

Union Advance Trail

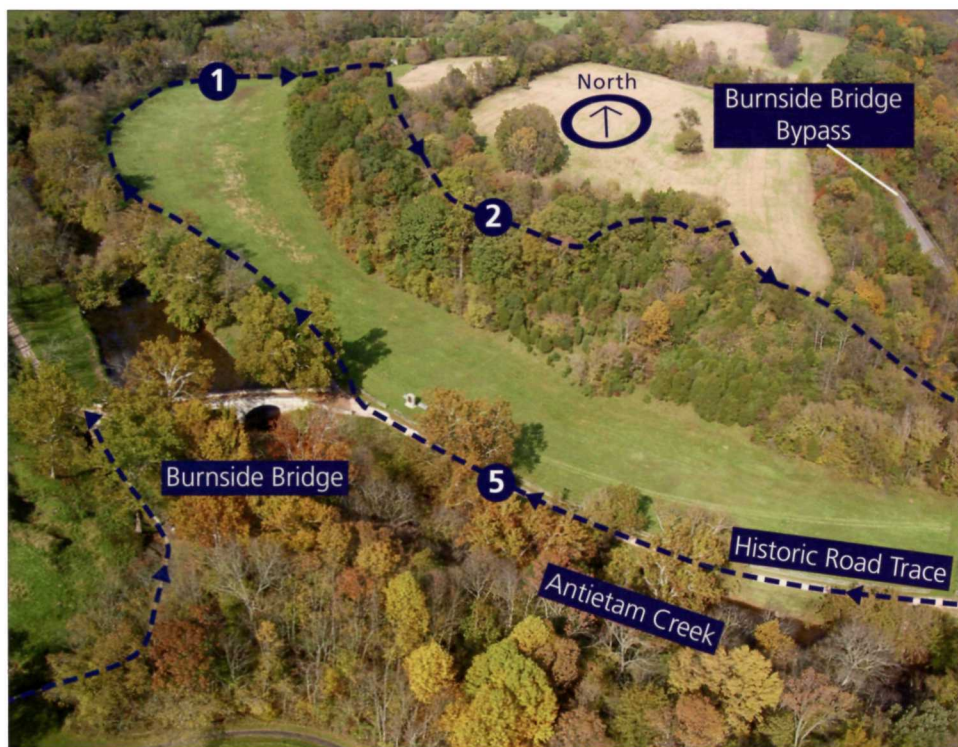
Attack and Defense of the Burnside Bridge



The Trail

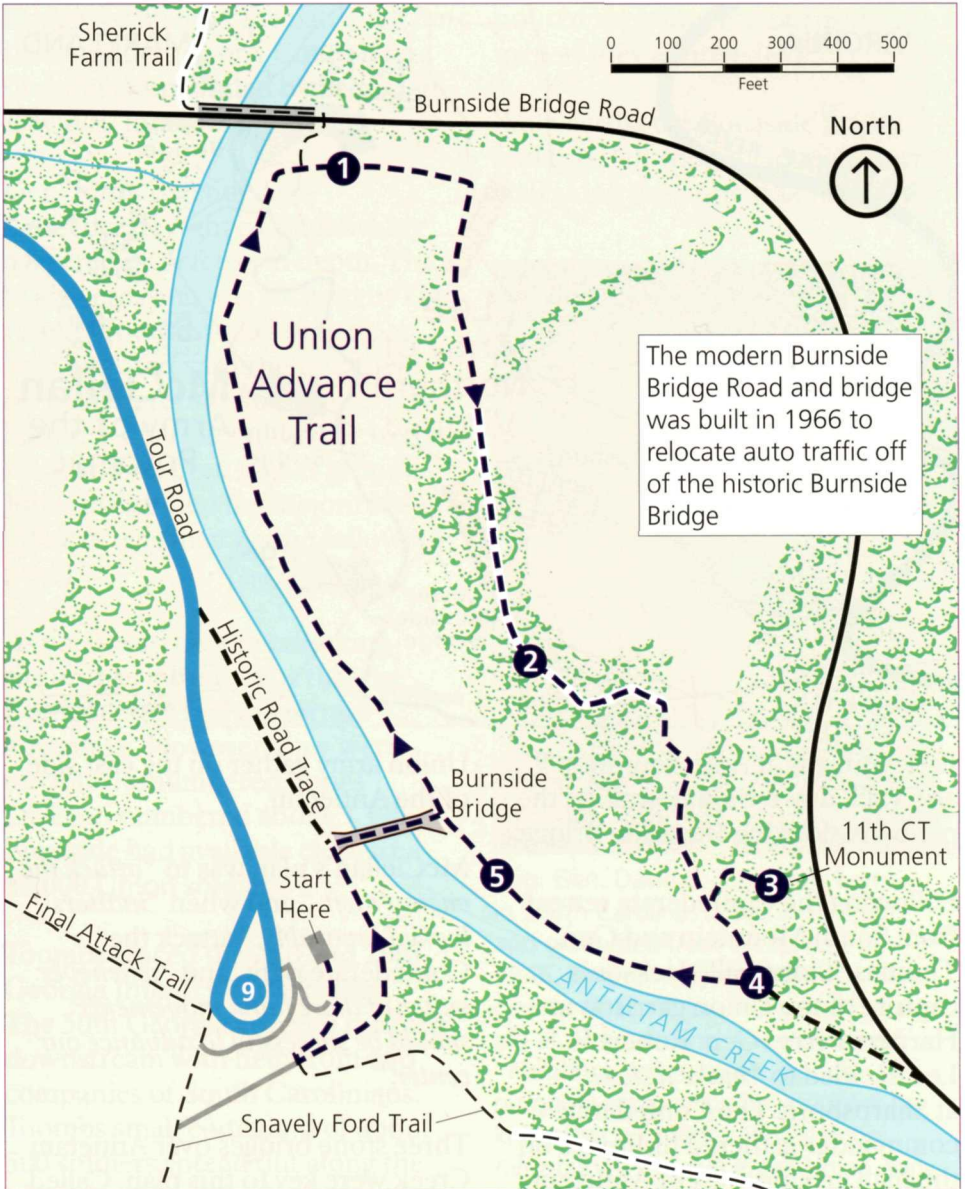
The Union Advance Trail starts at Auto Tour Stop 9. The trail crosses the Burnside Bridge and makes a loop on the east side of Antietam Creek. The trail is one mile in length and should take about an hour to complete. The trail is easy except for two hills. However, the surface can be slightly uneven, so good walking shoes are recommended.

