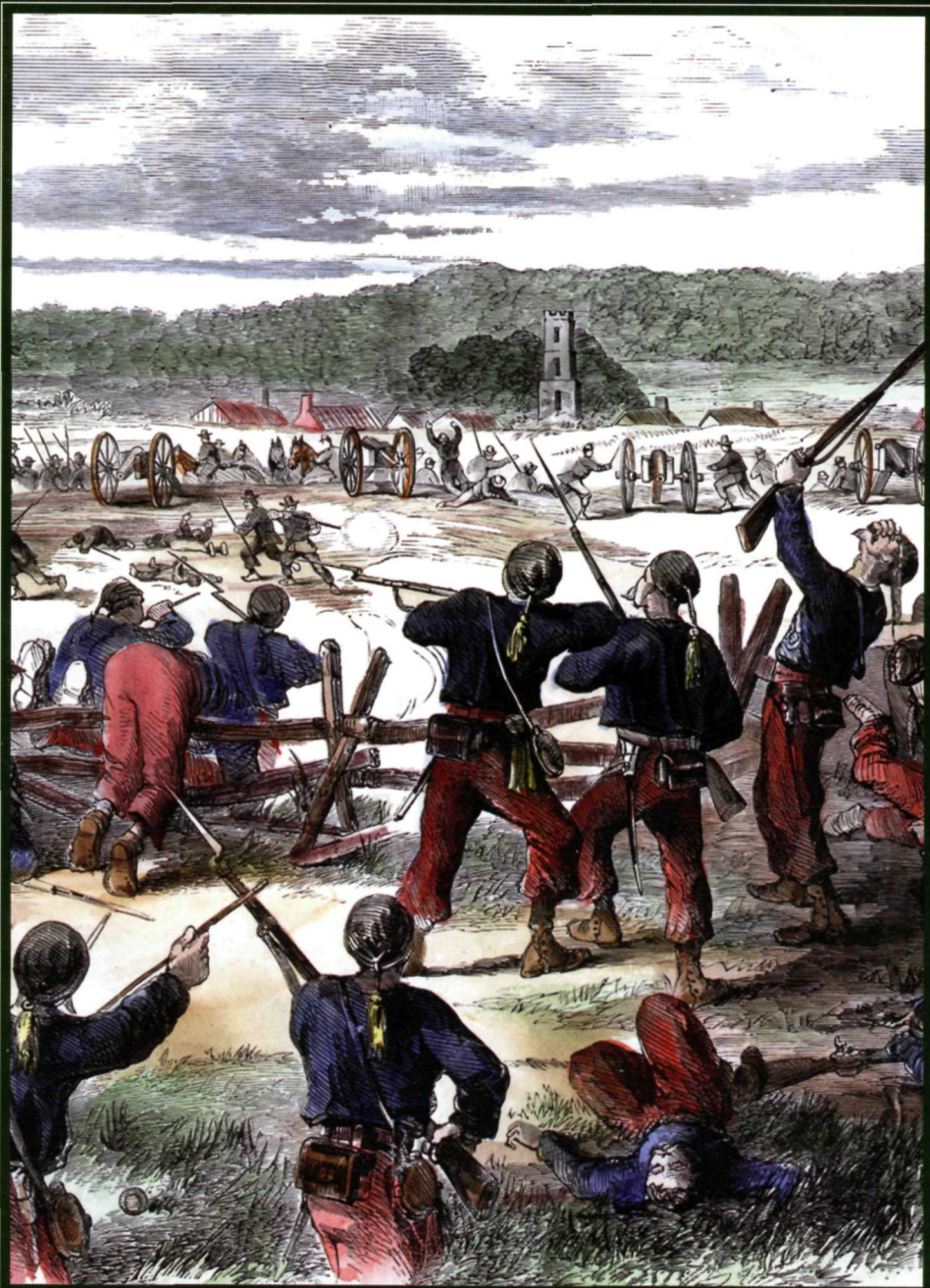


The Final Attack Trail



STOP 1 - Parking area at Driving Tour Stop 9

The Final Attack Trail begins at Auto Tour Stop 9. The trail is 1.7 miles in length and takes 60 to 90 minutes to walk. The terrain is rolling and the trail can be uneven, so good walking shoes are recommended and please stay on the trail.

