

# THE ANTIETAM JOURNAL

Vol. I  
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A Publication of the Antietam Institute



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September 2021

Kevin R. Pawlak  
Editor

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The Antietam Journal is a biannual publication of the latest research, interpretation, and stories of the Maryland Campaign of September 1862 that highlights the participants involved—soldier and civilian—and the lasting impact of the campaign on American history.

The Antietam Institute was established in 2021 as a member-based, educational, and philanthropic 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The Institute educates the public on the central role of the Maryland Campaign of 1862 and Battle of Antietam as a major turning point of the Civil War that directly resulted in the issuance of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Antietam Institute sponsored conferences, symposiums, publications, and leadership forums facilitate collaborative learning and knowledge exchange, create unique opportunities for discovery and inspire further historical research.

## Manuscript Submissions

Manuscript submissions can be sent to the editor at [editor2@antietaminstitute.org](mailto:editor2@antietaminstitute.org). Feature articles should not exceed 10,000 words in length (including footnotes).

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## The Editor's Column

In his coverage of the Battle of Antietam, *Boston Journal* correspondent Charles Coffin wrote, "It is a battle-field which will be much visited and studied." Today, Antietam National Battlefield attracts nearly 300,000 visitors annually. Dozens of books about the battle and the accompanying Maryland Campaign have been published since September 1862—159 years ago. Coffin was correct in his contemporary assessment of Antietam's relevance in American memory.<sup>1</sup>

The Maryland Campaign's importance will ensure that the conversations about and visits to the campaign's battlefields (Harpers Ferry, South Mountain, Antietam, and Shepherdstown) continue. Military, social, and political considerations shaped the campaign's outcome and made it a key piece of American history.

*The Antietam Journal* is the newly-founded Antietam Institute's attempt to contribute to the ongoing conversation about America's bloodiest single-day battle and a crucial campaign in the American Civil War that turned back the first Confederate invasion of the United States and entered Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation into the conflict's calculations. On the pages of this biannual publication, readers will find military analysis, political commentary, and the stories of the individuals—soldiers and civilians alike—affected by the campaign.

Two essays originally prepared under the Save Historic Antietam Foundation's Joseph L. Harsh Scholarship Award headline this inaugural issue. Daniel J. Vermilya's "Perceptions, not Realities...": The Army of the Potomac in the Maryland Campaign" reexamines the Army of the Potomac that fought at Antietam. Matt Borders' "The Loudoun Valley Campaign of 1862" tells the story of Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan's final days as commander of that army. The reprinting of these valuable essays would not have been possible without the cooperation of the Save Historic Antietam Foundation.

Joseph Stahl brings to life the story of one Antietam veteran through an identification tag while J.O. Smith's contribution to the journal encourages readers to set their feet on the ground where the campaign occurred and visit the preserved sites of the Maryland Campaign. Laura Marfut sat down with John Schildt, a renowned Antietam historian of many decades. Lastly, James A. Rosebrock reviews a new biography of Fifth Corps commander Maj. Gen. Fitz John Porter, another addition to the campaign's growing historiography.

Your support of the Antietam Institute will keep the conversation of the Maryland Campaign going for many years to come. Enjoy this latest addition to the scholarship of the Maryland Campaign.

*Kevin R. Pawlak*

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<sup>1</sup> "The Battle of Antietam," *The Columbia (PA) Spy*, October 4, 1862; "National Capital Region Infrastructure Fact Sheets," <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/211440cf-69a4-4cb3-b939-74c4a81a255c/original> (accessed July 1, 2021).

# Antietam Institute Announcements

## *The Brigades of Antietam*

While the 1862 Maryland Campaign has been extensively studied, a comprehensive treatment of the part played by each unit has been ignored. *The Brigades of Antietam* fills this void by presenting a complete account of each major unit, providing a fresh perspective of the campaign.

Using the words of enlisted men and officers, the book weaves a fascinating narrative of the role played by every unit (112 entries) from the time it began its march toward Sharpsburg to the final action at Shepherdstown. Organized by order of battle, each unit is covered in complete and exhaustive detail: where it fought, its commander, what constituted the unit, and how it performed in the campaign. Innovative in its approach and comprehensive in its coverage, *The Brigades of Antietam* is certain to be a classic and indispensable reference for the Maryland Campaign for years to come.

The book has been written by a collaboration of over 15 Antietam Certified Battlefield guides, Rangers, and seasoned Antietam volunteers. Bradley Gottfried, the author of *The Brigades of Gettysburg*, serves as the volume's editor.

*The Brigades of Antietam* will be published this summer. For a limited time only, certain Institute membership levels will receive an exclusive copy before it is available to the general public.

James A. Rosebrock is currently completing a companion piece, *The Artillery of Antietam*.

## **2022 Spring Symposium**

Join us for our first annual Spring Symposium. The program will include as five presentations on a variety of timely topics dealing with the Maryland Campaign. Speakers will be experts in the field and many will provide new perspectives on the battle of Antietam and the 1862 Maryland Campaign. A panel of experts will round out the day. There will be ample opportunities for interactions with the speakers, scholars/experts, and other participants during the presentations, lunch, and during the panel discussion. A continental breakfast and lunch will be provided.

Space is limited, so register early. Registration begins on October 15, 2021 and continues until March 23, 2022.

*For more information about both announcements, visit [www. antietaminstitute.org](http://www.antietaminstitute.org)*

# “Perceptions, Not Realities”: The Army of the Potomac in the Maryland Campaign

by Daniel J. Vermilya

The Army of the Potomac ranks as one of the most famed fighting forces in American history. From the fields of Gettysburg to the gates of Richmond, this army helped to save the United States in the country’s hour of need. Yet, on one of the famed battlefields of the American Civil War, the Army of the Potomac does not seem to get the credit that it so deserves. Infamous as the bloodiest single day of our nation’s deadliest war, Antietam was a crucial U.S. victory that led to the Emancipation Proclamation, reshaping the Civil War and impacting the freedom of millions. Despite its importance, some historians find Antietam’s outcome to be confusing, labeling it a draw, a standoff, or in some cases, even a Confederate tactical victory. Many maintain that because Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia was not entirely destroyed at Antietam, the battle’s tactical result was somehow ambiguous, a standard not applied to other battles of the war, such as Shiloh, Second Manassas, Chancellorsville, and most notably, Gettysburg. Each battle saw the losing army slip away to live and fight another day, yet is still seen as a clear-cut victory for the winning side.