You will be exploring the area where the Confederates defended the Burnside Bridge, and then crossing over Antietam Creek to see where Union soldiers made their advances to capture the bridge. To get the full story of all of the fighting on the south end of the battlefield, this hike is best combined with the Final Attack trail and brochure.



This aerial photograph looks north and shows most of the area you will walk. There are five stops on this trail. An overview of the Confederate defense can be found at the overlook just below the parking area (just off of the photo on the left). Stops 3 and 4 are just outside of the photograph on the right. The Confederates defended the high ground on the bottom left of the photograph (west side of Antietam Creek) and the Union soldiers attacked towards the bridge from the right of the image (east side of Antietam Creek). At the time of the battle the road paralleled the creek on the west side, crossed over the bridge, then continued south along the east bank towards the town of Rohrerstown. Aerial photograph courtesy of Ron Smith.

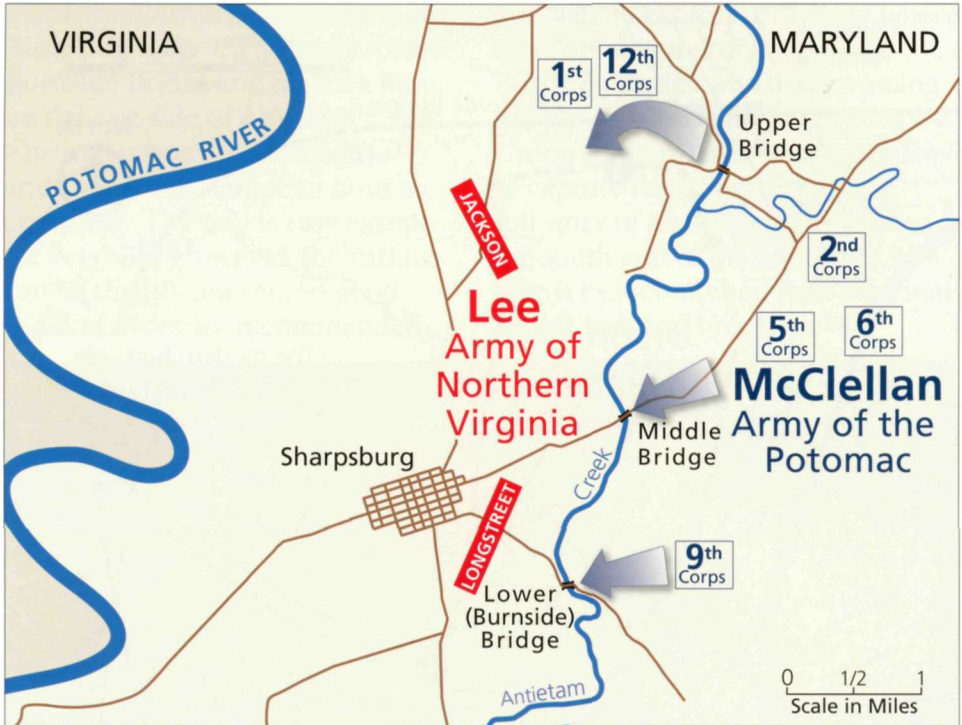
Trail Map



EYEWITNESS - "There was no part of the bloody field of Sharpsburg which witnessed more gallant deeds both of attack and defense than did Burnside Bridge. A fierce contest was waged for its possession....The 500 Federal soldiers who lay bleeding or dead along the eastern approach to the bridge were witnesses to the courage of the assaults. On the Confederate side of the stream, Toombs' two small regiments held their ground, and threw back assault after assault with a coolness and tenacity unsurpassed in history."

