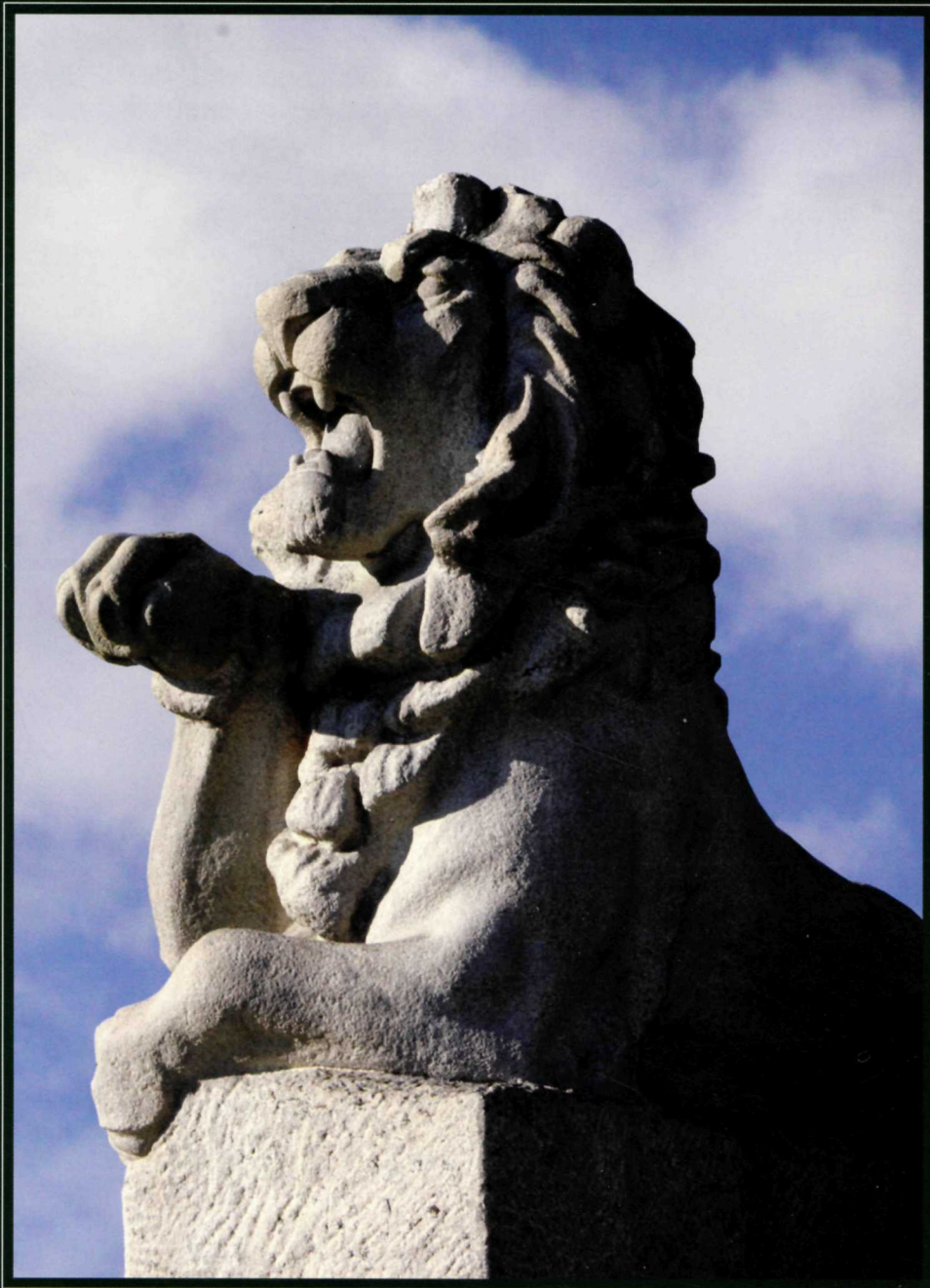


West Woods Trail

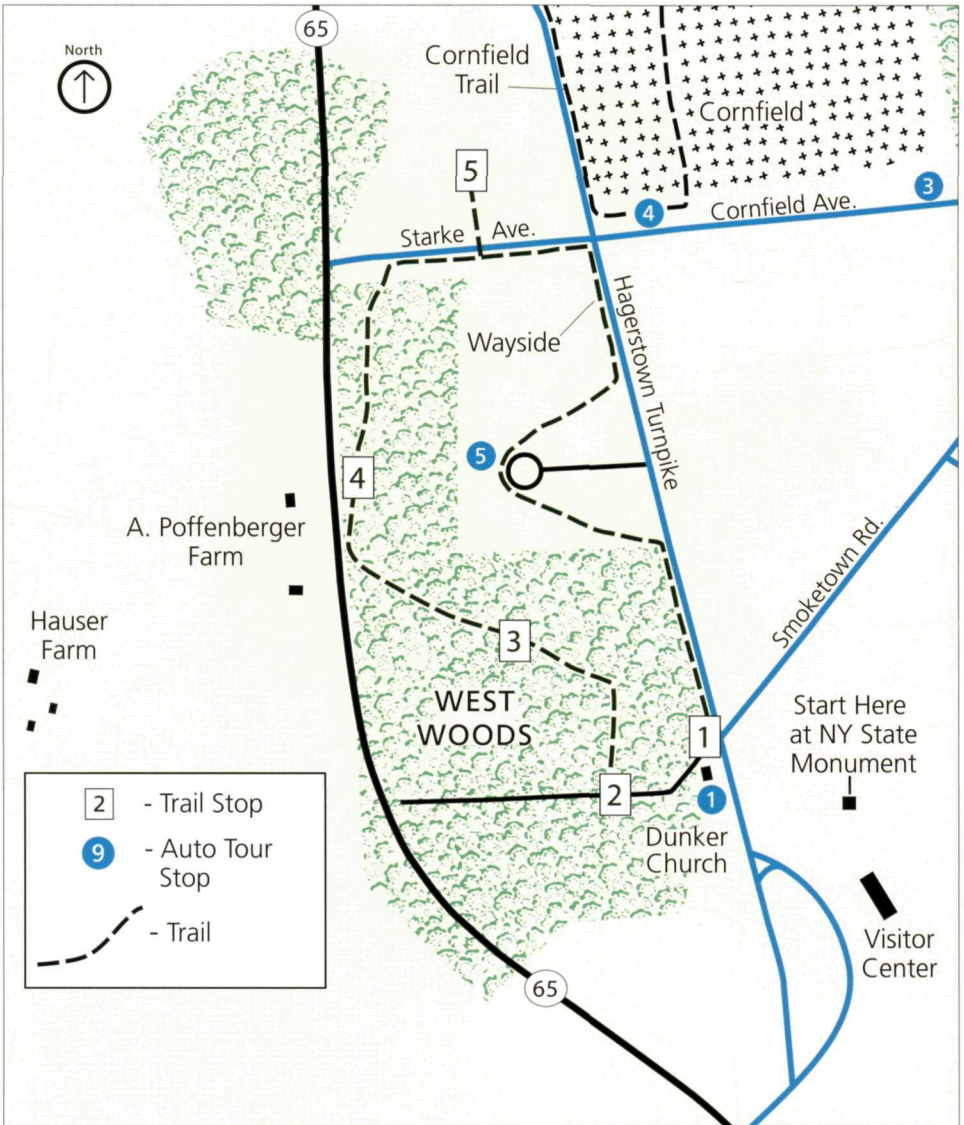
"How is it possible for anyone to pass through such a death-trap.."



Introduction

The West Woods Trail starts at the New York State Monument, which is just north of the Visitor Center. Allow approximately ninety minutes for this 1.5 mile hike. You will be walking through grassy fields, woodlots, and near park tour roads over gently rolling terrain, so good hiking shoes are recommended.

By 8:45 a.m. on the morning of the battle, the fields between this high ground and the North Woods, one mile north of this point, was covered with the wreckage of a titanic struggle. Discarded weapons, accouterments, and the bodies of thousands of killed and wounded littered the field. At about