In this popularized view of Antietam, the U. S. victory was limited because Federal forces did not exert their full strength on the battlefield against Lee’s army. It is commonly asserted that the Army of the Potomac had at least a two-to-one numerical advantage over the Army of Northern Virginia at the battle, with legions of well-armed soldiers sitting idly by while Lee’s rag-tag threadbare army valiantly staved off its own destruction. Had the blue-clad Union soldiers fully utilized this strength, the Confederates could and should have been easily destroyed and the war ended much sooner. Accordingly, Antietam appears to have been an instance of Union forces stealing a stalemate from the jaws of victory.

The culprit for these seemingly unforgivable crimes of timidity and foolishness, or so the story often goes, is none other than Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan. If the Army of the Potomac had only been led by any number of other officers from its ranks, ones who did not possess the fatal leadership and personality flaws of McClellan, the war could have easily ended in September 1862 with a crushing U.S. victory along the banks of Antietam Creek, saving the nation from another three years of bloodshed. Surely, any other general would have done more with the Army of the Potomac than McClellan did. Perhaps the central tenet of this argument is the premise that, because of the large advantage Federal forces had in superior strength and condition, Antietam should have ended much differently than it did.

This traditional interpretation of Antietam—which lays the alleged Union failures squarely at the feet of George B. McClellan—is nearly ubiquitous in popular and academic histories on the battle. Historian Scott Hartwig offered a



fitting summary of this view of the campaign when discussing the strengths of Union and Confederate forces in *To Antietam Creek*, the first volume of his work on the Maryland Campaign: “One of the enduring images of the Maryland Campaign is that of a well fed, superbly equipped, and massive Army of the Potomac being fought to a standstill by a ragged, ill-equipped, and greatly outnumbered Army of Northern Virginia.”<sup>2</sup>

In popular works on Antietam, perhaps none has had a larger impact than filmmaker Ken Burns’ acclaimed documentary series on the Civil War, which debuted nearly three decades ago. The portion of the series on Antietam is short, but full of moments faulting McClellan for failing to properly use his army. Of particular note is the suggestion that on the day after the battle, September 18, Federal forces outnumbered Confederates three-to-one, yet did not attack simply due to McClellan’s own timidity. Indeed this discussion of a numerical disparity between the two armies at Antietam is also included in the introductory film shown at the National Park Service Visitor Center, which makes a similar claim that throughout the entire Maryland Campaign, Union forces outnumbered Confederates at least two-to-one.

Examples of this interpretation are numerous as well in published works on Antietam, especially in the past several decades. In James McPherson’s *Crossroads of Freedom*, published in 2002, the Pulitzer-Prize winning historian suggests that while McClellan deserves credit for taking command and reorganizing the Army of the Potomac at a crucial moment following Second Manassas, “he was reluctant to run this machine at full speed for fear of breaking it.” In *The Long Road to Antietam*, published in time for the sesquicentennial anniversary of Antietam, author Richard Slotkin suggests that given how McClellan employed his army’s overwhelming strength at Antietam, the general’s very character and decision-making capabilities are to be questioned. Slotkin notes that the Army of the Potomac had a two-to-one advantage on the morning of September 17, and a three-to-one advantage on the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup>. The lack of an attack the day after the battle thus, “raises far more serious questions about [McClellan’s] judgment and motives than the errors of planning and execution that marred his tactical command the day before.”<sup>3</sup>

Historian Steven Woodworth strikes a similar tone in his history of the Civil War, *This Great Struggle*. He suggests Federal forces outnumbered Confederates 90,000 to 18,000 on September 16, and as such, “McClellan had the opportunity to crush the Confederate force at Sharpsburg and take it and its commander as prisoners.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> D. Scott Hartwig, *To Antietam Creek*, Vol. 1 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 674.

<sup>3</sup> James McPherson, *Crossroads of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 131; Richard Slotkin, *The Long Road to Antietam* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2012), 340, 344.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Woodworth, *This Great Struggle: America’s Civil War* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield

While these recent examples all illustrate the traditional interpretation of Antietam, perhaps no book on the battle has been as widely read as Stephen Sears' *Landscape Turned Red*. While providing an excellent combat narrative, Sears is quite harsh on U.S. forces at the battle, asserting that George McClellan "remained in character, so fearful of losing that he would not risk winning." Because of this, "Judging those twelve hours of desperate combat on a purely tactical level, for example, the Army of Northern Virginia could justly claim a victory," Sears writes. "It had beaten back a foe much superior in manpower and ordnance and inflicted substantially greater casualties than it suffered." Sears' judgment of Federal forces at the battle concludes with echoing perhaps the most common refrain on Union leadership in the American Civil War: "It would be the particular tragedy of the Army of the Potomac that (unlike their opponents) they seldom got the generals they deserved."<sup>5</sup>

While *Landscape Turned Red* is Sears' best-known work, he has written on Antietam elsewhere as well. In an article published in *American Heritage* in 1989, Sears contrasts the bravery and sacrifice of common U.S. soldiers with the obvious faults of their commander: "One-third of the Army of the Potomac would not fire a shot on September 17, and one leaves this spot, so terrible in its silent eloquence, in wonder at the obtuseness of George McClellan."<sup>6</sup>

The effects of such interpretations of the battle are readily apparent in how Antietam is remembered in popular memory. Indeed, in the minds of many McClellan has become not a general, but a caricature of one, more closely resembling the Cowardly Lion or Wile E. Coyote instead of an officer in the United States army. In my own time working at Antietam National Battlefield, I frequently encountered visitors who, upon seeing an image of George McClellan inside the park Visitor Center, would respond with emotions ranging from laughter to anger. Far too often, the assumption on the battle—fueled by published histories on Antietam—is that George McClellan had an army so powerful and so great that anyone who simply used it properly should have won the day handily. As a park visitor once told me, "If George McClellan had been Robert E. Lee, he would have won this battle."

Considering this popular perception of the battle hinges on some very basic and important assumptions, it is perhaps worth asking an important question—was the Army of the Potomac really the mighty and powerful fighting force of historical memory in September 1862?

Simply put, the Army of the Potomac at Antietam was not the grand fighting force of popular perception. It was an army built from the remnants of defeated armies in one week's time in early September 1862. Instead of a mighty sword that was simply in the wrong hands, the army had deficiencies throughout its

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Publishers, Inc., 2011), 156-160.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Sears, *Landscape Turned Red* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), 303, 309, 310.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Sears, "The Terrible Price of Freedom," *American Heritage*, 40, No. 3 (April 1989) <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/terrible-price-freedom> (accessed December 20, 2012).

organization. From battle experience to the condition of its troops, to its numerical strength overall, the Army of the Potomac was more threadbare than popularly depicted. Regrettably, these details and context are not found in the popular perception of Antietam, where the overall consensus has transformed historical myths about Antietam into alleged historical facts. As historian Joseph Harsh once wrote, “Perceptions, not realities, rule history....”<sup>7</sup>

To understand the reality of the Army of the Potomac at Antietam, several considerations must be taken into account. First, the army itself was created in early September 1862; its newness led to many complications for regimental, brigade, division, and corps commanders, as well as McClellan himself. While Lee’s army was a battle-tested and cohesive force, McClellan’s army was cobbled together on the eve of the campaign.