William Allen, *History of the Army of Northern Virginia*, 1862

Background - The Confederate Defense



Park your car at Auto Tour Stop 9 and walk down the sidewalk to the patio overlooking Burnside Bridge.

Following the Confederate retreat from South Mountain and Gen. Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson’s capture of the Union garrison at Harpers Ferry, Gen. Robert E. Lee decided to “make a stand” at Sharpsburg. The Confederate commander gathered his forces on the high ground west of Antietam Creek with Gen. James Longstreet’s men on the right and Jackson’s soldiers filling in on Lee’s left. As strong as the Confederate position was, there was risk however, with the Potomac River behind them and only one crossing back to Virginia. Lee and his men could see the

Union army gather on the east side of the Antietam.

McClellan’s plan was 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.*”

Three stone bridges over Antietam Creek were key to this plan. Called Upper, Middle, and Lower by the armies, these bridges were crucial to the Union army as the best possible locations to cross the creek and attack. McClellan directed the Union 9th Corps to take the Lower (later Burnside) Bridge and turn Lee’s right. The defense of the

bridge for most of the battle fell on the shoulders of one Confederate division commanded by Brig. Gen. David R. Jones.

Gen. Jones defended the Confederate right by establishing a layered or defense in depth. The bridge crossing was secured by Gen. Robert Toombs small brigade. Two hundred yards behind them, on higher ground, Jones placed two batteries of artillery. Farther to the west, and on even higher ground, Jones positioned the majority of his infantry (see map on the following page).

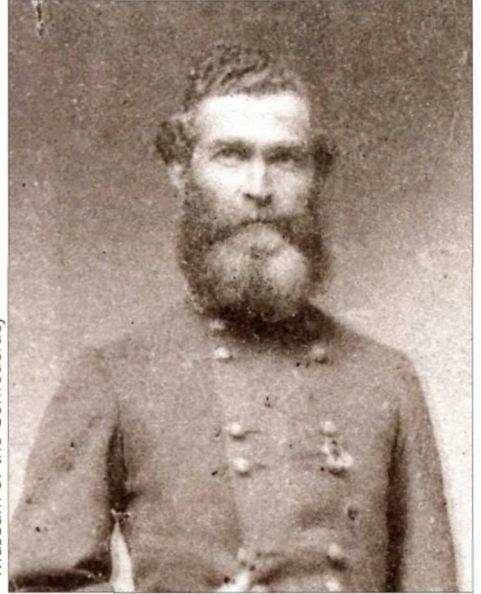
As you stand here overlooking the bridge, it is obvious that the Confederates had the terrain advantage. However, they were terribly outnumbered. Jones' Division numbered about 3,300. Burnside had available close to 12,000 Union soldiers.

Toombs placed the 2nd and 20th Georgia Infantry at the bridge. The 50th Georgia covered the ford downstream with help from two companies of South Carolinians. Toombs small command of about 500 soldiers spread out along the hillside you are standing on and

poured their fire into Burnside's men as they approached.

Walk across the Burnside Bridge and turn left (north) and follow the trail along the stone wall to Stop 1.