In this part of the battle, which lasted from 3:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., there were five times as many casualties than there were in the action at the Burnside Bridge. Two Generals were killed and Colonel Harrison Fairchild's Brigade of Union soldiers suffered the highest percentage of casualties for any brigade in the Union army at the Battle of Antietam. These final two and one half hours of combat concluded the twelve hour struggle that still ranks as the bloodiest one-day battle in American history.

As you stand at the start of the trail imagine that it is September 17, 1862 and about 3:00 in the afternoon as you look west into the afternoon sun. There had been a three hour struggle for possession

of the crucial Antietam Creek crossing behind you. Finally the Confederates retreated from this high ground defending the bridge.

For two hours thousands of sweat stained, clanking, blue clad soldiers tramped by to your left and right in preparation for the final advance to drive Robert E. Lee's Confederate army from Maryland. Approximately 8,000 Union soldiers would resupply and reorganize into a mile wide line of battle and advance across the ground that you will walk.

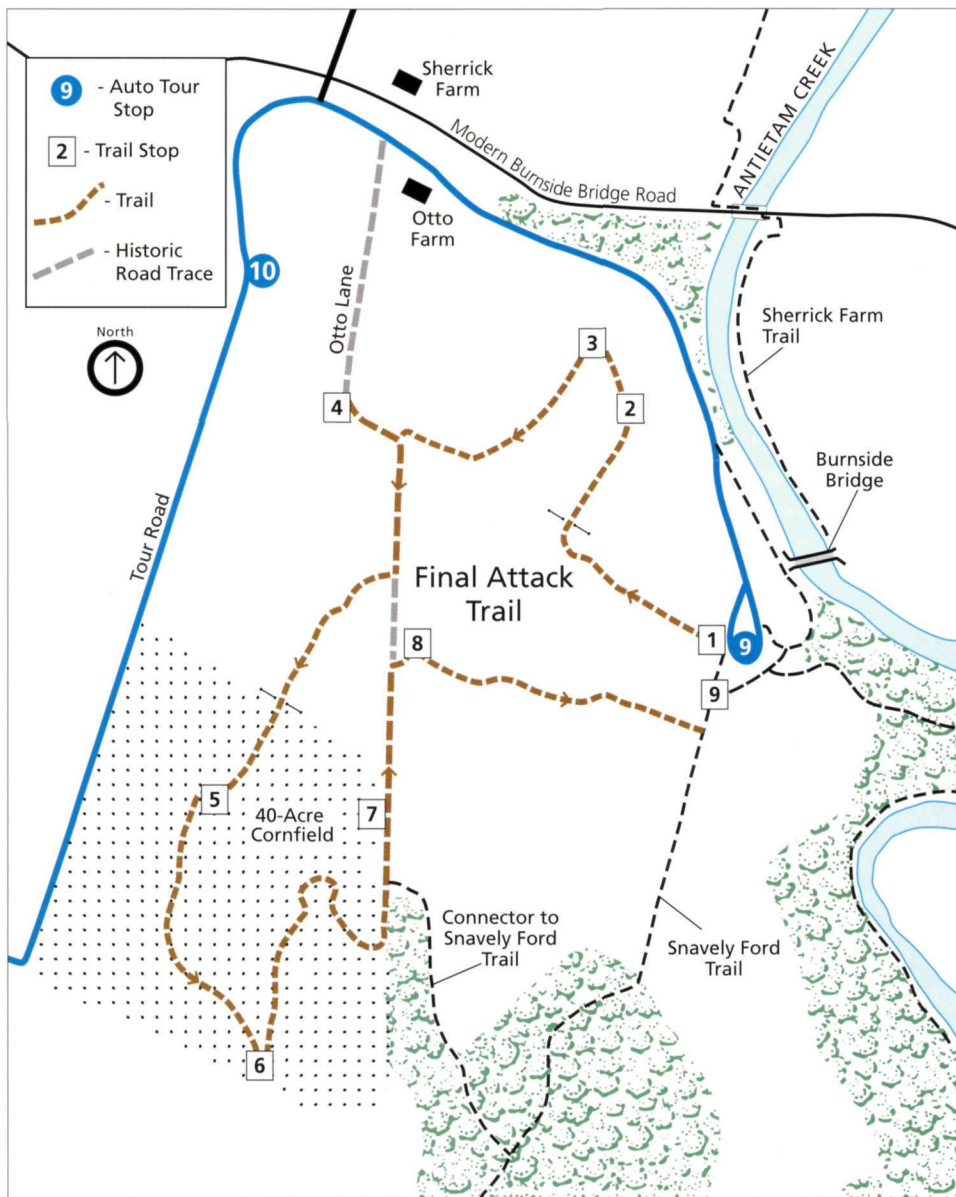
Things have quieted down on the north end of the battlefield, but the artillery in front of and behind you is still banging away as another battery of guns rumbles past with horses straining to pull their heavy load. Ahead is unknown, but you are sure the enemy is still there, and this might be your last day.