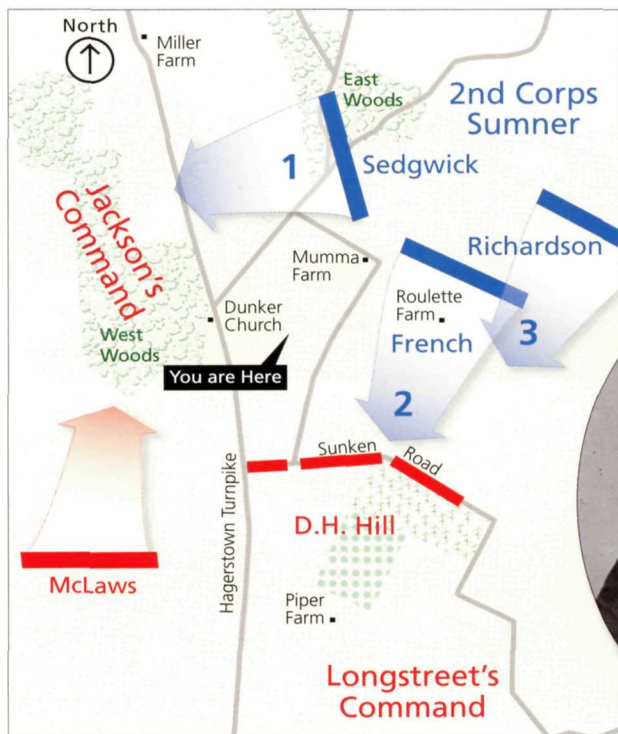


9:00 a.m., another attempt to crush Lee's left began to form.

Gen. Edwin V. Sumner's 2nd Corps started the day on the east side of Antietam Creek, near the Pry House. As the battle unfolded, Sumner and his men were ordered to the field to add support to the earlier Union attacks. There were three divisions in the 2nd Corps, each numbering about 5,000 men. After Gen. John Sedgwick's Division crossed the Antietam, they were rushed into the battle towards the West Woods. The remaining two divisions, after they waded the

Antietam, turned south and drove toward the Sunken Road.

At about the same time that Sedgwick's forces moved out of the East Woods and drove west, Confederate soldiers commanded by Gen. LaFayette McLaws and Col. George T. Anderson, were ordered north from Sharpsburg to shore up Jackson's thin line of gray. Unknown to either side, they were all headed toward a deadly, lopsided struggle in the West Woods.



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 toward the Dunker Church and carefully cross the Hagerstown Turnpike. Trail Stop 1 is just north of the church.

Stop 1 - The West Woods

The historic West Woods covered about 75 acres. Over the years, farmers used the wood from this woodlot for heating their homes or building fences. By 1900 most of the trees were gone, and a farm was built where the woods once stood. By 1995 the farm was gone, and this section of the West Woods was nothing more than an open field.

The National Park Service is working hard to restore the battlefield to its 1862 appearance. With the help of thousands of volunteers, the park staff has planted over 20,000 trees so this

area more closely resembles its wartime appearance, allowing future generations to better understand and appreciate the fighting in this woodlot.

Just across the Hagerstown Turnpike is a monument to the 59th New York Infantry. This regiment had 224 killed and wounded in the West Woods, including its commander Lt. Col. James Stetson. Farther on the trail you will pass a small monument dedicated to Lt. Col. Stetson that was placed there by his brother in 1920.



The area in front of you around 1900, looking north.



First Trees Planted in the West Woods - March 7, 1995, looking west.

Continue west behind the church about 100 yards to Stop 2.

Stop 2 - Confederate Reinforcements

After Gen. John B. Hood's division had been swept from the Cornfield, Hood sent an urgent message to the commanding general, Robert E. Lee, that, "unless reinforcements were sent at once, the day was lost." Lee responded, "...tell Gen. Hood to hold his ground, reinforcements are now rapidly approaching..." The reinforcements Lee spoke of were Gen. LaFayette McLaws's Division which Lee had ordered north.

As Sedgwick's Division advanced, the 34th New York mistakenly veered away from the 15th Massachusetts on their right. A gap opened up in the Union line and it was this 'hole in the line' that allowed some of McLaws's Confederates to slam into the exposed Union flank. The 34th was hit hard during their short time in the West Woods. Lt. H.W. Sanford recalled, "...we found ourselves flanked and enfiladed by a vastly superior force... it is a mystery that

will never be solved, how it was possible for anyone to pass through such a death-trap and live to record the fact."

The 125th Pennsylvania was not part of Sedgwick's Division, or even part of the Union 2nd Corps. Assigned to the 12th Corps, the 125th entered the West Woods just as Sedgwick's men started their advance. In the confusion, the 125th was caught up in the disaster. Over twenty percent of the regiment was lost during the short engagement including their color bearer, George Simpson, whose likeness adorns the top of their monument. The 34th New York Monument was dedicated in 1902 and the 125th Pennsylvania Monument was placed on the field in 1904. Even though these two regiments were from two different army corps, they fought side-by-side in the West Woods.