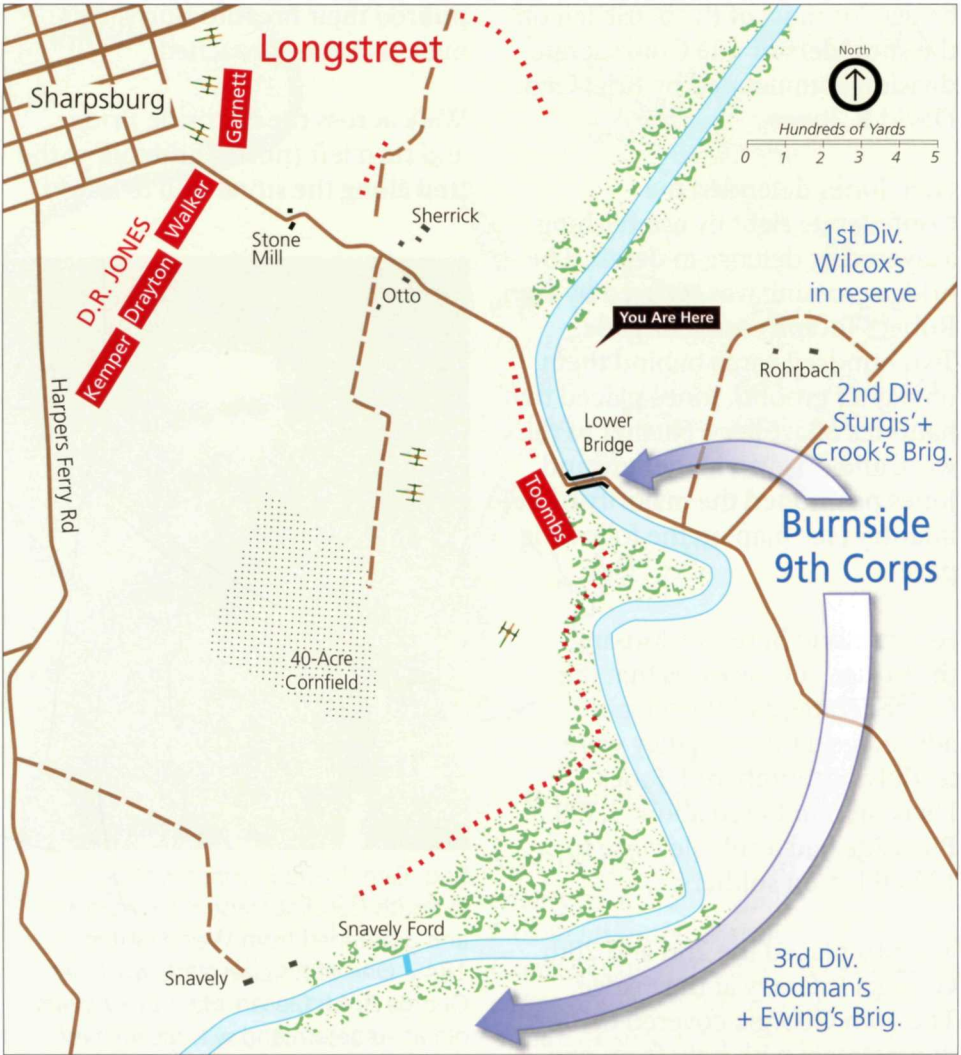
Museum of the Confederacy



Brig. Gen. David R. Jones was born in South Carolina, raised in Georgia and graduated from West Point in 1846. One of his classmates was Gen. George B. McClellan. He was 37 years old at Antietam and was nicknamed "Neighbor" Jones for his friendly, outgoing personality. Do you think he knew that his brother-in-law Henry Kingsbury, a Colonel in the Union army, was on the opposite side of the creek?

EYEWITNESS - *The strength [of the Confederate position] lay in the fact that the nature of the ground on the other side, the enemy were compelled to approach mainly by the road which led up to the river for near 300 paces parallel with my line of battle and distant therefrom from 50 to 150 feet, thus exposing his flank to a destructive fire for most of that distance.* Brig. Gen. Robert Toombs

Stop 1 - Union Plan and Organization



At 10:00 a.m., as the fighting raged at the Sunken Road, Ninth Corps commander Ambrose Burnside received orders to commence his attack against the Lower Bridge and the right flank of Lee's army. Recognizing the great difficulty in successfully carrying the bridge by a direct, frontal attack, Burnside sent Gen. Isaac Rodman with 3,200 soldiers downstream where they were to cross Antietam Creek and

outflank the Confederate troops in position on the high bluffs west of the creek, and opposite the bridge.

While Rodman's men moved south, Burnside ordered diversionary attacks against the bridge in order to keep the Confederate troops defending the bridge pinned down.

Over the course of the next three hours, at least three separate attacks

were launched against the bridge, each one resulting in heavy loss. Owing to the nature of the terrain on this part of the battlefield, no large scale attack against the bridge was possible. Thus, unlike other Union attacks at Antietam, those against the bridge were made on a much smaller scale, which made their success all the more difficult to achieve.

This trail will cover the extent of the Union attacks directly on the bridge. In fact it was near this stop that one of these attacks, led by Colonel George Crook, stalled.

Ninth Corps

MGen Ambrose Burnside
BGen Jacob Cox
approximately 12,000 men

First Division

BGen Orlando Wilcox
1st Brigade - Col Benjamin Christ
2nd Brigade - Col Thomas Welsh

Wilcox's Division was held in reserve during the action at the bridge, but was heavily engaged in the final attack after the bridge was taken.

Second Division

BGen Samuel D. Sturgis
1st Brigade - BGen James Nagle
2nd Brigade - BGen Edward Ferrero

Sturgis' Division fought and took the bridge. Crook's Brigade, supported by the 11th Connecticut, made the first attack, then Nagle's Brigade and finally Ferrero's men captured the crucial Antietam crossing.

Third Division

BGen Isaac P. Rodman (k)
1st Brigade - Col Harrison Fairchild
2nd Brigade - Col Edward Harland

Rodman's Division was sent downstream to outflank the Confederates. After much confusion and delay, Rodman crossed at Snavely Ford about the same time the bridge was taken.