Lt. Gen. James Longstreet, Commander of the Confederate Right Wing and Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside, Union 9th Corps Commander.



Trail Map

The trail map below shows the Final Attack Trail, current woodlots and the location of the historic 40-Acre Cornfield. A battle map, table of organization and time line can be found on pages 12-14.



Stop 2 - Advance on Sharpsburg

The next two stops provide exceptional views of the Antietam Valley and the series of ridges and farms that the 9th Corps advanced across. At Stop 2 you are facing mostly east. Antietam Creek is at the bottom of the hill below you and the Burnside Bridge is 300 yards to your right. The Union 9th Corps gathered behind the hill on the other side of Antietam Creek and made their assaults on the bridge.

Once the Burnside Bridge was taken, about 8,000 Union soldiers

gathered on this side of the creek, many of them moving up the creek valley below you toward Sharpsburg. One other key feature is the cleared ridge line at the base of the mountain to your front right about ½ mile away. This was a crucial Union artillery location, where up to 24 guns dueled with Confederate artillery to the west.

As you continue on the trail toward Stop 3, you are heading in a more westerly direction.

Antietam Creek runs through the bottom of the valley

Union Artillery Position

Burnside Bridge



EYEWITNESS - *“We heard all through the war that the army was eager to be led against the enemy, but when you came to hunt for this particular itch, it is always the next regiment that had it. The truth is, when bullets are cracking skulls like eggshells, the consuming passion in the breast of the average man is to get out of the way. Between the physical fear of going forward and the moral fear of turning back, there is a predicament of exceptional awkwardness from which a hidden hole in the ground would be a wonderfully welcome outlet.”*

Private David L. Thompson, 9th NY Infantry, Fairchild’s Brigade

Stop 3 - Sherrick Farm

Notice the stone Observation Tower at the Sunken Road to the north. To the west is the modern water tower on the edge of Sharpsburg. In the valley in front of you is the Sherrick Farm. The farm was built in the 1830s by Joseph Sherrick Jr. and was leased to Leonard Emmert at the time of the battle. The Mumma family, whose farm on the north end of the battlefield was destroyed during the battle, moved into the Sherrick house while they rebuilt their farm. On the high ground behind the brick Sherrick house, marked by the tall evergreen trees, is the National Cemetery. Dedicated after the battle in 1867, this dominant ground was a farm field at the time of the battle. Confederate artillery was positioned there to take full advantage of this commanding

piece of terrain. In fact, several of the guns were aimed directly at the ground you are standing on.

Extending south (left) from cemetery hill was Brig. Gen. David R. Jones' Division with approximately 2,800 men. The rest of the Confederates on this end of the battlefield were moved north during the morning's action.