National flag carried by Color Sergeant George Simpson, who was killed in the Confederate onslaught. Capt. William Wallace remembered how Simpson "fell, his death was instantaneous ...covering the flag with his life's blood." Sergeant Simpson is buried in Antietam National Cemetery.



Follow the trail north into the woods and proceed to Stop 3.

Stop 3 - Confederate Success

While moving through the woods, notice the rock outcroppings and rolling terrain that concealed the Confederates until they were right on the flank of their opponent. Confederate soldiers from Mississippi and South Carolina slammed into the flank of unsuspecting Federal soldiers who had taken up positions just north of this point. This Confederate attack, led by McLaws's Division,

inflicted over 2,000 casualties in about twenty minutes. The action in the West Woods was the only engagement on the field where Confederate forces outnumbered their opponents.

Five different Confederate brigades flanked the Federals posted here and drove them north and east out of the West Woods.



BGen Paul J. Semmes

MCLAWS DIVISION

BGen Joseph B. Kershaw



BGen William Barksdale

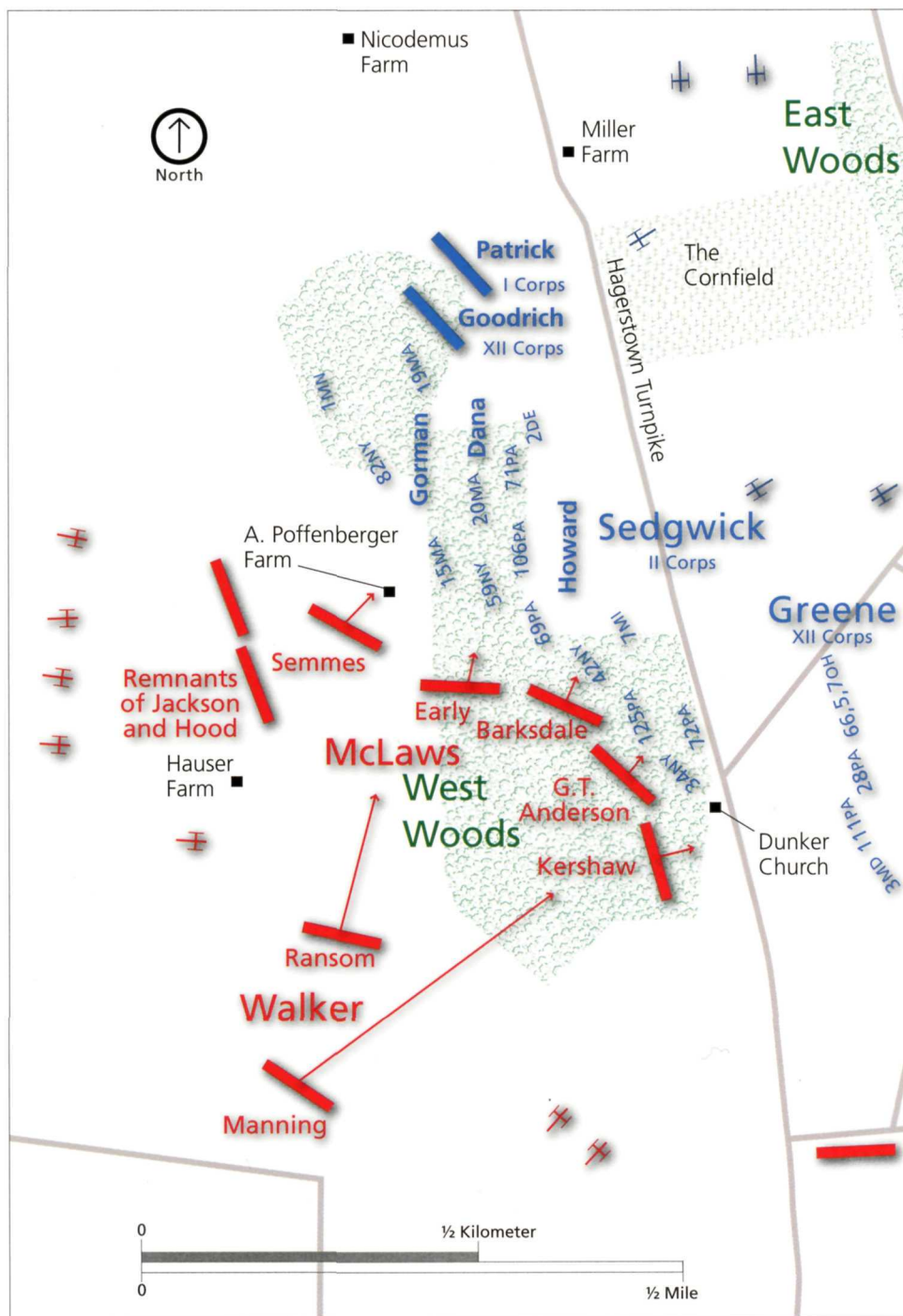


BGen Jubal A. Early
EWELL'S DIVISION



Col G.T. "Tige" Anderson
D.R. JONES DIVISION

Battle Map at Approximately 9:30 a.m.



Overview of the Fight for the West Woods



GEN. JOHN WALKER
Lee ordered Walker's Division to move north from the southern end of the battlefield toward the West Woods.



GEN. LAFAYETTE McLAWS
McLaws and his men marched all night from Harpers Ferry. Early that morning Gen. Lee ordered McLaws's men into battle. These soldiers did most of the fighting in the West Woods.

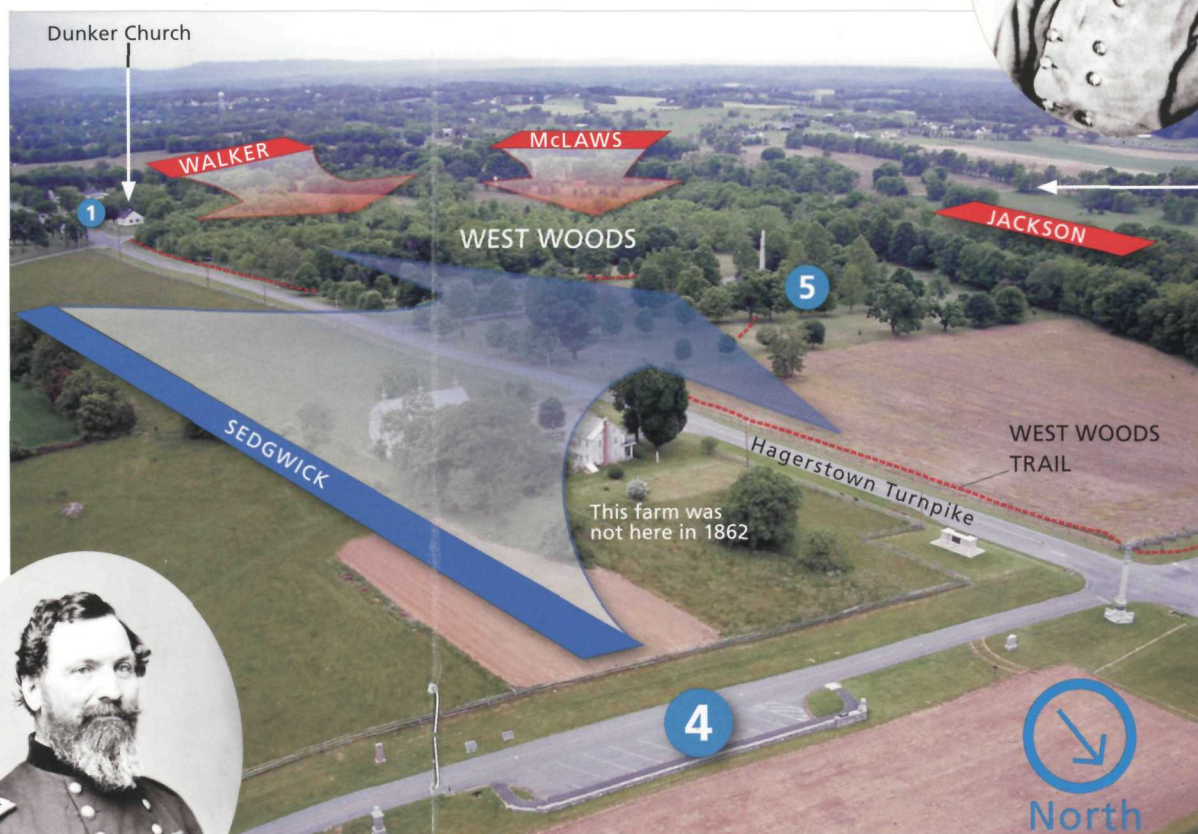


GEN. STONEWALL JACKSON
His ranks were decimated in the early morning action. What was left of his command fell back into the West Woods.