Second, the Army of Northern Virginia held a significant edge in battle experience over Federal forces at Antietam. Robert E. Lee’s army entered Maryland a veteran unit; nearly every soldier had been in at least one major fight prior to September 1862. In comparison, nearly 20 percent of the Union army at Antietam had never before been in combat, and many of those soldiers had been in the army just a few weeks. The lack of experience extended upwards into the officer corps of the Army of the Potomac as well.

Third, Union troops at Antietam were not in ideal fighting condition. Significant straggling occurred on the roads in Maryland, and many soldiers were exhausted from the recent defeats on the battlefields of Virginia. Of course, Lee’s army was in a poor condition as well. Yet while popular perception and interpretation takes that into account when suggesting that the Confederates were an army that could have been easily defeated in Maryland, no such consideration is given for the straggling or weaknesses of Federal troops.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, because of the newness of the command, the deficiency in experience, and Federal straggling, Union forces at Antietam were not as numerically strong or battle-ready as many historians have claimed. George McClellan did not have a massive reserve of unused troops with which to continue fighting on the 18<sup>th</sup>. In fact, he didn’t even have them on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

Before moving ahead, a word of clarity is in order. This article is not intended to be an exhaustive comparative study of Federal and Confederate forces at Antietam, nor is it meant to be an impassioned defense of George McClellan, a man who had many flaws and faults, and who certainly made his fair share of mistakes at Antietam and elsewhere. McClellan had clashes with other officers and with officials in the Lincoln Administration, including the president himself, all of which ultimately culminated in his removal from command in November 1862.

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph L. Harsh, *Taken at the Flood: Robert E. Lee and Confederate Strategy in the Maryland Campaign of 1862* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1999), 261.

Instead, it is my hope to understand better the Army of the Potomac at Antietam, moving beyond the myths that have long clouded our view of the Maryland Campaign. Understanding the army, not making caricatures out of its leaders, allows for a better appreciation of what occurred during those crucial days in September 1862, when the fate of the nation hung in the balance. This article is an attempt to point out the differences between perception and reality that so often cloud our understanding of history.

### **Picking up the Pieces: Building an Army**

*“This week is the crisis of our fate.”—Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan*

A logical place to begin this study is the days following the Battle of Second Manassas, which were a collective moment of crisis for the United States. At the start of September 1862, as John Pope’s defeated army streamed back toward the Federal capital, Robert E. Lee and his victorious Army of Northern Virginia were poised to enter the state of Maryland, invading loyal Union territory. In Washington, the crisis was quite severe. While Lee’s Confederates on the doorstep of the nation’s capital was no doubt a threat, before Union forces could even face off with Lee in the field, they first had to construct an army. That task of picking up the pieces from the shattering defeat at Second Manassas was placed squarely on the shoulders of George McClellan. It was a dark time for Federal hopes.

On August 31, McClellan sent a dispatch to General-in-Chief Henry Halleck lamenting the uncertainty over his role in Washington. Since arriving from the Peninsula, McClellan had seen increasing numbers of his command being sent to John Pope’s Army of Virginia in the field. Now, with Pope being battered at Manassas, McClellan wanted clarity on his situation. Late that same evening, with the situation facing Federal forces becoming increasingly dire, Halleck responded to McClellan by requesting his help in reforming the army in and around the capital:

Since receiving your dispatch relating to command I have not been able to answer any note of absolute necessity. I have not seen the order as published but will write to you in the morning. You will retain the command of everything in this vicinity not temporarily to be Pope’s army in the field. I beg of you to assist me in this crisis with your ability and experience. I am utterly tired out.<sup>8</sup>

Halleck’s note reflected the desperation of the moment, and it meant that George McClellan would be getting a second chance at command. After the failure of his Peninsula Campaign in the summer of 1862, it had at one point appeared as though McClellan’s time as a commanding general was over.<sup>9</sup> There

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<sup>8</sup> Halleck to McClellan, August 31, 1862, in the George Brinton McClellan Papers, Box A75, Reel 30, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division (Hereafter referred to as McClellan Papers, followed by Box and Reel numbers).

<sup>9</sup> From April to August, 1862, George McClellan led the original Army of the Potomac on the

were many in Congress, the War Department, and the Lincoln Administration who despised the 35-year-old general, and who sought to replace him with someone who would fight the war with more vigor, the way many Republicans sought to carry out the conflict.<sup>10</sup> This had led to John Pope being brought east to command the Army of Virginia. Now, with the guns of Manassas still warm from Pope's failure, there was no room for politics. A military leader was needed to organize the defense of Washington and to stave off impending defeat. "I am ready to afford you any assistance in my power," McClellan wrote to Halleck that same night, "but you will readily perceive how difficult an undefined position, such as I now hold, must be. At what hour in the morning can I see you alone, either at your own house or the office?"<sup>11</sup>

The following day, September 1, McClellan met with both Halleck and President Lincoln. That meeting made official what Halleck had indicated the night before: McClellan would be in command of the troops in and around Washington, though Pope's force was not yet under his authority. The urgency of his new role was readily apparent to McClellan. He stated as much when he wrote to his close friend and Fifth Corps commander Fitz John Porter, "The destinies of our country the honor of our arms are at stake, and all depends now upon the cheerful cooperation of all in the field. This week is the crisis of our fate."<sup>12</sup>

McClellan soon began the task of figuring out how many men he had under his new and quickly evolving command. For this task he relied heavily upon Brig. Gen. Seth Williams, the Assistant Adjutant General of the Army of the Potomac. Williams wrote to McClellan several times on September 1, informing him of the strength of various units in the Washington defenses. In the first dispatch, Williams was only able to provide the strength of Col. Peter Allabach's brigade, all new recruits who had recently arrived from Pennsylvania. In another, more detailed dispatch sent later that evening, Williams listed the strength of a number of units in and around the city. Many of these regiments were brand new to the service, others had served for a while but had little to no combat experience, and the rest were various artillery batteries and engineer groups. Thus, as September 1 came to a close, George McClellan had no idea

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Virginia Peninsula in an attempt to capture the Confederate capital of Richmond. It ended in failure, and he and the army were recalled to Washington in August 1862.

