

"A Savage Continual Thunder"

The 1862 Maryland Campaign:
Confederate invasion of the North



"If we should be defeated, the consequences to the country would be disastrous in the extreme."

~ Union General George B. McClellan



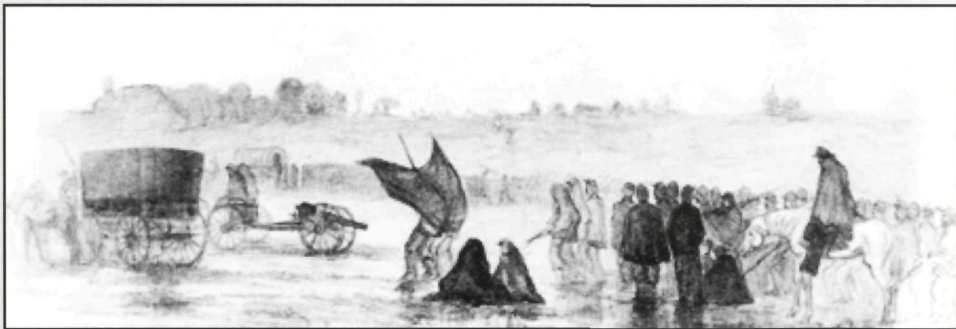
Southern Success

On August 30th, 1862, Confederate Gen. James Longstreet, in command of the Army of Northern Virginia's right wing, pushed his massive columns forward, smashing into the Union left. The Union Army of Virginia faced annihilation. Only a heroic stand by northern troops, first on Chinn Ridge and then once again on Henry Hill, bought time for the army to make a hasty retreat. Finally, under cover of darkness the defeated Federals withdrew across Bull Run towards the defenses of Washington.

The next day, Union resistance at the Battle of Chantilly blunted the Confederate's advance toward Washington, D.C., but did little to weaken southern confidence. Even though the army under Gen. Robert E. Lee was outnumbered and undersupplied, Lee knew that if the Confederacy was going to win the war and gain independence, more audacious action was necessary. Taking advantage of the victory at the Second Battle of Manassas, Lee, his generals, and Confederate President Jefferson Davis decided that now was the time to strike. Perhaps an invasion into the North could gain the Confederacy international recognition and weaken Union morale to the point that they would sue for peace.

"We are driven to protect our own country by transferring the seat of war to that of an enemy who pursues us with a relentless and apparently aimless hostility."

~ Confederate President Jefferson Davis



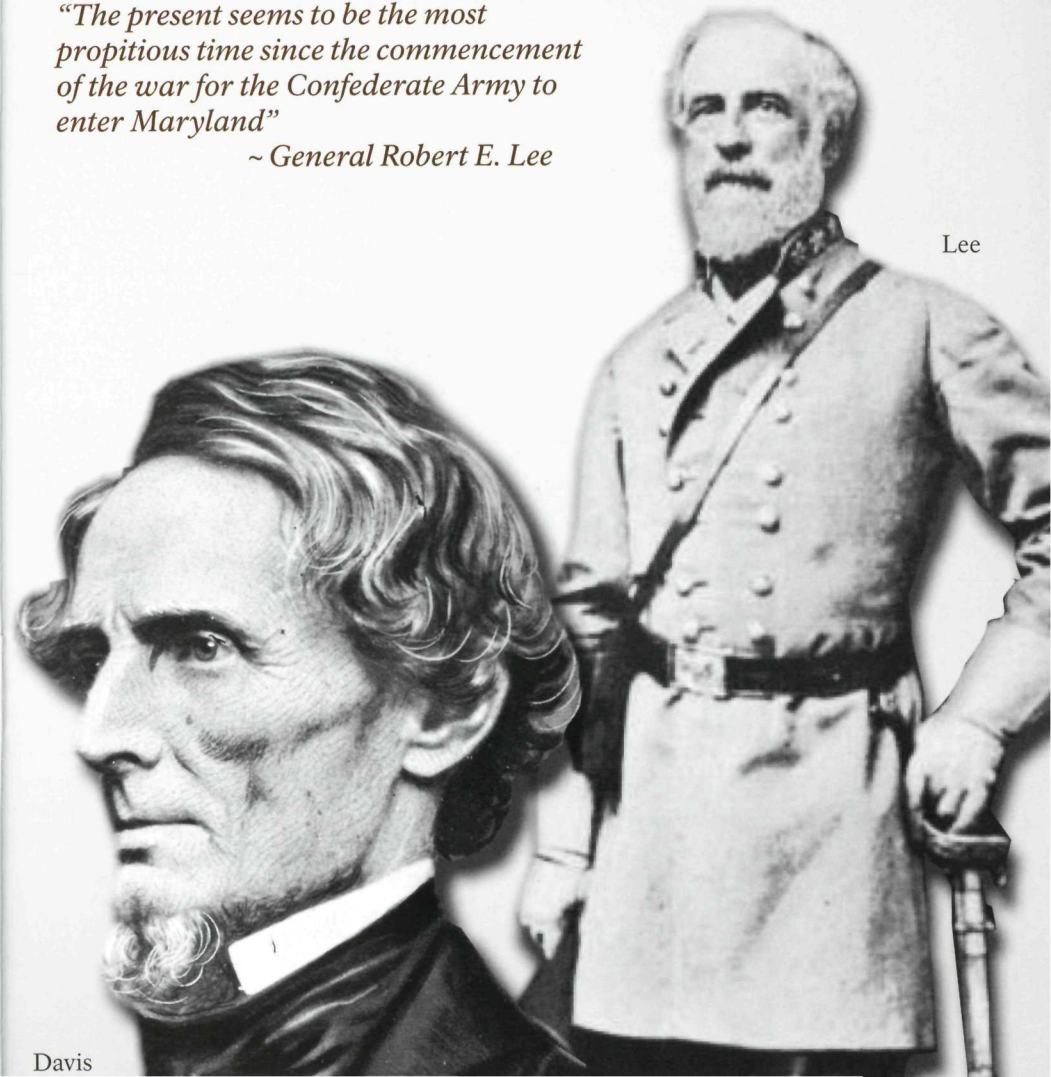
A hard rain fell on the Union army as they retreated to Washington, D.C. after their defeat at the Second Battle of Manassas.

Taking the War North

Until the launch of the Maryland Campaign, every major battle of the war had been fought on southern soil. The citizens of Virginia had seen their homes occupied and their farms stripped again and again. Defending that land and those people had been the stated mission of Confederate officers and soldiers. Now, they would be the invaders. Some of the men expressed opposition to this, but many realized that if the Confederacy was going to win the war, a major victory on Union soil was necessary. And most realized that the chances of winning that victory were greatly increased by having Lee leading them.