GEN. EDWIN SUMNER
Sumner's Union Second Corps advanced across Antietam Creek that morning. His three divisions became separated by time, distance and terrain.



GEN. JOHN SEDGWICK
His division of 5,000 men was crushed on three sides in the West Woods. Over 2,000 were killed or wounded. Known as "Uncle John," Sedgwick was wounded three times in the woods. He survived, but was later killed at Spotsylvania.



CONFEDERATE ARTILLERY was located on Hauser Ridge. These guns fired on Sedgwick's men as they moved through the West Woods.

This aerial photograph was taken from above the Cornfield, Tour Stop 4, looking southwest toward the West Woods, Tour Stop 5.

Walk along the trail west towards Rt. 65. Turn right at the road and follow the fence line to the next stop - the 15th Massachusetts Monument.

Stop 4 - The Wounded Lion

As the 15th Massachusetts reached this point, Confederate artillery positioned due west on Hauser Ridge stopped their advance. Within ten minutes, Confederate infantry that had just arrived on the field fired into their front and flank. When it appeared that the situation could not get any worse, Lt. Col. John Kimball remembered, "...the second line of the division... commenced firing through my left wing on the enemy...many of my men were by this maneuver killed by our own forces."

The 15th marched into the West Woods with 606 men in its ranks. Twenty minutes later, 75 had been killed and 255 wounded for a total of 330 casualties, or 55%. Of the wounded, forty-three later died from their wounds. This loss was the highest number of casualties

for any regiment that fought at Antietam. In 1900, thirty-eight years later to the day, the members of the regiment returned to the battlefield and dedicated this monument in honor of their lost comrades.

Prior to this stop, notice the War Department Tablets faced away from the modern road. The grassy area where the trail is located today was once the early park tour road. The tablets face the original road. Similarly, the monument just south of the 15th, dedicated to Col. John Stetson, was placed there because of the route of the old tour road. One final note before leaving this stop—across Rt. 65, between the trees is the Alfred Poffenberger cabin, one of the oldest structures on the battlefield.



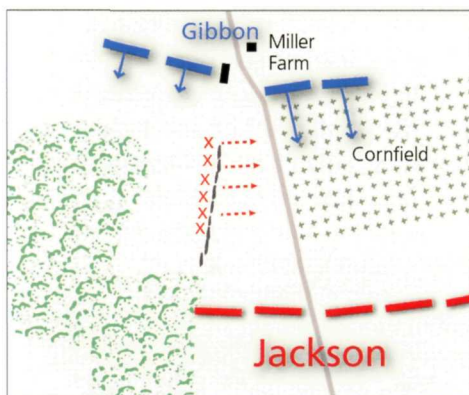
Continue on the trail through the woods to Starke Ave. The next stop is on the north side of Starke Ave. – The Rock Ledge

Stop 5 - The Rock Ledge

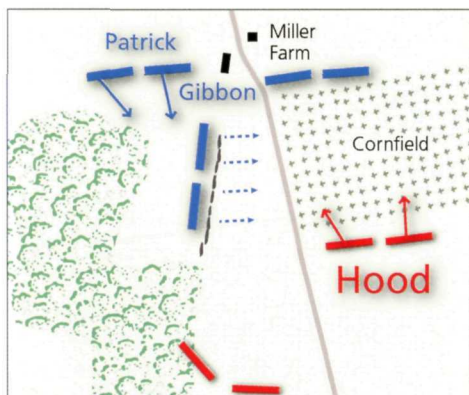
This inconspicuous rock ledge was a key terrain feature that changed hands numerous times during the battle. Initially, Confederates positioned behind this ledge fired toward the Cornfield (map 1).

Then two regiments of Gibbon's Brigade, First Corps, drove the Virginians from this position and used it to fire into Hood's Confederates as they advanced north (map 2). When the 19th Indiana and 7th Wisconsin along with Patrick's Brigade, also of the First Corps, advanced from here toward the Cornfield, Louisiana soldiers moved into position behind this same ledge and fired into their backs. The Confederates held this area until a brigade from the 12th Corps dislodged them.

