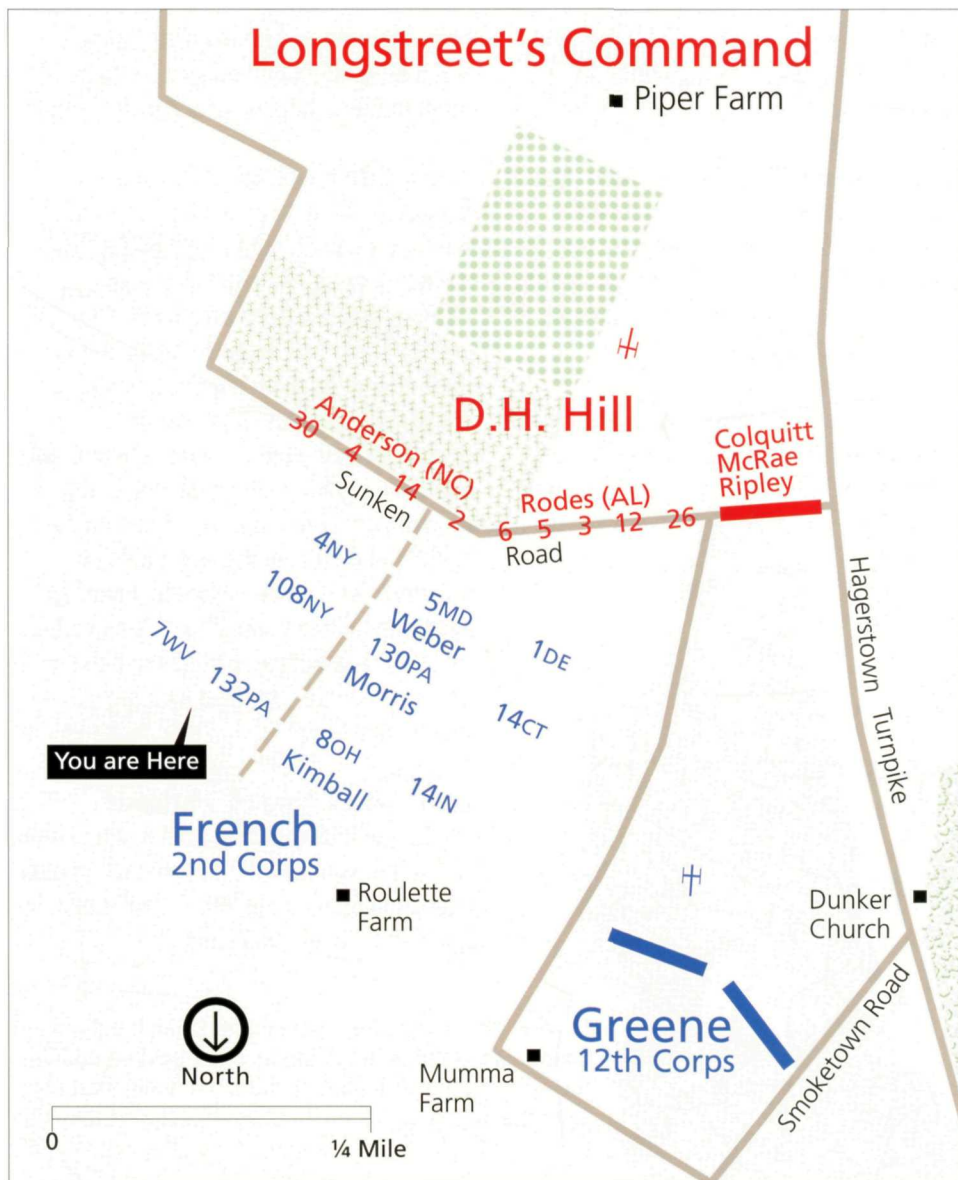
It is on the crest of the hill in front of you where both French and Richardson's men would meet the determined Confederates, deeply ensconced in the Sunken Road. Their advance was checked and for over three hours the blue and gray would blast away at each other at point blank range.