"The present seems to be the most propitious time since the commencement of the war for the Confederate Army to enter Maryland"

~ General Robert E. Lee



Lee

Davis

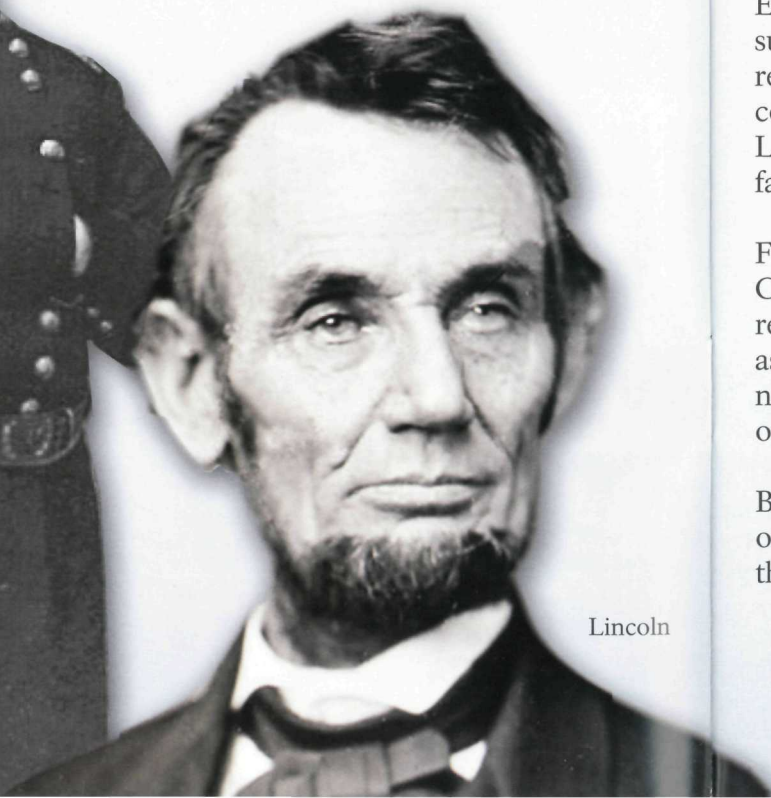
The Union Reeling

As the Confederates moved toward the Potomac River and Maryland, President Abraham Lincoln and the Union Army scrambled to counter them. A conglomerate of all the forces in the Washington vicinity were thrown together. Some of its men were fresh from the recruiting depots—they lacked training and were deficient in arms. Others had just returned from the Peninsular Campaign where Lee's army had driven them from the gates of Richmond in the Seven Days' Battles. Still others were the remnants of the force decisively beaten at the Second Battle of Manassas.

"Nothing but a desire to do my duty could have induced me to accept the command under such circumstances. Not feeling sure that I could do anything, I felt that under the circumstance, no one else could save the country, and I have not shrunk from the terrible task."

~General George McClellan

McClellan



Lincoln

At the head of this army, Lincoln placed Gen. George B. McClellan. At this critical moment, the army needed organization and confidence, two things McClellan was well acquainted with. In four days, he pulled together the army and prepared it to march, ready to pursue Lee. It was a remarkable achievement.

But in other respects, McClellan was the object of doubt. He was cautious. He seemed to lack that capacity for full and violent commitment essential to victory. Against Lee, whose blood roused at the sound of the guns, McClellan's methodical nature had once before proved wanting. Lincoln understood this, but knew that he had no better option for command, saying:

"He had beyond any officer the confidence of the army. Though deficient in the positive qualities which are necessary for an energetic commander, his organizing powers could be made temporarily available till the troops were rallied."

A victory in the field would give the President a chance to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which he had been holding since mid-summer. The proclamation would declare the slaves in the states in rebellion "thenceforward and forever free". Unless this moral purpose could be added to the North's primary war aim of restoring the Union, Lincoln questioned whether the will to fight could be maintained in the face of growing casualty lists.

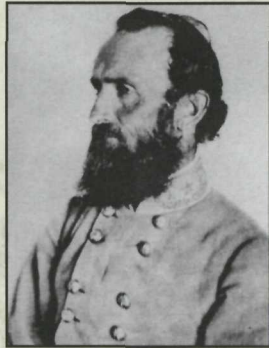
Followed by mingled doubt and hope, McClellan started in pursuit of the Confederate army. He knew Lincoln and Halleck had come to him as a last resort in a time of emergency. He knew they doubted his energy and ability as a combat commander. Even his orders from them were unclear, they did not explicitly give him authority to pursue the enemy beyond the defenses of Washington.

Burdened with knowledge of this lack of faith, wary of taking risks because of his ambiguous orders, McClellan marched toward his encounter with the victorious and confident Lee.

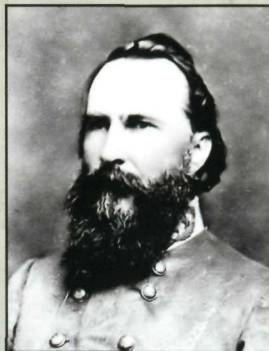
Leading the Charge

Lee and McClellan were the faces and the brains of their respective armies, but once their orders were issued, the responsibility fell to the next level of generals to position the men, carry out the battle plans, and achieve success. The relationships between these men could bring victory to an army when they were positive, but could cost lives and ruin an army when they weren't. Much depended on how these personalities worked together and how they performed under the tremendous stress of the campaign.

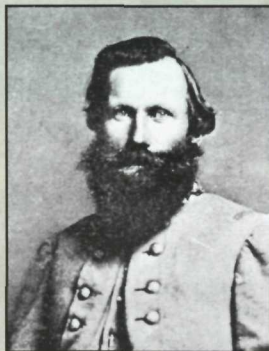
Thirty-eight year old Virginian **Thomas J. Jackson** graduated from West Point, served in the Mexican War and was an instructor at the Virginia Military Institute. At the First Battle of Manassas, he earned the nickname "Stonewall" by standing firm against Union attacks. His campaign in the Shenandoah Valley during the spring of 1862 made him famous for quick movements and daring attacks.



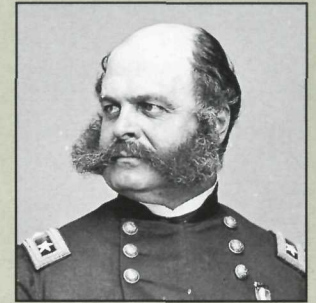
Called his "Old War Horse" by Lee, forty-one year old **James Longstreet** complimented Jackson's aggressive style with his own methodical philosophy. Willing to wait for the right moment to strike, Longstreet could be counted on for wise council and sound command. Though fiercely loyal to Lee, he was not afraid to voice his own opinion and occasionally disagree.



Only twenty-nine years old at the time, **James Ewell Brown "Jeb" Stuart** was the dashing and confident commander of Lee's cavalry. Willing to take risks and carry out dramatic operations, Stuart's reputation was built on daring charges, quick raids, and the dependable battlefield intelligence he brought in. With Stuart in the saddle, Lee was sure to have the edge when it came to cavalry.