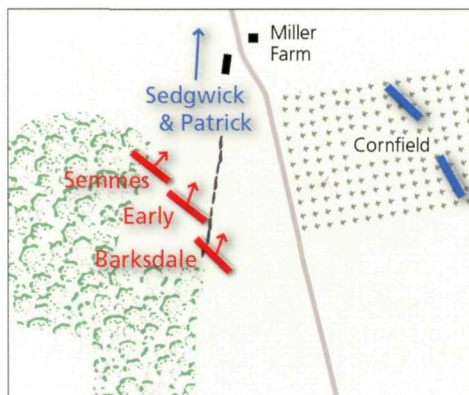
Finally, during Sedgwick's withdrawal from the West Woods the Confederates were able to once again gain control of this key defensive position (map 3). The confusing action around this ledge is an excellent example of the critical role terrain played during this battle.



Map 1 - About 6:00 a.m.



Map 2 - About 7:00 a.m.



Map 3 - About 9:30 a.m.

Hike east to the Hagerstown Pike and follow the markers to Philadelphia Brigade Park. On your way to Philadelphia Brigade Park, stop at the wayside along the Turnpike with the historic photograph.

Death Along the Turnpike

When Alexander Gardner and his assistant James Gibson came to the battlefield to photograph the aftermath of Antietam, they found grisly evidence of what they

were looking for here along the Hagerstown Turnpike. Gardner took a series of images in this area of what he described as dead Louisiana soldiers.



“The piles of dead on the Sharpsburg and Hagerstown Turnpike surpassed anything on any other battlefield of my observation. The angle of death at Spottsylvania, the Cold Harbor slaughter pen and the Fredericksburg field where Sumner attacked, were all mentally compared by me, when I saw them, with this turnpike at Antietam. My feeling was that the Antietam Turnpike surpassed all in manifest evidence of slaughter.”

Major Rufus Dawes of the Iron Brigade

Philadelphia Brigade Park

Standing at this point, one is at the center of Sedgwick's third brigade that drove into the West Woods. Philadelphia Brigade Park was named for this brigade of soldiers commanded by Gen. Oliver O. Howard. Howard lost 545 men in a span of about twenty minutes and later remembered, "They poured their blood out like water, and we must look to God and our country for a just reward."

Thirty years later the Philadelphia Brigade Association purchased eleven acres for their monument. The veterans established a public park, planted trees, erected a gate, and in 1896 dedicated their monument in the center of the property. In 1940, the National Park Service acquired this land from the Association at a cost of one dollar.

Pin from the dedication and early gate to Philadelphia Brigade Park.