You are standing at about the center of Burnside's battle line. Rodman's Division on your left. Wilcox's Division extends almost 1/2 mile to your right (north). Scammon's and Sturgis' Divisions were in support. After suffering a withering artillery barrage, the 9th Corps began their advance about 3:00 p.m.

Photograph of the Sherrick Farm taken by Alexander Gardner just after the battle.



From here the trail continues west and down towards the historic Otto Lane. You are walking in the footsteps of the Union advance.

Stop 4 - Otto Lane Respite

As you enter the historic Otto Lane the trail continues south (left). However, first walk down to the 11th Ohio Monument for stop 4, then come back and rejoin the trail.

This entire trail is located on the Otto Farm. John and Kate Otto's home is just to the north down this historic farm lane. You passed the house on your drive to the Burnside Bridge. One of Otto's two slaves, Hillary Watson, remembered how on September 16th, *"The hill at our place was covered with the Rebels. They'd walk right into the house and say, 'Have you got anything to eat?' like they was half starved. . . The Union troops, who come into our place few days later, wasn't so hungry. The rebels was always hungry, and the men were miserable dirty."* Hillary Watson was emancipated, but stayed on the farm. Later he bought several pieces of property and lived in Sharpsburg. After the battle the Otto and Sherrick Farms served as a field hospitals, primarily for the men of the 9th Corps.

After they advanced under the terrible fire from rifles and cannons to this point, Union soldiers would use this gully that you are standing in to seeking respite from the terror. Col Harrison Fairchild's small brigade with the 9th (Hawkins Zouaves), 89th and 103rd New York Infantry (about 940 men) continued on, driving farther west than any other brigade in the 9th Corps. They paid dearly for their bravery with approximately 48% of their men killed and wounded, a higher percentage than any other Union brigade in the battle. A member of the 9th New York remembered that *"The loss was frightful."* As you walk, look at the top of the hill. The tall obelisk is a monument dedicated to the 9th New York and it marks their farthest advance.

Supporting Fairchild was Col George Crook's Brigade with the 11th, 28th and 36th Ohio who also advanced to this spot. The veterans of the 11th Ohio would return and dedicate this monument in 1903.

EYEWITNESS - *"After reaching the crest of the hill we had to pass over quite a stretch of ground before we commenced descending into a hollow lying between the ridge occupied by the enemy and ourselves. The enemy not only had a direct, but a cross fire on us. It was going down this slope that Col Clark [Col Melvin Clark, 36th Ohio, Crook's Brigade] commanding the 36th was killed by a round shot that came from our left. It struck him sideways, just above the hips, tearing him almost in twain. He died almost instantly."*

Colonel George Crook, 2nd Brigade, Kanawha Division

Backtrack to the trail which follows Otto Lane south. You are paralleling the Union lines of battle.

Stop 5 - Caught in the Corn

The 16th Connecticut (CT) was one of many new regiments in McClellan's army. The regiment *"had received no drill, no discipline, few instructions, even in marching. It was little more than a crowd of earnest Connecticut boys."* It was the 16th CT and the 4th Rhode Island (RI) of Col. Edward Harland's Brigade that took much of the onslaught of the Confederate counterattack in the 40-Acre Cornfield. When looking back on his experiences, William Relyea of the 16th CT reflected that *"When my mind goes back to that bloody field of Antietam, that wreck of human flesh, my blood curdles in my veins."*

The 8th Connecticut was on the 16th's right in the open field north of the corn. Marching faster outside of the corn the 8th advanced forward with Fairchild's brigade, leaving the 16th CT and 4th RI on the flank of the entire Union army.

It was upon this flank, in the head high corn of the 40-Acre Cornfield that Maj. Gen. Ambrose Powell Hill would make the Confederate's

final attack. Hill's men had been left behind after the capture of Harpers Ferry to tend to the details of the surrender of the Union garrison. Lee ordered Hill to join the army as soon as possible. Known as the Light Division, Hill's approximately 3,500 men left Harpers Ferry at 7:00 a.m., marched fifteen grueling miles, waded across the Potomac River and arrived about 4:00 p.m. Three of Hill's five brigades, about 2,500 men, would arrive in time to attack.