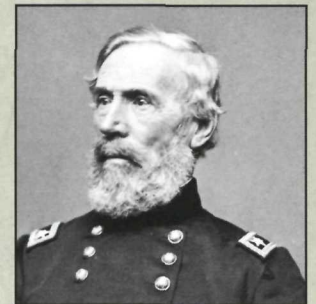
Hooker



Burnside



Franklin



Sumner

The Army of the Potomac was much larger and unwieldy than the Army of Northern Virginia. More soldiers meant more generals. Some of these Corps commanders McClellan trusted, others he did not. Quickly reorganized in the chaos following Second Manassas, the army had many leadership and communication hurdles to overcome.

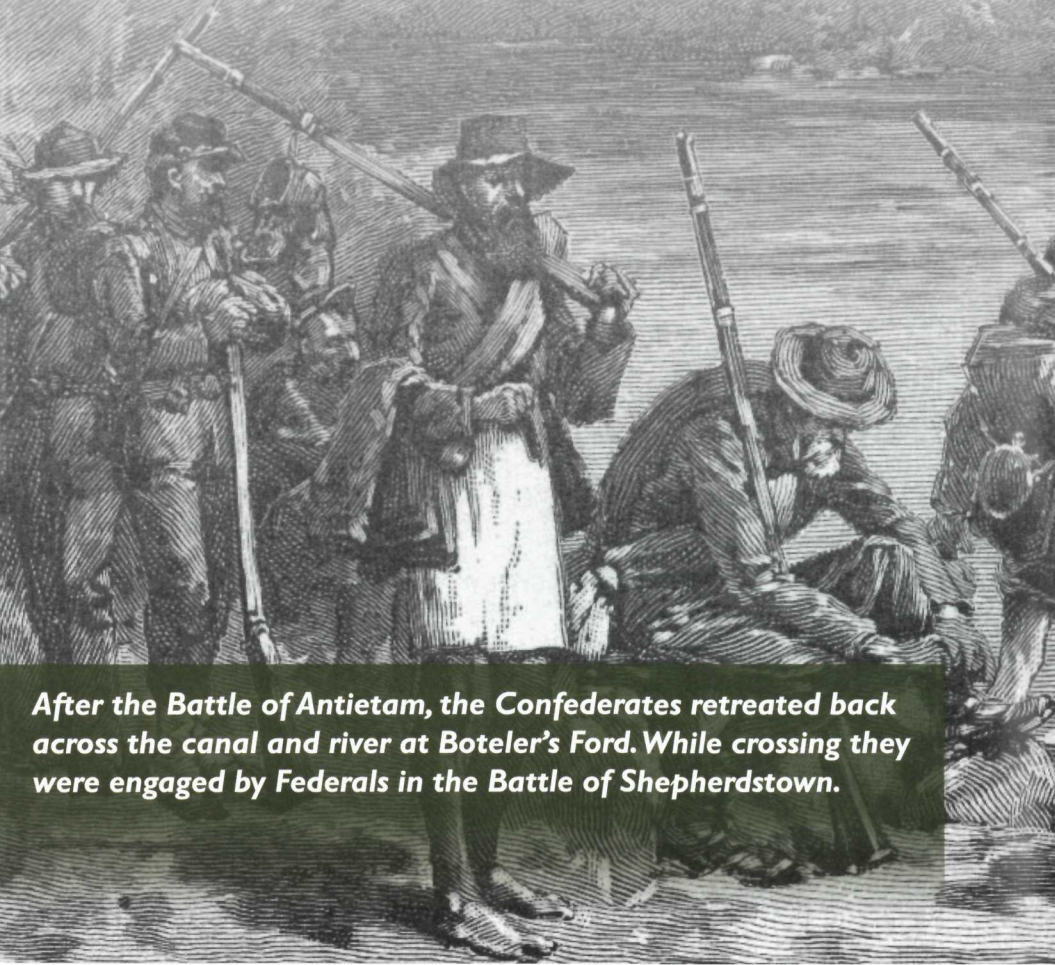
Four generals, "Fighting" Joe Hooker, Ambrose Burnside, William B. Franklin, and Edwin Sumner would all play significant, but not always positive roles in the Maryland Campaign. Hooker would prove to be a tenacious fighter and a sound battlefield general, but a serious wound at a critical time helped to stall the Union attack at Antietam. Burnside, trusted with an important part of McClellan's strategy, was honest, brave, and came closer than anybody to achieving victory at Antietam. Franklin was slow, but successful at South Mountain and mostly held in reserve at Antietam. Sumner, the oldest general in the army, had a difficult relationship with McClellan. His attack at Antietam, sometimes called reckless, cost his corps over 5,000 casualties.

Crossing Over

Early in the war many bridges over the Potomac, such as the Shepherdstown Bridge, were burned by soldiers to limit troop movements of the opposing army. Throughout the war, river fords were heavily used along the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal by advancing and retreating troops, and by Confederate raiders such as Mosby and McNeill.

Whites Ferry was two miles north of Leesburg, Virginia. This is where much of Lee's advancing army crossed north on September 4th, 1862, at the start of the Maryland Campaign.

Confederates crossing the Potomac into Maryland



After the Battle of Antietam, the Confederates retreated back across the canal and river at Boteler's Ford. While crossing they were engaged by Federals in the Battle of Shepherdstown.

The Confederates sang, "Maryland, My Maryland," as they splashed ashore, finally taking the fight to Union soil. With brimming confidence, they anticipated strong support from civilians and gladly followed Gen. Lee, sure that he would bring them victory.

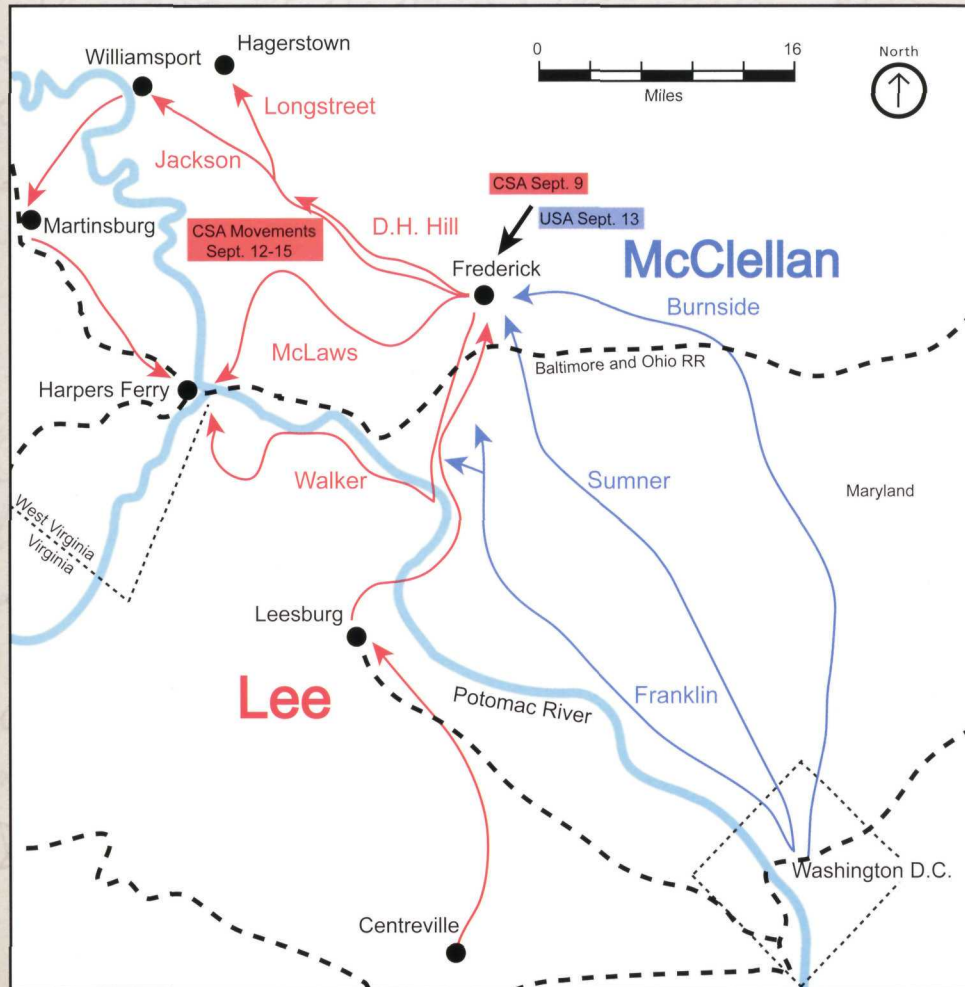
"As soon as we came in sight of the Potomac the boys gave one of the loudest and most protracted & glorious shouts you ever heard. We crossed by moonlight and the whole scene was one of the most inspiring I have ever witnessed."