Kanawha Division

Col Eliakim P. Scammon
1st Brigade - Col Hugh Ewing
2nd Brigade - Col George Crook

Scammon's Division was divided in half. Ewing's Brigade was attached to Rodman and crossed downstream. Crook's Brigade, attached to Sturgis, made the first attack on the bridge. They got off course and ended up getting pinned down 300 yards upstream from the bridge.

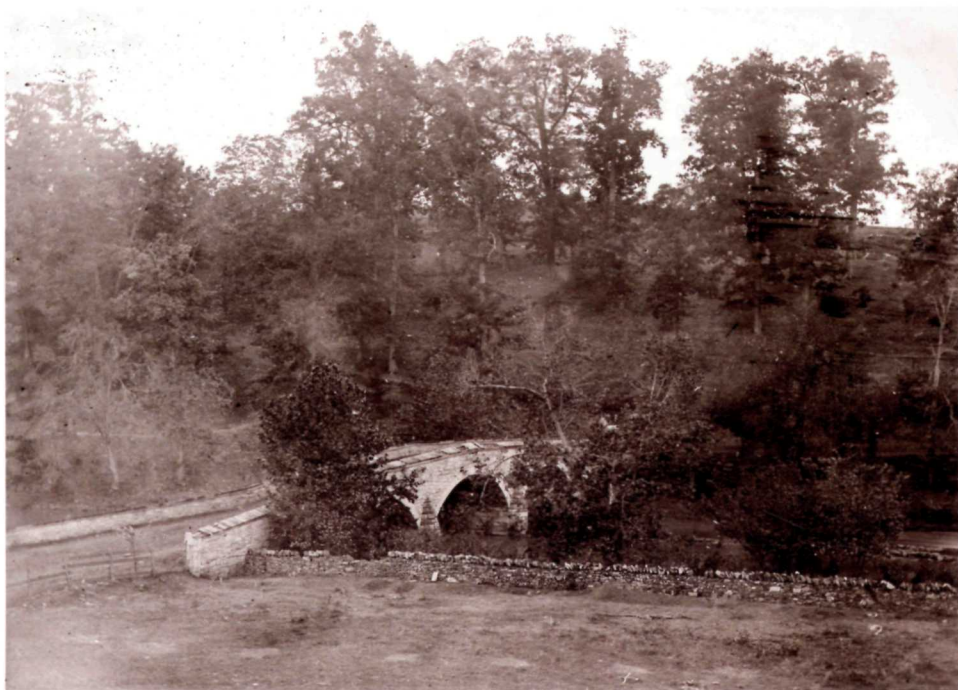
Stop 2 - Burnside Bridge Overlook

As you face the Burnside Bridge, you are looking west-southwest and are standing in the center of the three Union attacks on the bridge. The Ninth Corps gathered for their assaults on the other side of the high ground behind this point. Gen. Isaac Rodman's Division with Ewing's Brigade was sent south to cross downstream.

The first attack on the bridge started at 10:00 a.m. and was led by the 11th Connecticut Infantry followed by Crook's Brigade. Col. Crook, who thought that he was just supporting the other attacks, advanced his men and mistakenly ended up to the right (at the previous trail stop), and was pinned down by Confederate fire. The 11th Connecticut pushed

towards the bridge from the left. This uncoordinated first assault was just one example of how confusion, difficult terrain, and Confederate firepower broke down the Union attacks.