A.P. Hill wrote how, *"My lines advanced and soon encountered the enemy. This advance was made in the face of the most tremendous artillery fire I ever saw, and too much praise cannot be awarded to my regiments for the steady, unwavering step. It was as if each man felt that the fate of the army centered in himself."*

The 16th
Connecticut
Monument



EYEWITNESS - *"We were in a field of thick heavy corn where you could not see twelve feet ahead and things were somewhat mixed at times. . . all at once looking up to the left I saw a rebel brigade which had outflanked us so prettily forming with the utmost order and coolness. . . I am frank to confess that although I had no idea of running away, I trembled. You may call the feeling fear or anything you choose for I don't deny that I trembled and wished we were well out of it."*

Pvt. John Burnham, 16th Connecticut Infantry, Harland's Brigade

From here the trail continues south, through what was the 40-Acre Cornfield to the southern most boundary of the park.

Stop 6 - The End of the Line

You have walked to the extreme southern end of the battlefield and have completed a mile of the 1.7 mile trail. The stone wall below the majestic hackberry tree is the park boundary. You are beyond the 16th Connecticut, the 4th Rhode Island and southern flank of the Union army.

Once again, it was on this end of the field that A.P. Hill's Confederate's made their counterattack to support D. R. Jones' division that was being pushed back to Sharpsburg. It was Brig. Gen. Maxcy Gregg's Brigade that attacked right across this hill top and into the 4th RI and 16th CT. One of the men in Gregg's command remembered, *"Running rapidly forward through the corn, we stopped at the top of the hill and poured a galling fire into the fleeing foe. Many of them stopped in a little hollow in the corn at the foot of the hill, afraid to attempt the passage of the open slope beyond. Into them grouped here in a crouching disorderly line we poured volley after volley, doubtless with terrible execution."*

Divisional commanders D.R. Jones and A.P. Hill would not survive the war. Nor would the three Confederate brigade commanders who made this final attack at Sharpsburg.



Maj. Gen.
A. P. Hill
killed Apr 2, 1865

Brig. Gen.
David R. Jones
died Jan 15, 1863



Brig. Gen.
Maxcy Gregg
killed at Battle of
Fredericksburg,
Dec 13, 1862



Brig. Gen.
Lawrence O'Brian
Branch
killed on the hill in
front of you Sept
17, 1862



Brig. Gen.
James J. Archer
died Oct 24,
1864



From here the trail turns north. You will be walking in the footsteps of BGen. Gregg's Brigade as they attacked Burnside's flank.

Stop 7 - Final Attack Vista

You are overlooking one of the best battle panoramas at Antietam. From this spot you can see most of the ground covered in the 9th Corps advance and A.P. Hill's counterattack. The 4th Rhode Island and 16th Connecticut Infantry were below and in front of you. They constituted the left flank of the entire Union army that stretched for close to three miles to the north. These two regiments were slowed by the difficult terrain and the corn. The 8th Connecticut, also part of Harland's Brigade pushed on, advancing with Fairchild's men all the way to the top of the far hill. This created a huge gap in the line and it was into this gap where most of Hill's Confederates would strike.

Looking west toward the 16th CT monument, you are standing on the eastern edge of the 40-Acre Cornfield. Gregg's Brigade, South Carolinians, attacked from your left (south). North Carolinians in Branch's Brigade drove right (north) across the highest ground in front and into the flank of the 8th CT and Fairchild's Brigade. Archer's Brigade, men from Tennessee,

Isaac Peace Rodman

Born in 1822, Rodman put aside his Quaker beliefs to serve his country. Rodman commanded a division of 3,200 soldiers until he was shot in the chest on the hill in front of you. Taken to a field hospital, General Rodman died on September 20, 1862. He is buried in his family's cemetery in Peace Dale, Rhode Island.