<sup>10</sup> McClellan's politics and philosophy of how the war should be fought were anathema to many Republicans in power. See Ethan Rafuse, *McClellan's War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for Union*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> McClellan to Halleck, August 31, 1862, in *War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 vols., 128 parts, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1884), Series 1, vol. 12, pt. 3, pg. 773, hereinafter cited as *OR* with volume and part cited as follows: *OR* 12, pt. 3, pg. 773.

<sup>12</sup> McClellan to Fitz John Porter, September 1, 1862, in *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860 to 1865*, edited by Stephen Sears, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992, republication of 1989 Ticknor and Fields), 427.

how many men under his command were battle tested or battle ready.<sup>13</sup>

Over the next few days, the task of picking up the pieces continued, made all the more difficult by the September 2 news that McClellan would also take command of Pope's army as it retreated back to Washington. Pope himself knew the condition of his men was not good, and indicated as much to Halleck when he estimated his force as being around 57,000 men. "The straggling is awful in the regiments from the Peninsula," Pope wrote, "Unless something can be done to restore tone to this army it will melt away before you know it." Such a dire prediction was not what Halleck needed to hear at that time. Pope continued, noting the severity of the situation, "The enemy is in very heavy force and must be stopped in some way."<sup>14</sup>

Pope's letter was but the tip of the iceberg in regards to the straggling plaguing Union forces at that time. On September 1, Lt. Col. A.J. Warner of the 10<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Reserves was ordered to a camp outside of Washington to assist Brig. Gen. Andrew Whipple in rounding up stragglers and convalescents and getting them back to their commands. By September 3, Whipple reported to Williams that their camp alone had sent over 5,000 stragglers back to their units in the span of just three days. At Upton's Hill, Virginia, where a division of troops from the Kanawha Valley was encamped, Brig. Gen. Jacob Cox reported on the 5<sup>th</sup> that his men had rounded up several hundred stragglers from "all divisions of the army. Some of them have been missing a week. What shall be done with them?" Sergeant Major John Ellen of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Ohio, a regiment under Cox's command, described the confusion which abounded on September 2 when he wrote in his journal, "Rumors of all kinds, defeats, victories...Hundreds of stragglers." Further testifying to the chaos surrounding Washington at that time, Fifth Corps commander Maj. Gen. Fitz John Porter wrote in a dispatch on the 4<sup>th</sup>, "Stragglers from every corps line the roads."<sup>15</sup>

While these officers and others attempted to round up the stragglers around Washington, the equally difficult task of ascertaining the strength and condition of commands continued. Estimates came in for everything from the corps level to the regimental level, and the numbers were scattered and confusing. On the 5<sup>th</sup>, Brig. Gen. Alfred Pleasanton informed McClellan's Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Randolph Marcy that Nathaniel Banks' Second Corps, Army of Virginia, was less than 5,000 men strong.<sup>16</sup>

That same day, in response to requests from McClellan's headquarters for strength figures, Fitz John Porter could only reply with exasperation and

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<sup>13</sup> *OR* 12, pt. 3, 790-1.

<sup>14</sup> *OR* 12, pt. 3, 796-7.

<sup>15</sup> Williams to Barnard, *OR* 51, pt. 1, 776; Whipple to Williams, September 3, 1862, McClellan Papers, A76, Reel 30; Cox to Williams, September 5, 1862, McClellan Papers, A77, Reel 31; John S. Ellen Journal, September 2, 1862, Western Reserve Historical Society, MS. 3502; Porter to Marcy, *OR* 19, pt. 2, 179.

<sup>16</sup> *OR* 19, pt. 2, 185.

confusion:

I find it almost impossible to get a report of the strength of the command. Colonels and Adjutants and Assistant Adjutants either killed, wounded, sick, or absent. Have destroyed everything. New [books] are employed and records are rest with the Commands. I have done my best and I must beg you to be patient. Will send report at the earliest moment.

Porter's dour news was emblematic of the difficult task facing Federal forces. Very few brigades or divisions were battle ready in the first week of September 1862, and Lee's army appeared poised to launch another campaign. Receiving disappointing news from generals such as Porter only made that crisis more acute. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, McClellan received word from then Third Corps division commander Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker that both his command and the division of the late Maj. Gen. Phil Kearney, who was killed at Chantilly on September 1, were "in no condition to engage the enemy" due to heavy losses on the Peninsula and at Second Manassas.<sup>17</sup>

One of the few positive reports of strength which McClellan received came from the soon-to-be-relieved commander of the Third Corps, Army of Virginia, Maj. Gen. Irvin McDowell. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, one of McDowell's aides wrote to McClellan's headquarters stating that the corps strength was 15,294 men. Considering the straggling after Second Manassas, and the heavy losses of McDowell's command at that battle, this estimate may have been high, but for McClellan, it seemed to be a reliable indication that he had at least one coherent army corps returning from the plains of Manassas.

As for the Fifth Corps, problems would continue to plague Porter's command throughout the upcoming campaign in Maryland. September 6 saw better news from Porter, when he was able to provide a partial estimate of his strength figures, including most of the division of Maj. Gen. George Morrell. However, Porter reported the following day that despite knowing Morrell's strength, the division was not in a "serviceable condition." Complicating matters even further was the reorganization of the entire army taking place at that time, which considerably altered the makeup of Porter's corps. On September 8, the day after McClellan moved his headquarters into Maryland to begin his active campaign against Lee, Porter wrote to the general to ask whether he was to maintain control of some of the brigades which he had under his command during the fight at Manassas. Thus, while Lee's army was resting in Frederick, Maryland, on September 8, preparing for the next phase of the campaign, Federal forces were moving out of Washington amidst a cloud of uncertainty and confusion.<sup>18</sup>

All of these reports, dispatches, and letters indicate something very important

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<sup>17</sup> Porter to Williams, September 5, 1862, McClellan Papers, A77, Reel 31; *OR* 19, pt. 2, 184.

<sup>18</sup> *OR* 19, pt. 2, 195-196; Porter to Williams, September 8, 1862, McClellan Papers, A77-78, Reel 31.

about the Federal forces in the Maryland Campaign. Picking up the pieces following Second Manassas was not an easy task for George McClellan. He inherited a mess, a jigsaw puzzle which had been tossed out across a table with no directions or guidance. As if gathering together defenses for Washington would not have been tough enough during a time when the enemy's army was just outside of the Federal capital, it was made more difficult by McClellan's inability to ascertain the composition, strength, and condition of his command. The terrible defeat at Manassas had left the army in a poor condition for reorganization, let alone launching another campaign.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of September, amid this flurry of activity in Washington, McClellan had another meeting with both Lincoln and Halleck. He was asked to form an army for the field that would operate against Lee. McClellan's task had gone from defending Washington to forming an offensive force, requiring a more complete reorganization of the forces under his command. McClellan would need to pick the best units and best commanders from the conglomeration of troops in Washington. Time was not on his side.