Gen. William Henry French was born in Baltimore, Maryland and graduated from West Point in 1837. He served in the Seminole and Mexican-American Wars. A career soldier, French survived the Civil War, retired in 1880 and died a year later in Washington, D.C. He is buried there in Rock Creek Cemetery.

Battle Map at Approximately 9:30 a.m.

“Directly on my front, in a narrow road running parallel with my line, and being washed by water, forming a natural rifle-pit between my line and a large corn-field, I found the enemy in great force. . . . As my line advanced to the crest of the hill, a murderous fire was opened upon it from the entire force in front. My advance farther was checked, and for three hours and thirty minutes the battle raged incessantly, without either party giving way.”

Brig. Gen. Nathan Kimball



Stop 4 - Fire!

It was here at the crest of the hill where the Second Corps soldiers did most of their fighting and dying. Frederick Hitchcock from Pennsylvania remembered how upon *“reaching the top of the knoll we were met by a terrific volley from the rebels in the sunken road down the other side, not more than one hundred yards away....The air was full of whizzing, singing, buzzing bullets.”*

Richardson’s Division arrived about an hour after French’s and replaced many of his shattered regiments. His supporting attack added over 4,000 muskets and extended the Union line of battle to the left.

Richardson’s advance was led by the famous Irish Brigade, commanded

by Gen. Thomas Francis Meagher. You are standing where the 69th New York Infantry lost 196 out of 317 men killed and wounded, or 62%. Further to the left was the 63rd New York Infantry who lost 59% killed and wounded. Captain Field of the 63rd remembered that *“the rebels seemed to have a special spite against the green flag.”* (the Irish Brigade carried green flags with golden harps and shamrocks)

The battle reached a tempest of flame, smoke and noise. As one soldier remembered it was *“a savage continual thunder that cannot compare to any sound I ever heard.”* Another wrote how, *“The air was now thick with smoke from the muskets that not only obscured our vision of the enemy, but made breathing difficult and most uncomfortable...we were forced to breath this powder smoke which burned the coating of nose, throat, and eyes almost like fire.”* A member of the Irish Brigade said that their lines of battle *“melted like wax before the fire.”*