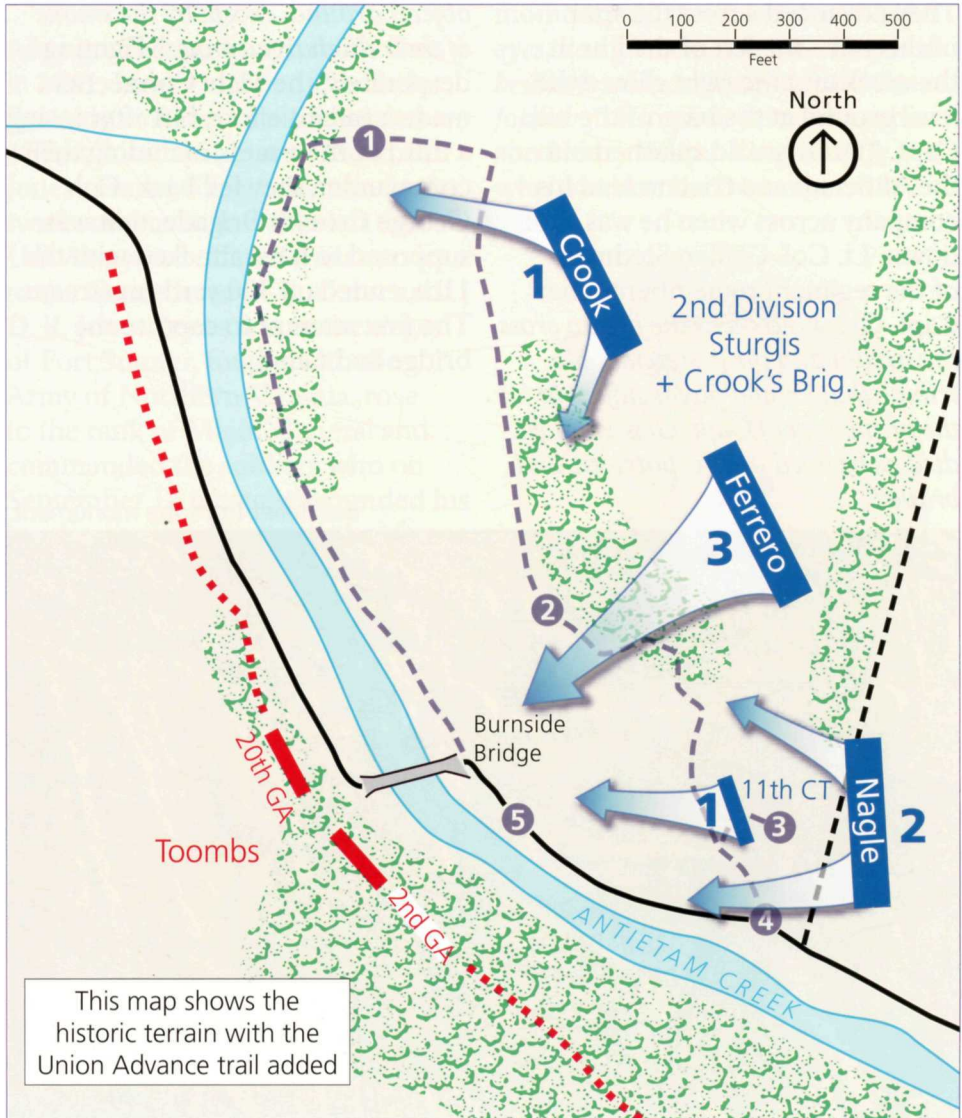
The second attack on the bridge also came from the left. General Nagle's Brigade was ordered forward at 11:00 a.m. The next two trail stops will focus on the attacks made by the 11th Connecticut and Nagle's Brigade. The third, and eventually successful, attack on the Bridge took place right here. After two failed attempts, it was clear that moving down the road in full view of the Confederate defenders did not work.



Alexander Gardner captured this image on the September 21, 1862.

Brig. Gen. Edward Ferrero's veteran brigade was selected for the next attack. However, this time they advanced down this hill and straight at the bridge. Just after noon, the 51st New York and the 51st Pennsylvania Infantry Regiments, with about 650 men, charged toward the bridge. The Confederate resistance was still strong enough to force them to a halt.

The Pennsylvanians gathered behind the stone wall, the New Yorkers broke left and tried to find cover behind the stout post and rail fences. Lt. Whitman from the 51st New York remembered "*we were ordered to halt and commence firing, and the way we showered the lead across that creek was nobody's business.*"



Stop 3 - 11th Connecticut Monument

This monument to the 11th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry was dedicated on October 8, 1894. The veterans of a difficult and costly charge at Antietam returned thirty-two years later to memorialize their fallen comrades. Colonel Henry Walter Kingsbury and the men of the 11th Connecticut led the first attack on the bridge at 10:00 a.m. They advanced across the spur of this hill—the left of the line at the creek and the right gained the level ground at the base of the hill. Capt. J.D. Griswold splashed into the Antietam and tried to lead his company across when he was shot down. Lt. Col. Griffen Stedman of the regiment remembered that Capt. Griswold *“was the first to cross the stream and the first to fall. No tribute that I could pay is sufficient for the brave soul of Capt. Griswold. He died as he lived – pure, patriotic and brave.”*

Kingsbury, Confederate General David R. Jones’s brother-in-law, urged his men on. He too was shot down by what Pvt. Tillinghast of Company D described as *“the hottest fire we ever received.”* The Confederates were *“so completely concealed that they could scarcely be distinguished through the leaves from the dark background and objects around, except by the smoke of their discharged guns.”* Fighting desperately, the 11th Connecticut made a gallant effort, but after losing a third of their men, including their commander, they fell back. Col. George Crook’s Brigade, that was supposed to have attacked with the 11th, ended up 300 yards upstream. The first attempt to capture the bridge had failed.

Bas Relief from the monument.



A Divided Nation—A Divided Family

Henry Kingsbury was the son of a soldier. His father Julius, a retired Army Major, died in 1856, the same year that Henry entered West Point. Appointed as guardians for cadet Kingsbury were Ambrose Burnside and Simon Bolivar Buckner. Simon Buckner had married Henry's sister, and he later became a Lieutenant General in the Confederate Army.