~William Deloney, Cobb's Legion

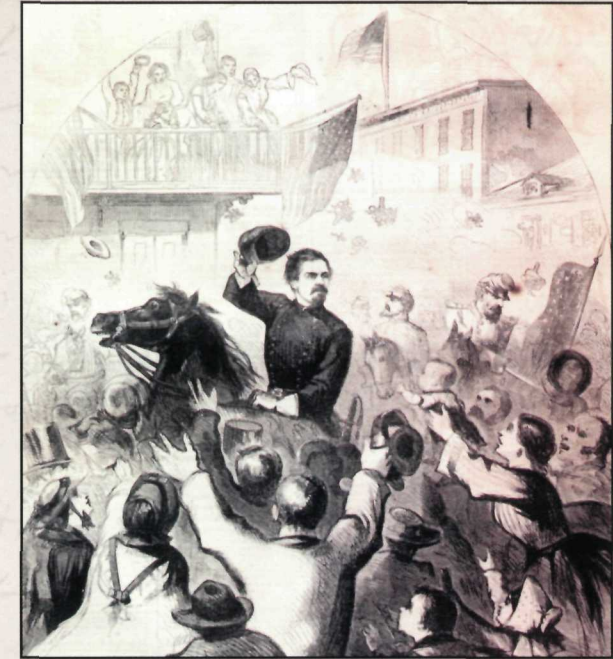


The Two Occupations of Frederick

As the Confederate Army approached Frederick, Gen. D.H. Hill attempted to destroy the Monocacy Aqueduct on the C&O Canal, burned the Covered Wooden Bridge over the Monocacy River, and damaged the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Bridge over the Monocacy to disrupt Union infrastructure. Meanwhile, Bradley Johnson and his cavalry, all natives of Frederick rode into town shouting, "Jeff Davis," and "The time of your delivery has come!" One soldier, Alexander Hunter, commented, "We were rather disappointed at our reception, which was decidedly cool, this wasn't what we expected." Only 130 men rallied to the Confederate flag, a much smaller recruitment than Lee and Davis had hoped for.



A large part of the army camped at the Best Farm, just a few miles south of Frederick. When word reached the town of the approaching invaders, some staunch Unionists left town, others however, remained to protect their property and help with the hospitals. Frederick was split in its loyalties; however, Unionists and Confederates alike went to the Confederate Camp out of curiosity to see generals Lee, Longstreet, Jackson, and Stuart, who had become famous for their actions in the war.



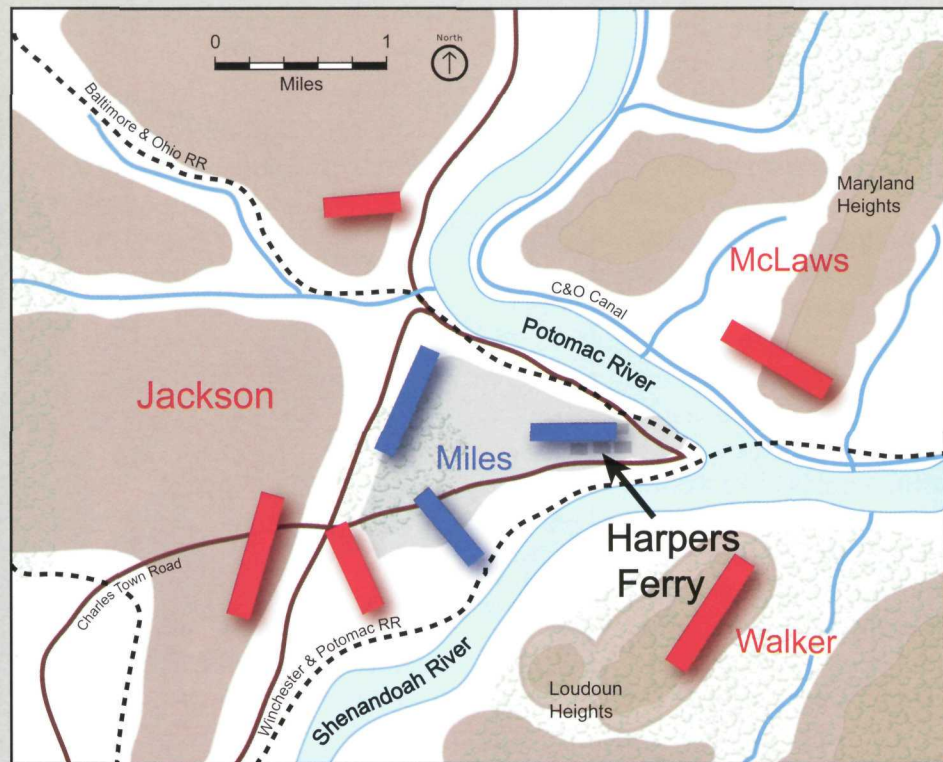
McClellan riding through Frederick, Maryland

The legend of Barbara Fritchie famously waving a Union flag at Confederate soldiers as they marched out of Frederick on September 10th is unlikely; however, Mary Quantrell did. For her defiance, a Confederate soldier knocked the flag from Mary's hand and broke the staff in pieces.

On September 9th, Lee issued Special Orders 191 from his headquarters on the farm, advising his generals of his intention to divide the army and what their specific orders were for the next several days. One copy of the orders was lost in a field and picked up by Union soldiers on the 13th as the army made its way into Frederick. Once authenticated and sent up the chain of command, the document provided McClellan with a better understanding of Lee's movements and plan. The normally slow McClellan deployed his men quickly and hoped to trap the Confederates while they were vulnerable. With the clock ticking, a chain of events forced commanders to adapt and improvise their plans, bringing unimagined destruction on a formally peaceful landscape, and altering the momentum and meaning of the war.