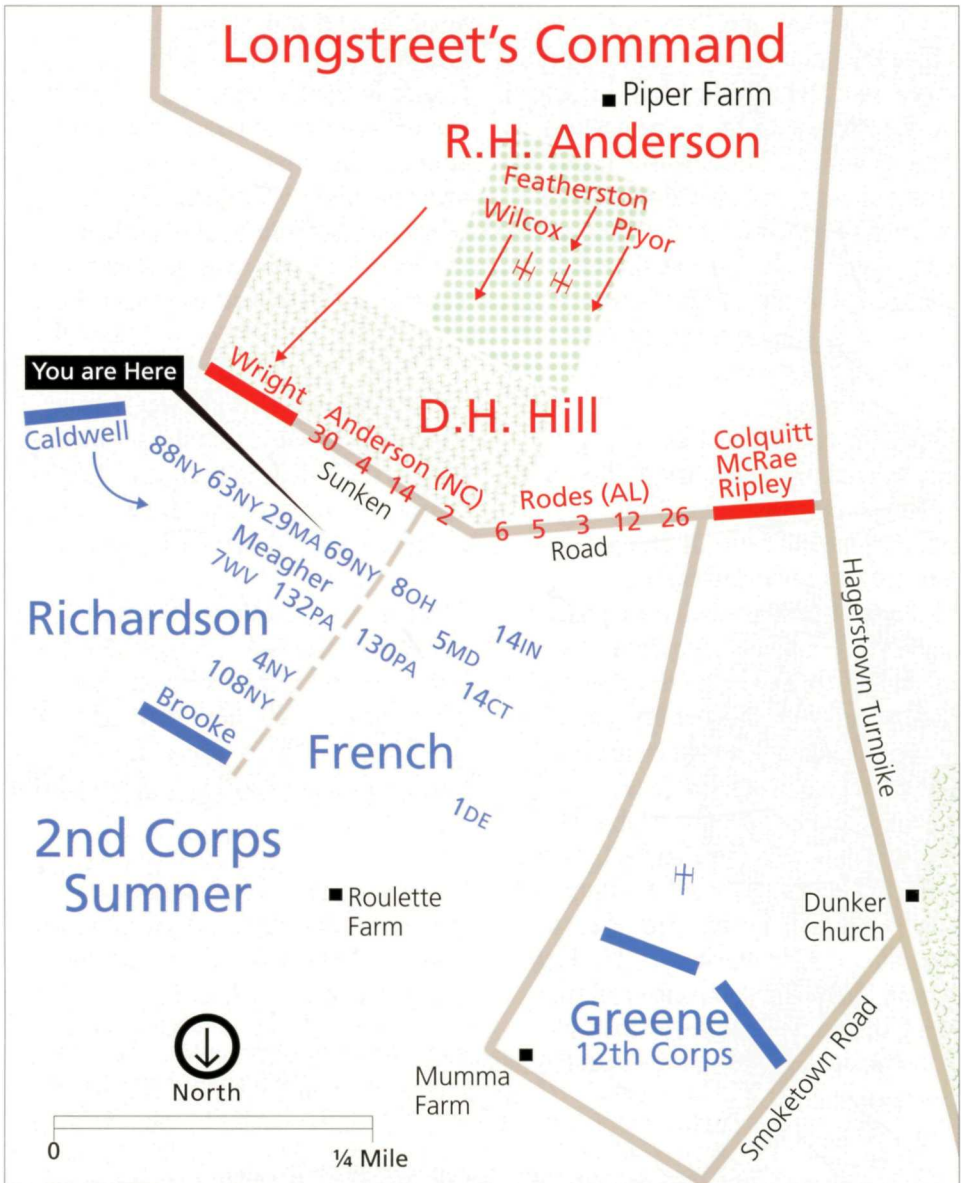
Gen. John Caldwell’s brigade replaced Meagher’s, and it was these soldiers that would eventually break through and drive the Confederates from the Sunken Road.

Born in Vermont, Maj. Gen. Israel B. Richardson graduated from West Point in 1841 and served in the Seminole and Mexican Wars. He was mortally wounded about 100 yards to your left and taken to Gen. McClellan’s headquarters at the Pry House where he died on November 3, 1862 at age 46.



Battle Map at Approximately 10:30 a.m.

“Despite the fire of musketry, which literally cut lanes through our approaching lines, the brigade advanced under my personal command within thirty paces of the enemy.” Brig. Gen. Thomas Meagher



Push on to the opening in the fence and into Bloody Lane. Once there, turn around and face the direction from which you came.

Stop 5 - Sunken Road to Bloody Lane

“My Rifles flamed and roared in the Federals’ faces like a blinding blaze of lighting” Col. John Gordon

As French’s Division drove toward the Sunken Road, approximately 2,200 Confederates anxiously awaited. Their muskets rested on the fence rails, which they had knocked down and piled up to strengthen their position. The Southerners clung close to this local short cut worn down by years of wagon traffic and erosion. Just before the Union advance, Commanding Gen. Robert E. Lee made an appearance to encourage his men.

The Confederate soldiers would have certainly heard the Federals before they saw them. Shouting officers and the din of clanging equipment announced the bluecoat’s approach. Then golden eagles appeared above the crest of the ridge, followed by the colorful battle flags, then bayonets, caps, faces, and shoulders appeared. It was at this point that the commander of the 6th Alabama regiment, Col. John Brown Gordon, remembered, *“With all my lung power I shouted fire!...The effect was appalling”* Col. Parker of the 30th North Carolina remembered that the Confederate volleys *“brought down the enemy like grain falls before the reaper.”*

For more than three hours, the combatants slugged away at one another at point blank range. Gravely outnumbered, the Confederates attempted to reinforce the hollowed out road with little success. At approximately noon, after numerous Federal assaults, the thin gray line broke. Union forces seized the road and drove the Southerners toward the Piper Farm.