After graduating fourth in his class in 1861, Henry married Eva Taylor. Eva's sister Rebecca also married a West Point Graduate – David R. Jones. Henry Kingsbury now had two brothers-in-law that left the U.S. Army and offered their services to the Confederacy—Buckner and D. R. Jones. Jones was at the siege of Fort Sumter, fought with the Army of Northern Virginia, rose to the rank of Major General and commanded the soldiers who on September 17 mortally wounded his brother-in-law. Four months after Antietam, David Jones died of a heart attack at the age of 37. Sisters Eva and Rebecca were now both widows.

Henry Kingsbury was described by his men as a *“brilliant, honorable and brave soldier...”* who was *“like a father to the enlisted men of*

his regiment.” *“He was strict while on duty, but always courteous and gentlemanly.”*

Henry was taken to the nearby Rohrbach farm house where he was visited by Ambrose Burnside. Lt. Col. Griffen Stedman of the 11th Connecticut was at his side the next day and described Kingsbury's last moments: *“...the Colonel opened his eyes, had given me the sweetest, most brilliant smile, and then closed them forever.”* Kingsbury never met his son Henry Walter Kingsbury Jr., who was born in December, 1862.



West Point portrait of Col. Henry W. Kingsbury, commander of the 11th Connecticut Infantry.

EYEWITNESS - *“Col. Kingsbury ...brought up the left wing where he was exposed to the most intense fire...he was soon severely wounded in the heel; although much crippled he continued urging on the men, but in a few moments was again struck in the leg. Unable longer to stand he was borne from the field but in the passage was struck buy a third ball in the shoulder, by a fourth in the abdomen. At the hospital he suffered great pain during the dressing of his wounds and survived but twenty-four hours.* Lt. Col. Griffen Stedman, 11th CT Infantry

Stop 4 - Fence Opening

After the attacks of Crook's Brigade and the 11th Connecticut failed, Brigadier General James Nagle was selected to lead the next assault on the bridge. Because of the difficult nature of the terrain, Nagle realized that he could not utilize his entire brigade in the attack. He thus chose two regiments—the 2nd Maryland and 6th New Hampshire—to charge toward the bridge using the Rohrersville Road (the restored gravel road from here to the bridge). His other two regiments—the 48th Pennsylvania & 9th New Hampshire—were to provide covering fire from the high bluff where you just walked. At 11:00 a.m., Nagle ordered the attack.

Captain Lyman Jackman of the 6th NH wrote that upon receiving the order, the soldiers *“fixed bayonets, and, moving at the double quick, passed through a narrow opening in a strong chestnut fence—which there was no time to remove—and charged in the most gallant manner directly up the road toward the bridge.”*

As the 2nd MD and 6th NH rushed toward the bridge, *“the rebels, from their entrenched position, redoubled*

Brig. Gen. James Nagle who wrote in his official report that *“The position was a strong one for the enemy, as he was posted in strong force on the bank of Antietam Creek, on the wooded banks of this stream, with precipitous banks that afforded them shelter from our artillery and infantry.”*

the fury of their fire, sweeping the head of the column with murderous effect. Of the first hundred men who passed through the opening in the fence, at least nine-tenths were either killed or wounded.” Nagle's attacking column soon melted away, and the roadside and creek bank were thickly strewn with dead and wounded soldiers. Another Union attempt to carry the bridge had failed.

Follow the restored historic road toward the Burnside Bridge. Pause to read the next page, keeping in mind that you are walking in the footsteps of the Union attackers.



Finally Across

Around 1:00 p.m., Ferrero's men, who had scrambled down the hillside and halted along the fence and stone wall, continued to fire across the creek. On the opposite bank, the Confederate firepower was dwindling. A Georgia soldier remembered how *"their ammunition gave out, they took the cartridges from their dead and wounded comrades and shot it away at the enemy, and then were clamorous for more."*

The final blow to the Confederate position was Isaac Rodman's Union soldiers who finally crossed Antietam Creek downstream. This, Toombs wrote, enabled the 9th Corps *"to attack my small force in*

front, right flank, and rear. . ." In addition, Toombs reported to D.R. Jones that *"my two regiments having been constantly engaged from early in the morning up to 1 o'clock with a vastly superior force of the enemy, . . . and the ammunition of both regiments being nearly exhausted, . . . I deemed it my duty, in pursuance of your original order, to withdraw my command."*

Red, white, and blue flags led the Union charge across the bridge. Finally, after three hours of life and death struggle, the bridge was won. Toombs' men fell back to join the rest of D.R. Jones's command for the final stand to save Lee's army.



Edwin Forbes sketch of Union soldiers charging across Burnside Bridge.

Stop 5 - The Burnside Bridge

Known as the Rohrbach Bridge before the battle, the Burnside Bridge was one of 14 bridges that Washington County constructed as part of a project that spanned a 40 year period beginning in 1822.