Amidst these circumstances, McClellan in effect built a new army out of salvageable pieces from five different commands that were in and around Washington, D.C. Its foundation came from the Army of the Potomac troops which McClellan led during the Peninsula Campaign in Virginia several months earlier. From that command, only the Second and Sixth Corps, along with Brig. Gen. George Sykes' division from the Fifth Corps and Maj. Gen. Darius Couch's division from the Fourth Corps, were chosen to leave for the campaign in Maryland. This left behind the balance of the Fourth and Fifth Corps, as well as the badly mauled Third Corps. It is likely that Hooker's dispatch of the 6<sup>th</sup>, informing McClellan's staff of the poor condition of the Third Corps, played a role in that force being left behind to guard Washington, rest, and refit. Of the old Army of the Potomac forces that McClellan took into Maryland, one common condition existed; with the exception of George Sykes' division, they had not been engaged at Second Manassas.

The next major piece of McClellan's force was drawn from John Pope's Army of Virginia, which consisted of three corps. McClellan would take two of these three with him into Maryland; the Third Corps, previously commanded by Maj. Gen. Irvin McDowell, became the First Corps, Army of the Potomac, and the Second Corps, previously commanded by Nathaniel Banks, soon became the Twelfth Corps, Army of the Potomac.<sup>19</sup> McDowell's command suffered terrible losses at Second Manassas, and Banks' force was still suffering from its thorough drubbing at Cedar Mountain in early August. Both of these corps saw combat in the Second Manassas Campaign, but neither was engaged on the Peninsula that summer. Thus, a general pattern was developing for the army that

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<sup>19</sup> The First Corps, Army of Virginia, would remain in Washington and be rechristened the Eleventh Corps, Army of the Potomac.



McClellan led into Maryland; the units had either seen heavy action on the Peninsula or at Second Manassas. McClellan had very few troops who saw heavy combat in both of those campaigns, a stark contrast from Lee's army in Maryland. The only Union forces which had seen heavy combat both on the Peninsula and at Second Manassas who played a role in the Maryland Campaign were elements of the Fifth Corps and the Pennsylvania Reserve Division, which would form part of the newly rechristened First Army Corps.<sup>20</sup>

While the First, Second, Sixth, and Twelfth Corps were all veterans of the two major campaigns of the 1862 summer, there was another piece to the army that was created from scratch less than three weeks before Antietam: the Ninth Corps, which consisted of three different parts. During the Maryland Campaign the Ninth Corps was led first by Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside, then Maj. Gen. Jesse Reno, and by the time of the battle, Maj. Gen. Jacob Cox. The first part of the corps came from two divisions which had served in North Carolina under Burnside in early 1862. In this new formation, the divisions were commanded by Maj. Gen. Isaac P. Rodman and Maj. Gen. Samuel Sturgis. The next piece was the division Brig. Gen. Isaac Stevens had commanded at Second Manassas. When Stevens was killed on September 1 at Chantilly, Virginia, Maj. Gen. Orlando Willcox took the reins of command. The final piece of the Ninth Corps was the Kanawha Division, a force which had been campaigning in the Kanawha Valley of Western Virginia for the balance of its service. Originally led by Jacob Cox, this force reached the banks of Antietam Creek with Col. Eliakim P. Scammon at the helm.

The battle record for these Ninth Corps units fits with McClellan's general pattern of picking forces which had either been on the Peninsula or at Second Manassas, but not both. While the two divisions from North Carolina and Stevens' command had been with Pope's army at Second Manassas, none of them were on the Peninsula. Altogether, the Ninth Corps provides an example of just how much turnover there was for both organizational and command changes in early September 1862. It was a corps made of four divisions which had never fought together as a single force. At Antietam each of the divisions was led by an officer who had taken command during the month of September, and in the case of Willcox, Sturgis, and Scammon, the new commander had only days to become acclimated to their new task.

In Maryland, the Army of the Potomac had a single division of cavalry led by Brig. Gen. Alfred Pleasanton. While appearances suggested the division to be quite strong, as historian Scott Hartwig has noted, it had its flaws as well. First off, it was not completely assembled until September 12, several days into the campaign. This meant that cavalry operations and movements were hampered early on by a lack of uniformity and organization. Second, the regiments in this

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<sup>20</sup> The Pennsylvania Reserve Division was attached to the Fifth Corps for part of the Peninsula Campaign, but was with the First Corps, Army of the Potomac during the Maryland Campaign.

cavalry division had operated separately of one another on the Peninsula, and were thus operating together as a division for the first time. And third, many cavalymen were sent to various headquarter staffs to provide escorts and guard detachments, weakening the cavalry by several hundred men. Hartwig has suggested that the strength of the cavalry is somewhat misleading when consideration of these various problems is taken into account. Thus, even in cavalry, the Union army had its problems.<sup>21</sup>

For Col. Henry Hunt, the first week of September 1862 was a busy time as well. On September 5, Hunt was named the new artillery chief for the Army of the Potomac. He faced the daunting challenge of addressing problems with the artillery in the army and doing so while moving into Maryland. Hunt went through the inventory of the army's guns, attempting to get rid of batteries which were too weak or inefficient to continue. Despite having more rifled artillery pieces than their Confederate counterparts, Federal artillerymen were still afflicted by a poor organization in Maryland. The field guns were too dispersed to achieve their full impact. Various division and brigade commanders were often times not well equipped to handle artillery, and thus, one significant advantage held by Federal forces would go largely unused in Maryland.

### **Battle Experience**

*"...I have no officer to fill his place."—Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker*

Despite all of these obstacles, on September 7, when McClellan shifted his headquarters from Washington to Rockville, Maryland, to begin his active pursuit of Lee's army, Federal forces had successfully averted the fall of Washington in the aftermath of Second Manassas. While one crisis had passed, another challenge was already becoming readily apparent for the Army of the Potomac. The army was plagued by inexperience and unfamiliarity, a problem which it would not or could not completely overcome. As Union forces moved into Maryland, many soldiers and officers were learning as they went.

Whereas the Army of the Potomac began the campaign an amalgamation of five forces—remnants of the army from the Peninsula, remnants of Pope's army from Manassas, and the three pieces of the Ninth Corps—Lee's army entered Maryland a tired yet cohesive group. In the Maryland Campaign, 81 percent of Lee's force had fought both on the Peninsula and at Second Manassas. Comparatively, only 22 percent of the Federals had fought in both campaigns. While over 60 percent of Confederate forces had been engaged in three or more major battles or campaigns, approximately ten percent of Federals had comparable experience in battle.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Hartwig, *To Antietam Creek*, 155-158.