While he attempted to reposition some artillery, Union Gen. Israel Richardson was mortally wounded. Following this, the command structure faltered and the Federal push towards Sharpsburg ended.

After more than three hours of fighting, little had changed. Neither side held the Sunken Road, the Union forces fell back toward the Roulette Farm while the Confederates regrouped around the Piper Farm.

5,500 soldiers were killed or wounded during the fighting in and around the Sunken Road, today known as Bloody Lane.

Walk down the lane, away from the tower. Turn right just after the 130th Pennsylvania Monument to Stop 6.



This shot riddled section of fence rail is said to have been found at Bloody Lane.

Confederate Defenders

James Longstreet

Longstreet, born in 1821, was a career soldier. At Sharpsburg, Longstreet commanded approximately half of Lee's Army. The Piper House, just a few hundred yards south, was his headquarters. During the desperate stand made by the Confederates after they were driven from the road, Longstreet calmly sat on his horse. He held the reigns of his staff officer's horses while they helped to load and fire a cannon at the advancing Union soldiers.



Daniel Harvey Hill

A North Carolinian, D.H. Hill was the general in direct command of the fighting in the Sunken Road. Hill was not related to Confederate general A.P. Hill, but he was brother-in-law to Stonewall Jackson. Hill made the decision to place his men in the road, not expecting to fight from this position, but to use it as a rallying point for soldiers falling back from the northern part of the battlefield. After the Confederate line in the road broke, Hill grabbed a discarded musket and rallied 200 men in an effort to stop the Federal breakthrough.



George B. Anderson

Anderson commanded a brigade of four North Carolina regiments and like many other commanders on this battlefield, Anderson attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Shortly after the fighting began at the Sunken Road, he was wounded in the ankle. In the days following the battle, the bullet which had lodged in Anderson's ankle became infected. On October 16, 1862, at the age of 31, Anderson died from complications caused by the wound.



Robert Rodes

Rodes command the brigade of five Alabama regiments in the Sunken Road. Before the war he graduated from the Virginia Military Institute and later went on to become an instructor at that institute. Rodes then was a civil engineer for an Alabama railroad company. He survived Antietam, but was mortally wounded in 1864 while leading his men at the Third Battle of Winchester.



Stop 6 - Medal of Honor

It was here where the First Delaware Infantry was on the front line of French's Division in their attack on the road. Lt. Charles Tanner remembered that in *"less than five minutes, 286 men out of 635, and eight of ten company commanders, lay wounded or dead on that bloody slope. . . and our dearly beloved colors were lying within twenty yards of the frowning lines of muskets, surrounded by the lifeless bodies of nine heroes, who died trying to plant them in that road of death."*

Tanner rushed forward to save his flag and *"while covering the short distance, it seemed as if a million bees were singing in the air. But I had reached the goal, had caught up the staff which was already splintered by shot, and the colors pierced with many a hole, and stained here and there with the lifeblood of our comrades, when a bullet shattered my arm. Luckily my legs were still serviceable, and, seizing precious bunting with my left hand, I made the best eighty yard time on record, receiving two more wounds."*



Lt. Tanner was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for saving the flag of the First Delaware.



"I REACHED THE GOAL"

Final Stop - Tompkins' Battery

As French and Richardson's Divisions attacked the Confederates in the Sunken Road, Captain John Tompkins and his Rhode Island Battery of six rifled guns moved forward in support. They provided additional firepower for the advancing infantry and counter-battery fire against the Confederate guns on the Piper Farm.

Incredibly, with the Mumma House burning behind him, Confederate artillery firing from his front, and an infantry attack that almost overran his guns from his right, Capt. Tompkins was able to hold this position for almost 3 hours.