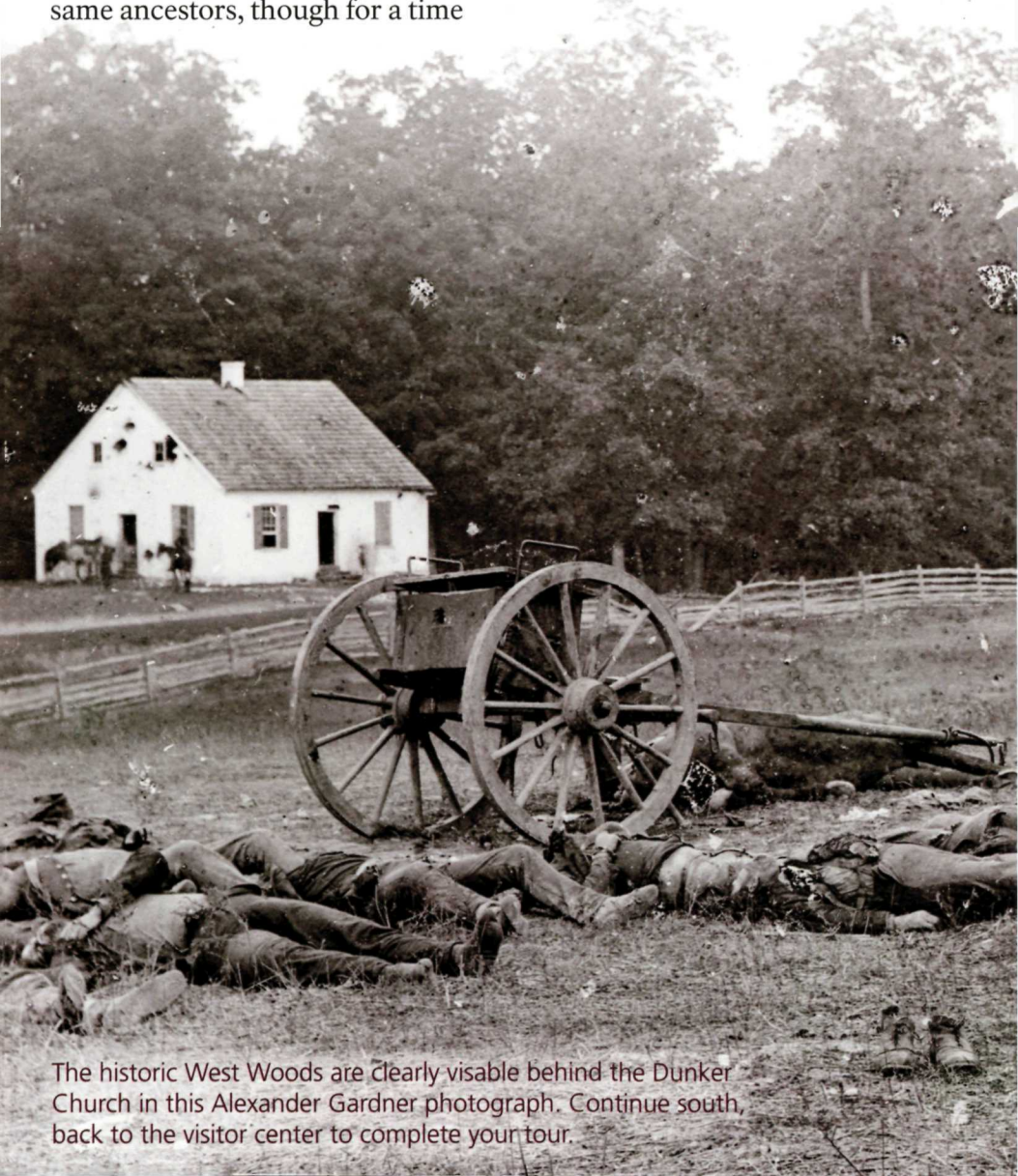


Conclusion

“What a slaughter was this one day battle! The valor displayed on this field by the men of the north and the south had never been equalled by the armies of other nations. Here we met foes worthy of the steel. They were Americans; brothers in whose veins flowed blood of the same ancestors, though for a time

estranged from us. Thank God that we can meet today, comrades of a united country, under one Constitution and one flag.”

Capt. John Reilly at the dedication of the Philadelphia Brigade Monument.

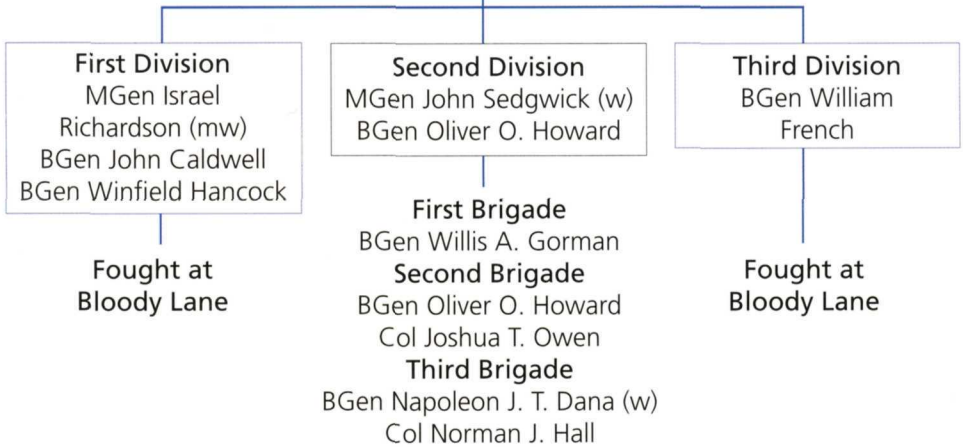


The historic West Woods are clearly visible behind the Dunker Church in this Alexander Gardner photograph. Continue south, back to the visitor center to complete your tour.

Tables of Organization for Units Engaged

UNION 2nd Corps

MGen Edwin V. Sumner
approximately 15,000 men



CONFEDERATE LONGSTREET'S (right) WING

MGen James Longstreet



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

JACKSON'S (left) WING

MGen Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson

Early's Brigade
BGen Jubal A. Early



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