Alabama and Georgia, moved between Gregg and Branch, turned and drove toward you. The 30th and 23rd Ohio moved up to meet them where the tour road is today.

The 4th RI and 16th CT tried to hold but as one soldier described they, "*stood for a few minutes trying to rally, swept by a destructive cross fire...Men were falling on every hand.*" The new soldiers gave way, exposing the flank of the Ohio men where Major Hildt of the 30th stated that "*a withering fire was directed from our left flank, from which we suffered severely.*" They withdrew, further exposing Fairchild's men and the 8th CT at the top of the hill who were forced to retreat. The entire 9th Corps collapsed from left to right and fell back towards the bridge.

A soldier in the 9th Corps remembered how "*the conflict died away, the enemy also had got all the fighting they wanted for the day. It had been an afternoon in the valley of death.*"

Stop by the 12th Ohio Monument then continue north along the ridge line.

Stop 8 - Artillery Ridge

This ridge line was used by the artillery of both sides. Early in the battle two Confederate batteries held this ground and used it to hold Burnside's men at bay. Capt. Benjamin Franklin Eshleman's and Capt. John Richardson's batteries each had four smoothbore cannons and were both part of the famous Washington Artillery of New Orleans. Eshleman pulled out at noon to move south and cover Snavelys Ford. Richardson moved west to higher ground at 1:00 p.m. firing at the advancing 9th Corps and dueling with the Union artillery that then took position here.

After the bridge was taken and the Southern cannon left this ridge, two U.S. batteries would pull into the same position facing in the opposite direction. Four rifled cannons of Capt. Joseph Clark's Battery E, 4th U.S. joined six rifled guns of Capt. George W. Durrell, Independent Battery D, PA Light Artillery. West Point graduate Capt. Clark wrote

how when taking position here, *"my 1st Lt. was killed. My horse killed under me, and I was wounded by a bursting shell. I received four bullets—one through the bridle glove and left thumb, one above the knee joint, one through the thigh and one above the hip of my right leg."* Capt Clark would survive the war, but on September 17, command of the battery fell to Sergeant C. F. Merkel who fought the battery until dark.

At the other Union guns, Lt. Charles Cuffel of Durrell's battery remembered that *"the cannonading was very heavy, each side appearing to employ all the guns at their command, and to use them with utmost vigor. The air seemed to be filled with shrieking missiles, and there was ocular evidence on every hand that somebody was getting hurt."* Such was the devastating barrage that emanated from, and fell upon this ground.

Durrell's battery in action at Antietam



From here the trail turns east. You are now headed back towards the Burnside Bridge.

Final Stop - The McKinley Monument - Soldier, Statesman and Martyr

Ohioan William McKinley survived the Civil War, only to be killed by an assassin's bullet while serving as the nation's 24th President.

Sergeant McKinley was a Commissary Sergeant with the 23rd Ohio of Colonel Hugh Ewing's Brigade. During the battle, Sergeant McKinley bravely served the soldiers in his regiment. Another U.S. President from the same Civil War regiment, Rutherford B. Hayes said that, *"Early in the afternoon, naturally enough, with the exertion required of the men, they were famished and thirsty, and to some extent broken in spirit. The commissary department of that brigade was under Sergeant McKinley's administration and personal supervision."*

"From his hands every man in the regiment was served with hot coffee and warm meats.... He passed under fire and delivered, with his own hands, these things, so essential for the men for whom he was laboring."

After the war, McKinley served as a Congressman and Governor of Ohio. He was twice elected as President before he was shot by anarchist Leon Czolgosz at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. Shot on September 6, 1901, the President held on for eight days before succumbing to his wound on September 14th. This monument was dedicated in his memory two years later on October 13, 1903.