He reported that, *"During the greater portion of the time I was engaged, the battery was without support, and exposed on its right flank to an enfilading fire from the rebel infantry. I report having expended 83 rounds of canister,*

68 rounds of solid shot, 427 rounds shell, and 454 rounds of case shot—1,050 rounds in all. With the exception of the shots fired at the battery on my right, which was hid by a ridge, every shot was fired at a visible enemy, the guns pointed with care, and the accuracy of aim and length of fuse noticed. I report 4 killed and 15 wounded. Six horses were killed and 4 wounded." Capt. Tompkins' uniform is located in the visitor center museum.



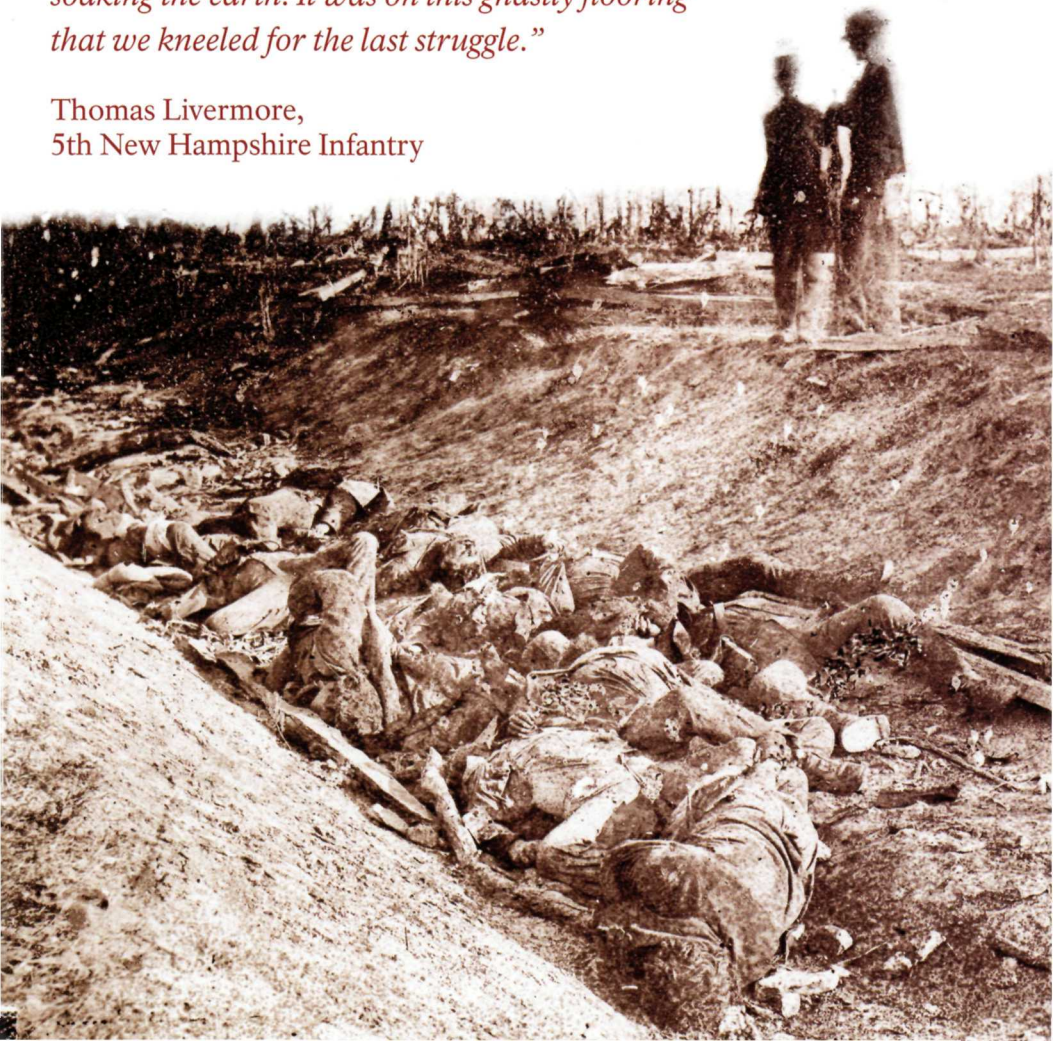
Conclusion

There are few places in America that so clearly evoke visions of courage, sacrifice, suffering and destruction as the Bloody Lane at Antietam. As you finish this hike, take a moment to reflect on the