<sup>22</sup> These figures are based off of the research of Dr. Joseph Harsh, some of which was discussed at his March 1995 lecture at Antietam National Battlefield.

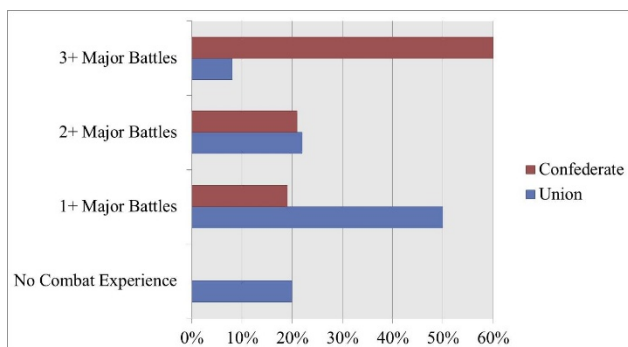


Chart 1. Comparative combat experience between Union and Confederate troops at Antietam

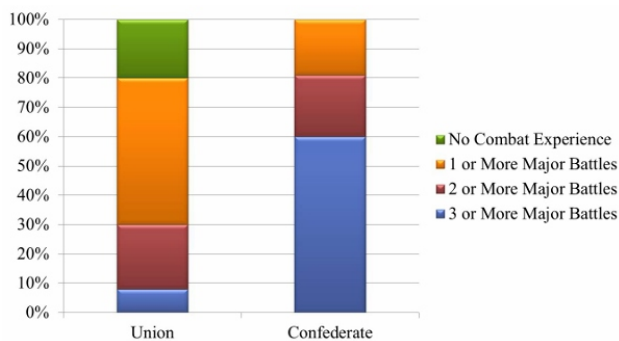


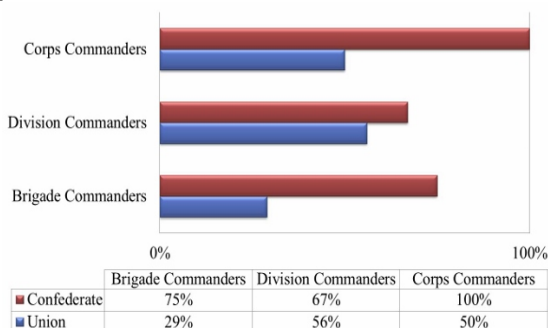
Chart 2. Comparative combat experience for the Army of the Potomac and Army of Northern Virginia at Antietam

While almost all of Lee’s army was composed of veteran troops, almost 20 percent of the force which McClellan took into Maryland was composed of troops who had never before been in battle. Moreover, many of these troops were new recruits who had been raised in the summer of 1862 and had been in the army only a matter of weeks. Considering these comparisons, the soldiers in the Confederate army were simply more battle-tested than their Union counterparts.

The gap in experience between these two armies goes far beyond the percentages that had been on the Peninsula and at Second Manassas. Confederate forces were vastly more experienced than their Federal counterparts across the board, especially when it came to those commanding troops in combat. While both Jackson and Longstreet, the two wing commanders of Lee’s army in Maryland, had prior experience leading troops at that level, only three of the six generals in charge of Federal corps at Antietam had commanded troops in combat at the corps level before.<sup>23</sup> When looking at

<sup>23</sup> The Army of Northern Virginia was not organized into corps during the Maryland Campaign, so this is a rough comparison. Longstreet and Jackson each functioned at times during the campaign as wing commanders of Lee’s army, a rough equivalent of corps commanders for the

division commanders, the gap in experience is not as wide. Sixty-seven percent, or six out of the nine Confederate division commanders were veterans at that level, and 53 percent, or nine of 17 Federal division commanders had comparable experience.



*Chart 3. Corps, Division, and Brigade commander experience comparison between the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia at the Battle of Antietam*

Yet, on the field of battle in the heat of combat, tactical command decisions that so often dictate the course of an engagement are not made at army, corps, or division command. Brigade and regimental commanders are the ones who often control the ebb and flow of Civil War combat. Experience at this level is crucial. At Antietam, 75 percent, or 30 of the 40 Confederate brigade commanders had led brigades in combat before. The same was true for only 29 percent of Federal brigade commanders, of whom 44 of the 62 were new to the job. Furthermore, of the Federal brigade commanders, 40 percent assumed their position during the month of September, giving them at most one or two weeks to become acclimated to their new role. In the Twelfth Corps, the smallest Union corps at Antietam, four of the five brigade commanders were brand new in September 1862. All but three of the brigade commanders in the Army of the Potomac at Antietam had risen to their post after March of 1862, when the army assumed a corps structure under McClellan’s command.

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Federal forces. The Army of Northern Virginia officially adopted a corps structure immediately following the Battle of Antietam.

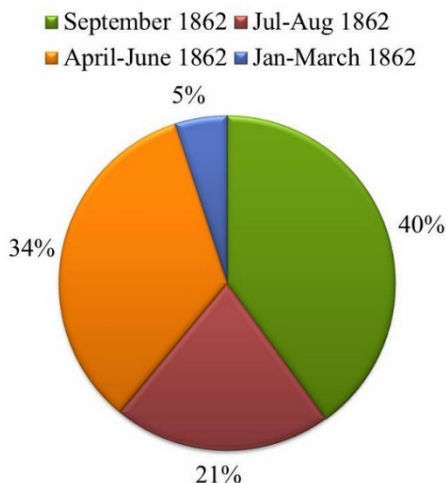


Chart 4. Percentages of when brigade commanders in the Army of the Potomac at Antietam took command of their brigades

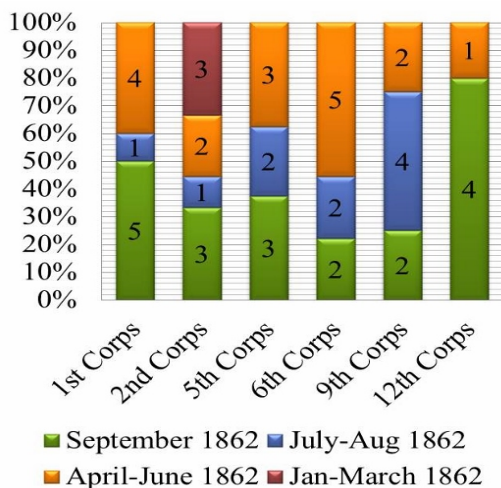


Chart 5. Brigade command dates for each corps of the Army of the Potomac at Antietam