Soldier, 23rd Ohio

President McKinley

Assassination

Conclusion

Burnside's advance and A.P. Hill's counterattack concluded the twelve hours of fighting on September 17, 1862. On this end of the battlefield the Union men fell back to where you started this walk. The difficult terrain, the confusion of battle, and a timely Confederate arrival all combined to stop the Union army and led to a tactical draw.

General Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia held their ground on the 18th, then withdrew back across the Potomac River to Virginia. This battle ended the first Northern invasion by the Confederacy and provided Abraham Lincoln an opportunity to issue the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation.



“As the sun sank to rest on the 17th of September, the last sounds of battle along the Antietam Creek died away. The canon would at last grow cool, and unwounded men and horses could enjoy rest and food, but there were already thousands sleeping the sleep that knows no waking, and many times as many thousands were suffering all the agonies that attend on wounds. The corn the trees, so fresh and green in the morning were reddened with blood and torn by bullet and shell; and the very earth was furrowed by the incessant impact of lead and iron.”

The blessed night came, and brought with it sleep and forgetfulness and refreshment to many, but the murmur of the night wind, breathing over fields of wheat and clover, was mingled with the groans of the countless sufferers of both armies. Who can tell, who can imagine the horrors of such a night, while the unconscious stars shown above, the unconscious river went rippling by.”
Francis Palfrey, Lieutenant Colonel, 20th Massachusetts Infantry

Time Line of Burnside's Attack (all times are approximate)

- Daybreak Battle starts on the northern end of the battlefield when the Union 1st Corps attacked the Confederate left flank.
- 9:00 a.m. McClellan's order was prepared for the 9th Corps to begin their attack on the Confederate right flank on the southern end of the battlefield.
- 9:30 a.m. Union attack on the Sunken Road began.
- 10:00 a.m. Burnside received attack order and the initial assault on the Lower (later Burnside) Bridge began with the advance of the 11th Connecticut Infantry. Brig. Gen. Isaac Rodman's division plus Col. Hugh Ewing's Brigade of the Kanawha Division were sent downstream.
- 11:00 a.m. Brig. Gen. James Nagle's Brigade, Sturgis' Division, attacked toward the Bridge.
- 12:00 noon Brig. Gen. Edward Ferrero's Brigade of Sturgis' Division began their assault on the Bridge.
- 12:30 p.m. Confederate position at the Sunken Road collapses, Union soldier's force the defenders from their entrenched position.
- 1:00 p.m. Ferrero's Brigade captured the Burnside Bridge and crossed the Antietam.
- 1:00 p.m. to
3:00 p.m. The 9th Corps crossed the creek, reorganized, resupplied and prepared for final attack.
- 3:00 p.m. 9th Corps advance began, moving forward (west) from right to left.
- 4:00 p.m. Elements of MGen A.P. Hill's Confederate Division arrived from Harpers Ferry after a grueling fifteen mile march and attacked the Union left flank.
- 5:30 p.m. Burnside men driven back to the Bridge, remaining on the west bank as the battle ended.

Order of Battle for Principal Units Involved

UNION

Ninth Corps

MGen Ambrose Burnside
BGen Jacob Cox
approximately 12,000 men



CONFEDERATE

Longstreet's Wing

MGen James Longstreet

Jones' Division

BGen David R. Jones
approximately 3,300 men

Anderson's Brigade

BGen George T. Anderson
(moved north early on Sept 17)

Drayton's Brigade

BGen Thomas F. Drayton

Jenkin's Brigade

Col Joseph Walker

Kemper's Brigade

BGen James L. Kemper

Pickett's Brigade

BGen Richard B. Garnett

Toomb's Brigade

BGen Robert Toombs

Jackson's Wing

MGen Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson

Light Division

MGen Ambrose P. Hill
approximately 2,500 men

*Archer's Brigade

BGen James J. Archer

*Branch's Brigade

BGen L. O'Brian Branch (k)

Field's Brigade

Col Brockenbrough

*Gregg's Brigade

BGen Maxcy Gregg

Pender's Brigade

BGen William Pender

Thomas' Brigade

BGen Edward L. Thomas

*Primarily Archer's, Branch's and Gregg's Brigades that arrive in time and engage.