"More than two thirds of the people are Union. . .I don't want to stop in Maryland five minutes longer than I can help."

~Thomas Garber, 12th Virginia



The Battle of Harpers Ferry

As Lee's army moved north through Frederick, he expected some 14,000 Federal troops garrisoned at Harpers Ferry and Martinsburg to withdraw. Lee's plans depended upon it - the Confederates needed the Shenandoah Valley as their line of supply and communication while they campaigned north of the Potomac. The Federals, however, refused to withdraw, forcing Lee into a quandary.

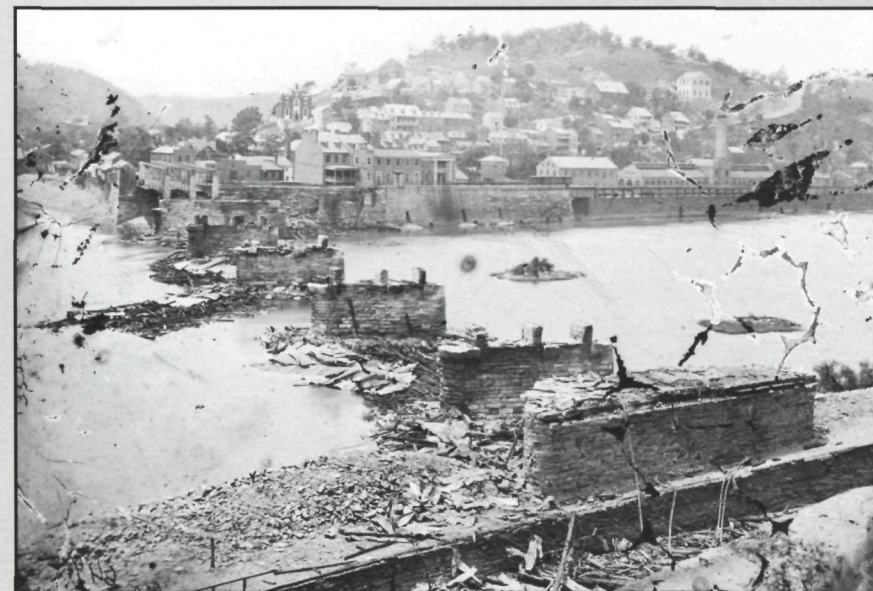
Harpers Ferry was a key supply base for Union operations in the Shenandoah Valley, and served to protect the C&O Canal and B&O Railroad - important Union transportation corridors. Lee could not move north without neutralizing the Harpers Ferry garrison.

Believing that Union forces were in "a very demoralized and chaotic condition" following their defeat at Second Manassas in Virginia, and that McClellan was "an able general but a very cautious one," Lee decided to divide his army into four parts. Special Orders 191 contained all the operational details: three separate columns totaling almost 23,000 men would march on Harpers Ferry, surround the place, and capture or destroy the garrison there. Lee selected Jackson to lead the assault.

With Gen. John G. Walker holding Loudoun Heights and Gen. Lafayette McLaws in position on Maryland Heights, Jackson tightened the noose on the federal garrison from his position on School House Ridge. The Confederate artillery fire upon Harpers Ferry was effective and demoralizing. Union Col. William Trimble of the 60th Ohio wrote that there was "not a place where you could lay the palm of your hand and say it was safe."

Realizing that artillery alone would not subdue the Federal garrison, Jackson ordered Gen. A.P. Hill and Col. Crutchfield, his Chief of Artillery, to flank the Union position on Bolivar Heights. Using School House Ridge for cover, 3,000 men moved toward the Shenandoah River. Hill dragged twenty guns up the river's steep bluffs, and succeeded in planting his artillery 1,000 yards from the exposed Union left flank. Crutchfield crossed the Shenandoah River and hauled ten guns up to Loudoun Heights. Hill later wrote that "the fate of Harpers Ferry was sealed."

On the morning of September 15th, the Union Col. Dixon Miles held a council of war. Surrounded by a force twice the size of their own and out of long range artillery ammunition, the officers unanimously agreed to surrender. At around 9:00 a.m., white flags were raised by Union troops all along Bolivar Heights. Jackson captured over 12,500 soldiers at Harpers Ferry - the largest single capture of American forces until World War II.



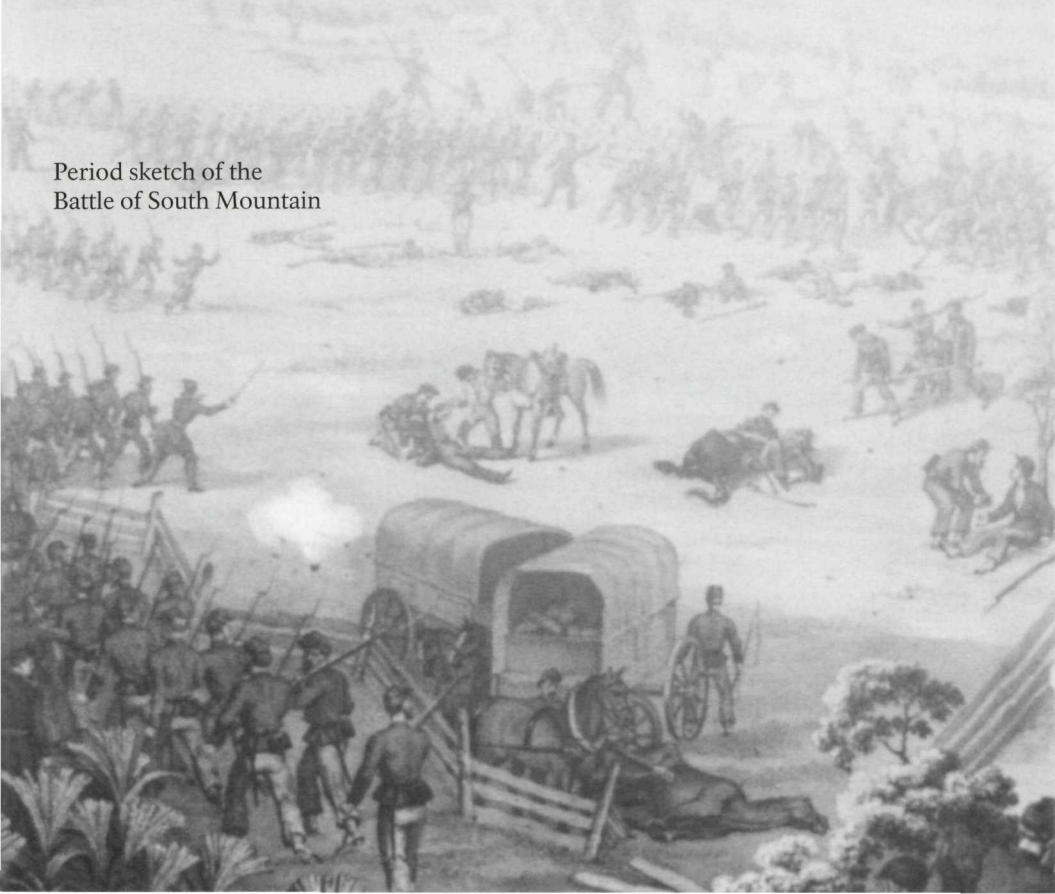
Harpers Ferry changed hands several times over the course of the war and sustained extensive damage to its vital transportation network.