This bridge, designed and built by John Weaver at a cost of \$2,300, connected Sharpsburg with Rohresville, the next town to the south. It was completed in 1836 and was actively used for traffic until 1966. In an effort to preserve the bridge, a bypass was built to take cars across a new bridge upstream. At the same time the four monuments that had been mounted on the four corners were removed and relocated to the east bank. The wooden coping was restored

and the asphalt removed. Today, visitors can once again quietly stroll across what has become the icon of Antietam Battlefield. The peaceful, bucolic setting belies the terrible struggle that took place here.

One of the soldiers who fought here from Maryland clearly remembered that struggle when he wrote “*at this bridge the murderous balls and bursting shells were appalling, destruction hovered in the air, death environed it; the approaches were strewn with dead men. It spanned the Antietam, but all who attempted to cross it had found eternity.*”

Cars parked at the Burnside Bridge parking lot in 1961.





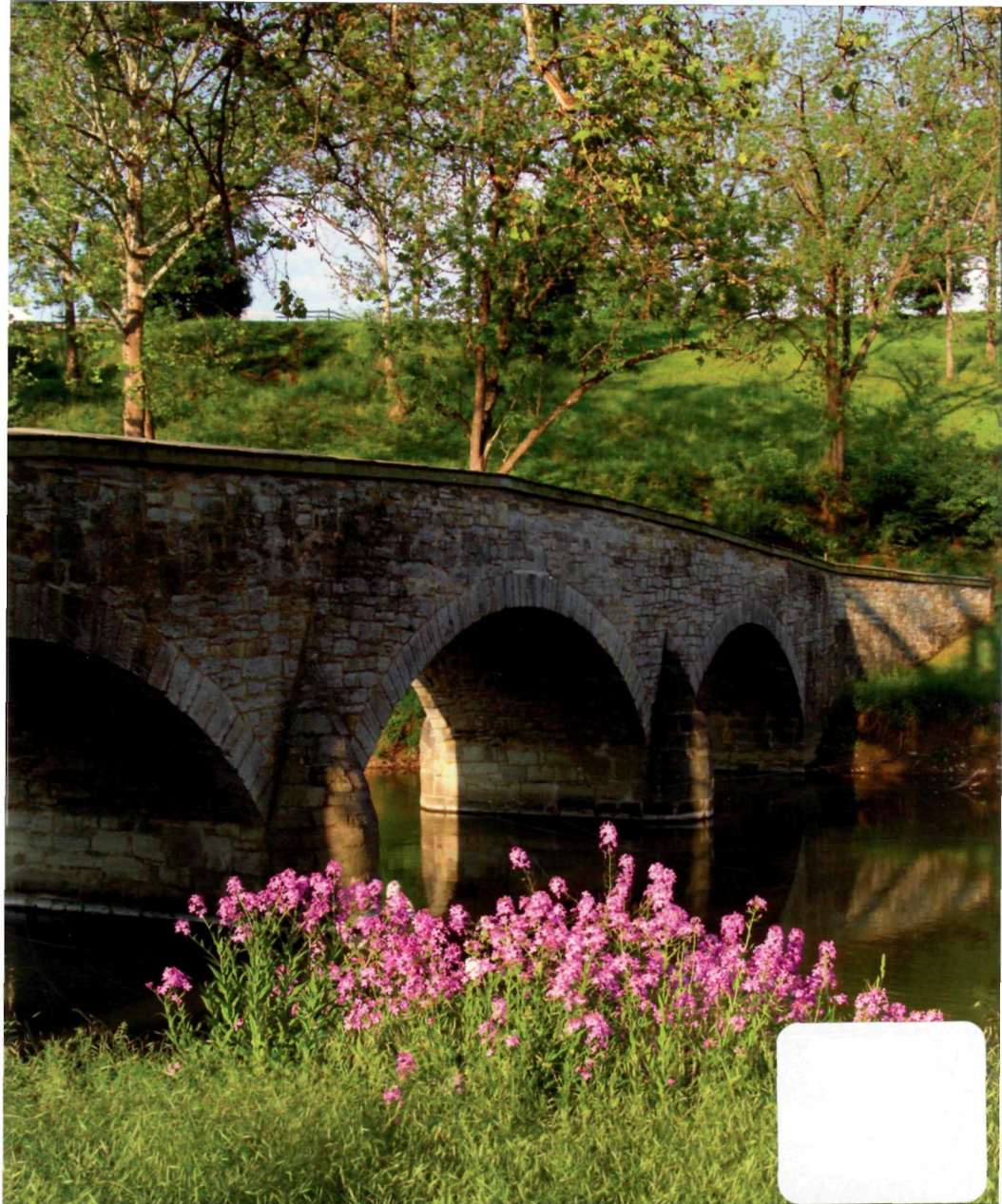
Alexander Gardner captured this view just after the battle.



This postcard, published around 1900, looks north along the historic Rohrserville Road toward the Burnside Bridge.



In this view the camera points south from the bridge. Notice the 51st Pennsylvania Infantry Monument mounted on the bridge. Before the bridge was restored there were monuments mounted on all four corners.



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