As for regimental leadership, because of heavy losses at Second Manassas and the sickness and battle casualties of the Peninsula Campaign, many regiments in the Union army were commanded by officers below the rank of colonel. Forty-seven percent, or almost half of the Union regiments at Antietam were commanded by lieutenant colonels, majors, or captains. This number was higher in those corps hit harder by battle losses, such as the First, Ninth, and Twelfth corps, where in each instance the majority of the regiments were commanded by officers of those lower ranks. This meant that many regiments were being commanded by officers who were likely unprepared for the task at

hand.<sup>24</sup>

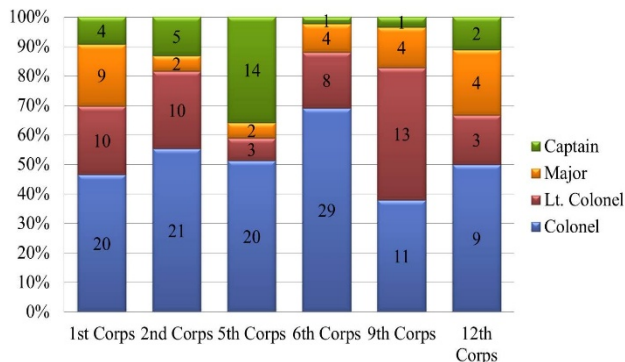


Chart 6. Regimental commanders by rank in each corps of the Army of the Potomac at Antietam

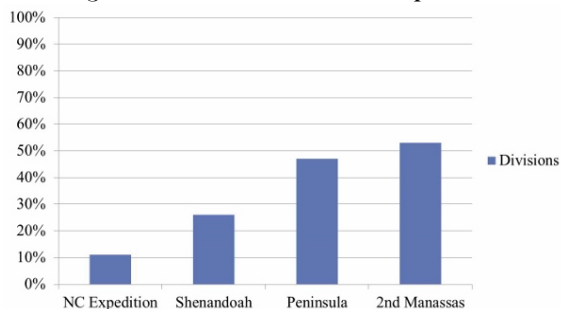
For officers taking command during the campaign itself, the challenges were immense. Certainly, those who had been within their regiment, brigade, or division before were at least familiar with many of their fellow soldiers; yet, new responsibilities in a time of crisis meant a very steep and unforgiving learning curve for numerous officers, whether familiar with their men or not. Brigadier General Orlando Willcox offers just one example.

Willcox had a very interesting Civil War career. As the colonel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan, he was wounded and captured at First Manassas (in 1895 he received the Medal of Honor for his actions there). Willcox was in a Confederate prison camp until August 19, 1862, when he was released as part of a prisoner exchange. He was soon appointed a brigadier general, and on September 8, 1862, he took command of the Ninth Corps division formerly commanded by the late Isaac Stevens. That same day, Willcox issued the first of what would be several circulars. This order requested that all brigade, regimental, and battery commanders report to him at division headquarters. Because he was entirely foreign to the division, Willcox most likely wanted to meet those in his new outfit. Two days later, a letter was sent to Ninth Corps headquarters from Willcox's staff requesting a list of the divisions and division commanders in the Ninth Corps, as well as brigades and brigade commanders. Thus, one week before the Battle of Antietam, Orlando Willcox, a division commander, was still learning who was under his command, as well as the names of the other division

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<sup>24</sup> Confederates had likewise been in the same battles which had caused heavy losses for the Federals. As Scott Hartwig notes in *To Antietam Creek*, "The summer campaigns had decimated the regimental field and line officers." In the Confederate divisions commanded by Alexander Lawton and J.R. Jones, 37 percent of the regimental commanders were either captains or lieutenants: "This meant that there were a considerable number of junior officers bearing responsibility for duties that they were unfamiliar with or untrained for." Hartwig, *To Antietam Creek*, 79.

and brigade commanders in his corps.<sup>25</sup>



*Chart 7. Combat Experience of the divisions of the Army of the Potomac at Antietam. Shows by percentage which campaigns the army's divisions had participated in prior to the Maryland Campaign*

up less than 50 percent of the army's total strength. Thus, McClellan was unfamiliar with the majority of the army he took into Maryland.

For McClellan, this made it all the more essential to have officers with him whom he had relied on during the fighting on the Peninsula. While some of the ranking officers in the army were McClellan loyalists, such as Fitz John Porter and William B. Franklin, others were not so. Following the disaster at Second Manassas, John Pope, among others, sought to spread the blame of defeat. On September 5, orders were issued by the War Department temporarily relieving Porter, Franklin, and Fifth Corps division commander Charles Griffin of their commands until allegations that they had not sufficiently assisted John Pope at Manassas, or in Porter's case, not followed Pope's orders, could be answered. Learning this on the same day on which he was asked to create a field army surely caused George McClellan considerable consternation; he was losing several of his most loyal officers during a time of crisis. "It will save me a great deal of trouble and invaluable time," McClellan informed Halleck, "if you will suspend the operation of the order in regard to Franklin and Porter until I can see my way out of this difficulty." McClellan recommended that Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker, instead of being assigned to replace Porter with the Fifth Corps, replace McDowell with the First Corps instead. "The secretary told me he would cheerfully agree to anything of this kind that met your approval," wrote McClellan. "I really feel it necessary for me to ask for these things at once."<sup>26</sup> Due to the circumstances, McClellan's worries were quelled for the time being, and Porter and Franklin would stay in command (although initially only

While not all officers were as new to command as was Willcox, he was representative in one way; he was part of the majority of the army which had not been with George McClellan on the Peninsula. Whereas the majority of the regiments in the Army of the Potomac had been in the Peninsula Campaign, their numbers were so low that they made

<sup>25</sup> Circular, September 8, 1862, Brig. Gen. Orlando B. Willcox, *Records of Continental Army Commands*, RG 393, Part 2, Entry 5075, Vol. 1, National Archives; Capt. Robert Hutchings to Capt. Edward Hill, September 10, 1862, in *Records of U.S. Army Continental Commands*, Entry 5075, Vol. 2, Pt. 2, RG 393, National Archives.

<sup>26</sup> *OR* 19, pt. 2, 188; McClellan to Halleck, September 6, 1862, *OR* 19, pt. 2, 189-190.

Franklin was to leave Washington for the field).