landscape that you just explored, the footsteps followed, the farmer's fields crossed, where one soldier, who witnessed the carnage on September 17th described as a "carpet of red, gray and blue."

"On looking around me I found that we were in the old sunken road... In this road there lay so many dead rebels that they formed a line which one might have walked upon as far as I could see, many of whom had been killed by the most horrible wounds of shot and shell, and they lay just as they had been killed apparently, amid the blood that was soaking the earth. It was on this ghastly flooring that we kneeled for the last struggle."

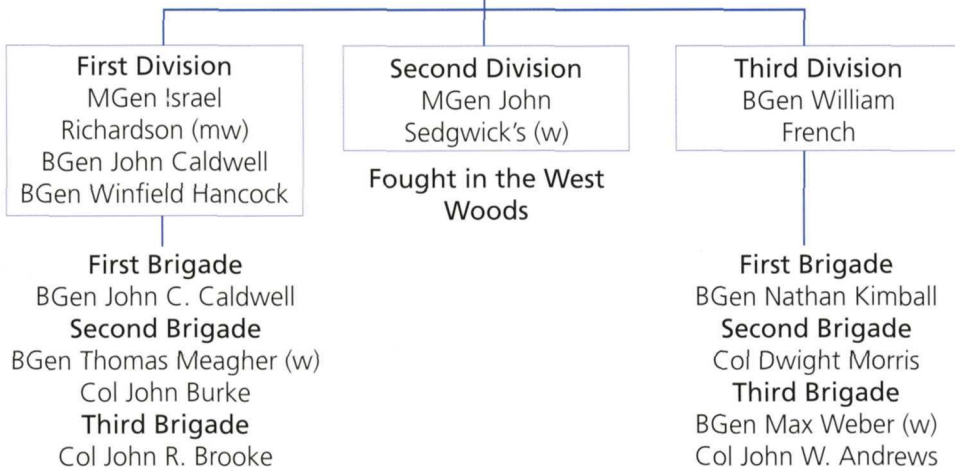
Thomas Livermore,
5th New Hampshire Infantry



Tables of Organization

UNION 2nd Corps

MGen Edwin V. Sumner
approximately 15,000 men



CONFEDERATE

Hill's Division
MGen Daniel Harvey Hill

Anderson's Division
MGen Richard H. Anderson (w)
BGen Roger Pryor

Ripley's Brigade
BGen Roswell S. Ripley (w)
Col George P. Doles

Rodes' Brigade
BGen Robert E. Rodes (w)

Garland's Brigade
Col D. K. McRae (w)

Anderson's Brigade
BGen George B. Anderson (mw)
Col R. T. Bennett (w)

Colquitt's Brigade
Col Alfred H. Colquitt

Wilcox's Brigade
Gen Cadmus Wilcox,
Col Alfred Cumming (w)
Maj Hilary A. Herbert,
Capt James M. Crow

Mahone's Brigade
Col William A. Parham

Featherston's Brigade
BGen Winfield S. Featherston
Col Carnot Posey

Armistead's Brigade
BGen Lewis A. Armistead (w)
Col James G. Hodges

Pryor's Brigade
BGen Roger A. Pryor
Col John C. Hately (w)

Wright's Brigade
BGen Ambrose R. Wright (w),
Col Robert H. Jones (w),
Col William Gibson

MGen = Major General
BGen = Brigadier General
k = Killed
w = Wounded



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