The Battle of South Mountain

On September 14th, 1862, lead elements of the Union army pursuing the Confederates west of Frederick met stiff resistance in key gaps along South Mountain. Confederate rear guards were left to protect vital passes through South Mountain, while Jackson took Harpers Ferry and Longstreet moved towards Hagerstown. McClellan directed his army to drive forward through the passes and split the Confederate forces.

At 9:00 a.m. the Union Ninth Corps began its assault on Fox's Gap to dislodge troops under the command of Confederate Gen. D.H. Hill, while the First Corps moved into position to the north against Turner's and Frostown Gaps. After a brief lull in the fighting around noon, the Federal attacks resumed around midday with combined assaults on Fox's, Turner's and Frostown. After hours of nonstop combat the Federals eventually dislodged the Confederate defenders. The fighting for the northern gaps ended late in the evening with soldiers firing blindly into the woods and rocky slopes at opposing muzzle flashes.

Period sketch of the
Battle of South Mountain



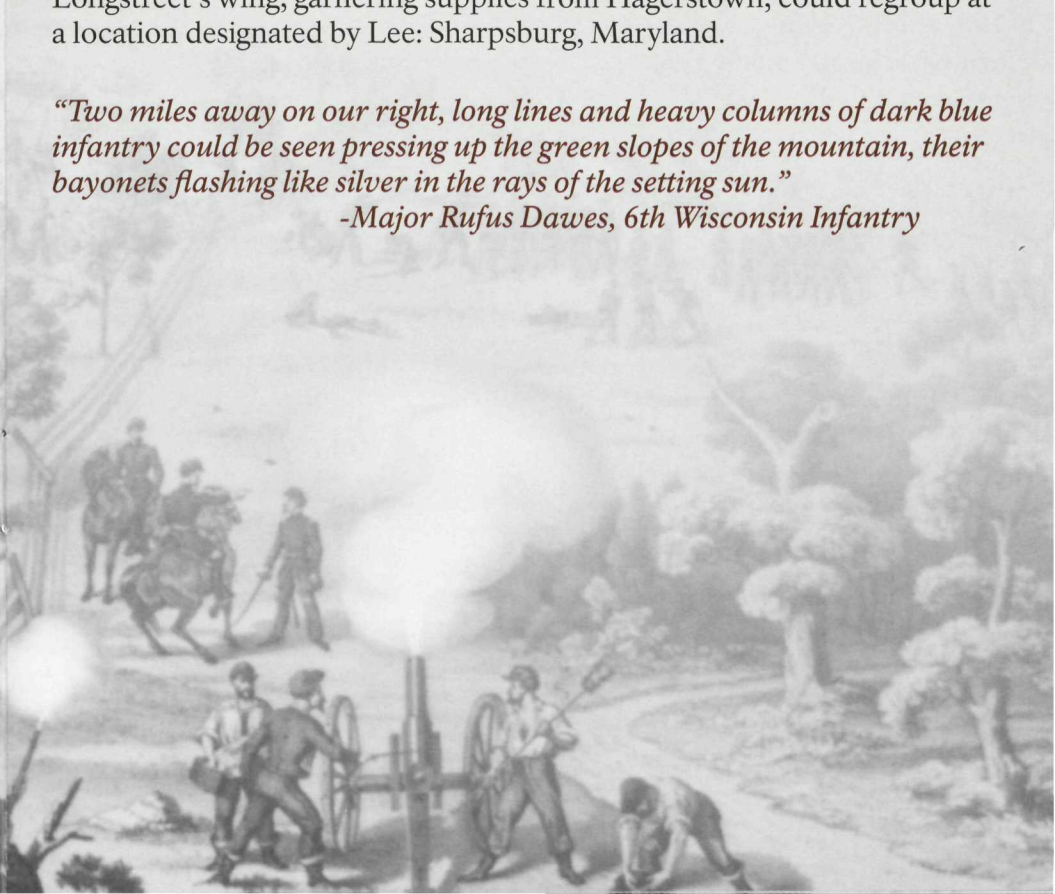
When the fighting for Fox's, Turner's and Frostown Gaps was over, Union Gen. Jesse Lee Reno, and Confederate Gen. Samuel Garland were dead, Union First Corps division commander Gen. John Hatch was seriously wounded, and almost 4,000 Union and Confederate soldiers were killed, wounded or missing.

About six miles to the south another goal had to be reached - Gen. William B. Franklin's Sixth Corps was given the daunting task of striking the Confederate forces around Harpers Ferry. After moving slowly forward and waiting on the outskirts of Burkittsville, Maryland, Franklin finally ordered his 12,000 man corps to assault Crampton's Gap. Unprepared for a large assault, the small Confederate force there, numbering roughly 1,200 men, held firm for a short period until the Federal force overwhelmed them on both front and flank.

Though the Battle of South Mountain was a Confederate defeat, it delayed the Federal army just long enough to allow "Stonewall" Jackson's wing to capture the garrison at Harpers Ferry, while the remaining elements of Longstreet's wing, garnering supplies from Hagerstown, could regroup at a location designated by Lee: Sharpsburg, Maryland.

"Two miles away on our right, long lines and heavy columns of dark blue infantry could be seen pressing up the green slopes of the mountain, their bayonets flashing like silver in the rays of the setting sun."