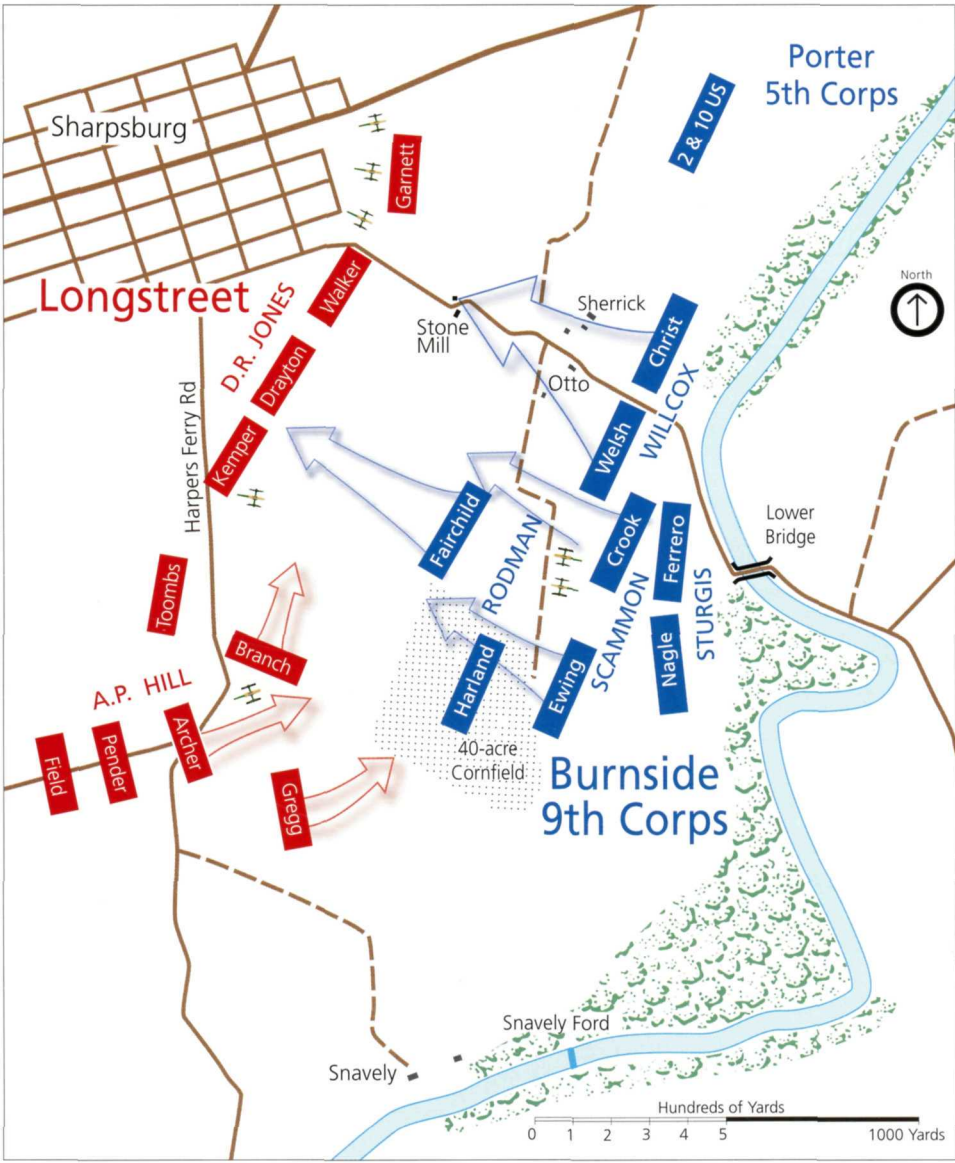
BGen = Brigadier General

MGen = Major General

k = Killed

w = Wounded

Battle Map at Approximately 4:00 p.m.





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