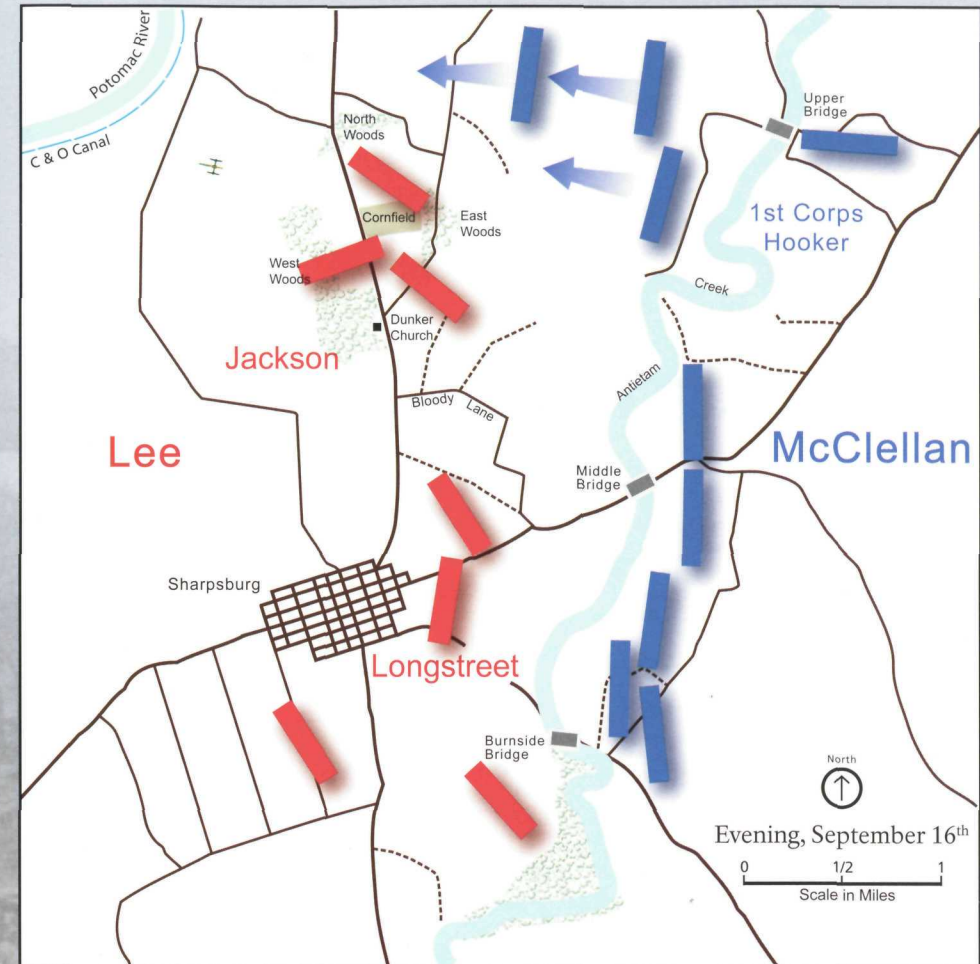
-Major Rufus Dawes, 6th Wisconsin Infantry



Preparing to Attack

Following the Confederate retreat from South Mountain, Lee considered returning to Virginia. However, with word of Jackson's capture of Harpers Ferry on September 15th, Lee decided to make a stand at Sharpsburg. The Confederate commander gathered his forces on the high ground west of Antietam Creek with Longstreet's command holding the center and the right while "Stonewall" Jackson's men filled in on the left. The Confederate position was strengthened with the mobility provided by the Hagerstown Turnpike that ran north and south along Lee's line; however there was risk with the Potomac River behind them and only one crossing back to Virginia. Lee and his men watched the Union army gather on the east side of the Antietam.

Thousands of soldiers in blue marched into position throughout the 15th and 16th as McClellan prepared to drive Lee from Maryland. McClellan planned to "attack the enemy's left," and when "matters looked favorably," attack the Confederate right, and "whenever either of those flank movements should be successful to advance our center." As the opposing forces moved into position during the rainy night of September 16th, one Pennsylvanian remembered, "...all realized that there was ugly business and plenty of it just ahead."



Union supply wagons crossing the Middle Bridge over the Antietam Creek after the battle.

"There was something weirdly impressive yet unreal in the gradual drawing together of those whispering armies under cover of night-something of awe and dread, as always in the secret preparation for momentous deeds."

~ Private Edward Spangler, 130th Pennsylvania

The Battle of Antietam

The twelve hour battle began at dawn on September 17th. For the next seven hours there were three major Union attacks on the Confederate left, moving from north to south. Gen. Joseph Hooker's command led the first Union assault. Then Gen. Joseph Mansfield's soldiers attacked, followed by Gen. Edwin Sumner's men as McClellan's plan broke down into a series of uncoordinated Union advances. Savage, incomparable combat raged across the Cornfield, East Woods, West Woods and the Sunken Road as Lee shifted his men to withstand each of the Union thrusts. After clashing for over eight hours, the Confederates were pushed back but not broken, however over 15,000 soldiers were killed or wounded.

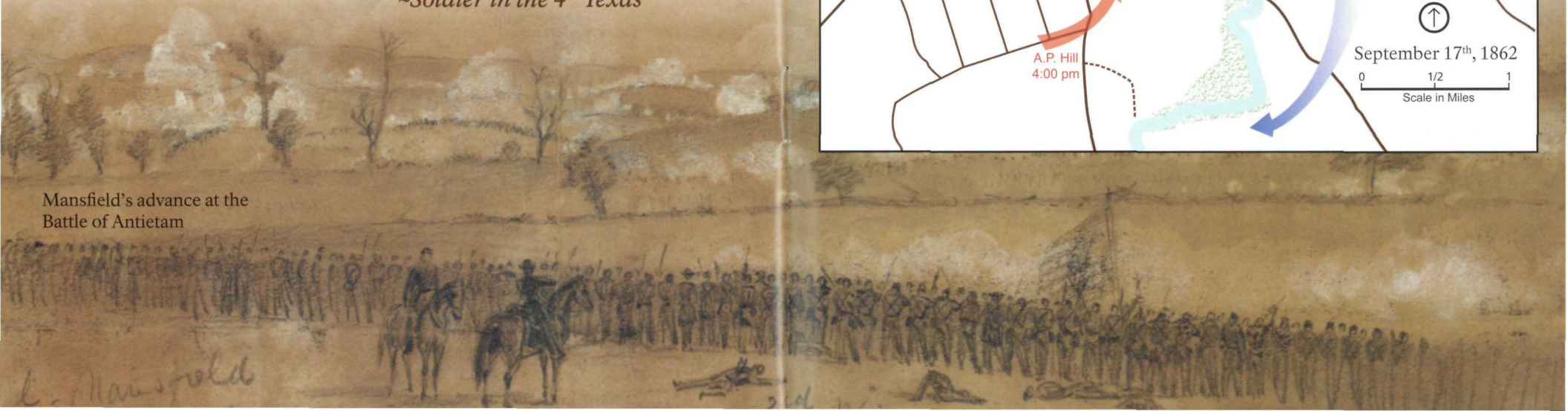
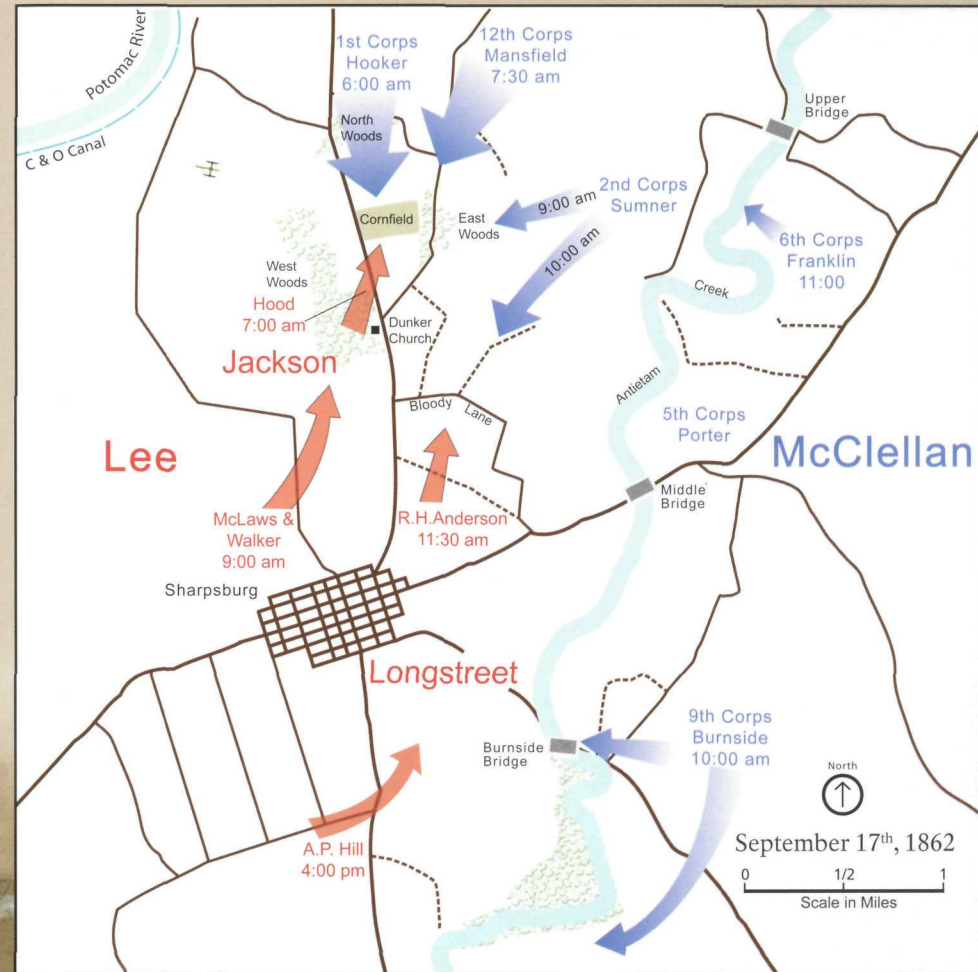
While the Federal assaults were being made on the Sunken Road, a mile-and-a-half farther south Union Gen. Ambrose Burnside opened the attack on the Confederate right. His first task was to cross Antietam Creek, spanned by the bridge that would later bear his name. A small Confederate force, positioned on higher ground, was able to delay Burnside for three hours. After taking the bridge at about 1:00 p.m., Burnside reorganized for two hours before moving forward across the arduous terrain—a necessary and critical delay. Finally the advance started only to be turned back by Confederate General A.P. Hill's reinforcements that arrived in the late afternoon from Harpers Ferry.

“Legs, arms, and other parts of human bodies were flying in the air like straw in a whirlwind. The dogs of war were loose, and ‘havoc’ was their cry.”

~Soldier in the 4th Texas

Mansfield's advance at the Battle of Antietam

Neither flank of the Confederate army collapsed far enough for McClellan to advance his center attack, leaving a sizable Union force held in reserve. Despite over 23,000 casualties of the nearly 100,000 engaged, both armies stubbornly held their ground as the sun set on the devastated landscape.



The Bloodiest Day in American History

Seldom had Lee's army fought a battle so strenuous and so long. "The sun," a soldier wrote, "seemed almost to go backwards, and it appeared as if night would never come." From dawn to sunset, the Confederate commander had thrown into battle every organized unit north of the Potomac. Stragglers in the days preceding Antietam had reduced Lee's army from 55,000 to 41,000 men. This small force had sustained five major attacks by McClellan's 87,000-man army—three in the West Woods and the Miller Cornfield, and those at the Sunken Road and the Lower Bridge—each time the outcome hanging in the balance.

Surveying the ground the next day, Lee's officers informed him that Federal batteries completely dominated the narrow strip of land over which a counter-attack would be launched. An attempt against the Federal guns would be suicidal. Lee was forced to admit the campaign was lost.

During the afternoon, he announced to his lieutenants his intention of withdrawing that night across the Potomac. At midnight Longstreet led the way across Boteler's Ford and formed a protective line on the south bank. Steadily through the night and early morning, the Confederate columns retreated into Virginia, covered by artillery.

On the afternoon of September 19th, Federals under Gen. Charles Griffin clashed with the Confederate rear guard. Lee, believing he was under heavy pursuit, sent A.P. Hill's division back to the Potomac. The massing Confederates pushed the Union troops back across the river near Shepherdstown on the 20th. His army now safe, Lee escaped to Virginia, battered but not beaten. McClellan went into camp around Sharpsburg. The Maryland Campaign was over.

Photographs like this one, taken by Alexander Gardner two days after the battle, revealed the full scale of the carnage and shocked the public.



The Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation

President Lincoln altered the course of the Civil War and the nation when he issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22nd, 1862. During that summer, he agonized over issuing a proclamation to abolish slavery in those states in rebellion. Until then, he had publicly stated that the war was only about preserving the Union. Some of his cabinet thought that such a move would look like an act of desperation in the face of Union military setbacks. The president needed a victory to give him the opportunity to go ahead with such a dramatic change in his war policy. The Battle of Antietam, followed by Lee's withdrawal to Virginia, was the decisive moment.

The proclamation was issued in two parts. The preliminary document was introduced five days after the battle and gave the southern states 100 days to rejoin the Union or lose their slaves. On January 1st, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, abolishing slavery in states in rebellion; military force would then make this freedom a reality. These important documents set the stage for the complete abolition of slavery in all the states in 1865. The proclamation also had a decisive effect discouraging European nations from allying with the Confederacy. In time, the South was deprived of valuable labor and over 200,000 African American men joined the Union army to fight for freedom.



The War Marches On

As autumn gave way to winter, the Union debated the Emancipation Proclamation and the Confederacy attempted to rebuild its army in Virginia. Unable to capitalize on Federal gains, McClellan was removed from command and President Lincoln searched for a general who could defeat Lee and end the war. Lee continued to make bold moves and win spectacular victories, until setbacks at Gettysburg and Vicksburg forever put the armies of the Confederacy on the defensive.

By the time General Ulysses S. Grant managed to snare Lee at Appomattox Courthouse, over 620,000 men had died in the Civil War. From the horrors of war, the crippling legacy of slavery, and decades of reconstruction and reconciliation, our nation moved closer to the dream of freedom and justice for all.



(Far Left) Lincoln and McClellan at Antietam in October of 1862
 (Left) Unidentified African American soldier (Above) Soldier's Cemetery in Alexandria, VA (Upper Right) Three Confederate prisoners at Gettysburg
 (Lower Right) Appomattox Courthouse



“The Sesquicentennial of the Civil War is a time to commemorate those who fought and died during this pivotal era in American history. At the same time, it is an opportunity for us to renew our commitment to the ongoing march for freedom and equality for all people.”

~ Ken Salazar, US Secretary of the Interior

This series of booklets allows us to tell stories “beyond the battlefield” and examine how this terrible conflict affected ordinary people and the communities around them. Thank you for your support and interest.

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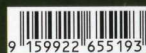
Antietam National Battlefield
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