And yet, Porter and Franklin were not the only veteran officers whose status in command was threatened. On September 12, after learning that John Reynolds, commander of the Pennsylvania Reserve Division in the First Corps, was being ordered to Pennsylvania to take command of the state militia—units raised in response to Lee’s invasion northward—the new First Corps commander Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker was incensed. Hooker fired off a heated note to McClellan’s headquarters requesting that the commanding general ignore the orders reassigning Reynolds. “A scared governor ought not to be permitted to destroy the usefulness of an entire Division of the army, on the eve of important operations,” Hooker insisted. “General Reynolds commands a Division of Pennsylvania troops, of not the best character, is well known to them, and I have no officer to fill his place.”<sup>27</sup> Unbeknownst to him, Hooker’s frustration was misplaced; the day before McClellan had pleaded with Halleck to keep Reynolds with his division, but to no avail. Reynolds left to take command of the Pennsylvania militia just days before Antietam. By the time Hooker’s First Corps reached the banks of Antietam Creek, two of his three division commanders had been replaced during the campaign, leaving Brig. Gen. James Ricketts as the only veteran division commander.<sup>28</sup>

While arguments regarding division commanders were taking place, there were also concerns over who should command the Twelfth Corps. Since its former commander Nathaniel Banks remained in Washington to command the city’s defenses, upon first striking out into Maryland, the Twelfth Corps was led by Brig. Gen. Alpheus Williams. However, because Williams was not a professional military officer before the war, he was not McClellan’s ideal choice for corps command. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, Maj. Gen. Joseph K.F. Mansfield was ordered to report to McClellan in the field for further orders, presumably to take the helm of the Twelfth Corps. Yet, before Mansfield arrived, another officer was suggested for the post. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, Maj. Gen. Edwin Sumner wrote to McClellan to suggest “the interests of the service will be protected” should Maj. Gen. John Sedgwick, a veteran division commander in the Second Corps, be appointed to command the Twelfth Corps, with Brig. Gen. Oliver O. Howard taking Sedgwick’s place at the head of his division. That same day, McClellan issued orders placing Sumner’s recommendation into action. However, the next day, September 14, the orders were suspended, with Sumner being ordered to oversee the Twelfth Corps, still commanded by Williams. The command changed yet again the following day on September 15, when Mansfield arrived and was officially named Twelfth Corps commander. And, when Mansfield fell

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<sup>27</sup> Hooker to Seth Williams, September 12, 1862, *OR* 19, pt. 2, 273-4.

<sup>28</sup> Brig. Gen. Abner Doubleday replaced John Hatch as a division commander after the latter was wounded during the Battle of South Mountain on September 14, 1862, just three days before Antietam. Brig. Gen. George Meade was also new to division command having succeeded Brig. Gen. John Reynolds earlier in the campaign.



mortally wounded on the morning of September 17 just a few hours after the battle of Antietam began, Alpheus Williams once again assumed command of the corps. Thus, during the course of four days, the Twelfth Corps had, on paper at least, three different commanders: Williams, then Sedgwick, then back to Williams, then Mansfield, then back to Williams yet again.<sup>29</sup>

All of this is not to suggest that the Confederate army was without its command problems. It is well known that Confederate generals A.P. Hill and John Bell Hood, who each played a major role at Antietam, were placed under arrest during the campaign, yet still commanded their divisions on September 17. However, what the Confederate army did not have was the widespread turnover, confusion, inexperience, and lack of familiarity that plagued Federal forces at nearly every level of command during the Maryland Campaign. Thus, perhaps the achievements of the Army of the Potomac should be considered with this context in mind given the limitations its soldiers faced.

Ultimately, on the field of battle, experience mattered. And, in September 1862, as Joseph Harsh noted in his work on the Army of Northern Virginia, the edge in experience at Antietam was decidedly in favor of the Confederates:

The size of an army is but part measure of its strength, of course. Just as important is its ability to fight. Rosters kill not a single enemy, and numbers alone do not gain victories. The fighting capability of an army derives from an imprecise mixture of its combat experience and training, and the quality of its officer corps.... On September 2, 1862, there was no army of either North or South to match the battle experience of the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>30</sup>

### Condition of the Troops

***“...for the authorities can’t be blind to the fact that the old army is a set of men wore down almost unfit for service at present.”—Pvt. George Cramer, 11<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Reserves***

While commanders at all levels struggled to overcome the problems with inexperience and unfamiliarity with their troops, the condition of the men in the ranks was not ideal for sustaining a winning effort. In this regard, both armies suffered during the campaign. Accounts of the problems facing Confederates in the campaign are commonplace in Antietam campaign and battle histories. It is well known that Lee’s army suffered from considerable straggling. Many Confederate soldiers wore tattered uniforms, had inadequate or no footwear, ate a diet of green corn, suffered from sickness and exhaustion, and fell out of the ranks by the thousands. The fact that these forces were able to overcome all of these obstacles and still achieve a tremendous victory by capturing Harpers

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<sup>29</sup> Mansfield to McClellan, September 11, 1862, McClellan Papers, A79, Reel 31; Sumner to Marcy, September 13, 1862, *Ibid.*; *OR* 19, pt. 2, 283; *OR* 19, pt. 2, 290.

<sup>30</sup> Harsh, *Taken at the Flood*, 39.

Ferry on September 15, and then reunite at Sharpsburg in time to stave off complete destruction on the 17<sup>th</sup>, is a remarkable testament to the endurance and toughness of the average Confederate soldier in the Maryland Campaign. Perhaps the survival of Lee's army at Antietam is more a credit to the common Confederate soldier than it is a negative mark on George McClellan's record.<sup>31</sup>

However, understanding the difficulties which Confederates overcame does not mean that Federal difficulties should be ignored or diminished. Straggling was a universal problem along the roads of Maryland in September 1862; neither army was immune from its effects. While Confederate straggling was far more severe, Federal straggling was significant as well because of its enormous implications on the army's overall strength and condition during the campaign. Such straggling meant that McClellan's army at Antietam was necessarily smaller than it was upon leaving Washington, meaning Federal forces at the battle were smaller in number and weaker in condition than commonly portrayed.

One of the best ways to understand the condition of the men in the ranks is to look at their letters and diaries. For many Federal soldiers, embarking out into Maryland in September was not a pleasant thought. After the drubbing of Second Manassas, many simply wanted to rest and refit in Washington. Years after the war, in a letter to his children recalling his Civil War service, H.W. Burlingame of the 104<sup>th</sup> New York noted the exhausted condition of the men in the ranks at the outset of the Maryland Campaign:

Our brigade at that time was in a really bad condition, we had been without tents or blankets, with no change of clothing since we left our knapsacks in the field back near Thoroughfare Gap. We had been sleeping on the ground during all of that time without any covering but the sky, and not anything under us but the ground, and this in good weather or bad. Our clothes were ragged our shoes no better, no stockings to speak of, I had no stockings to wear for fully the last half of the way from Washington to Antietam. There were sores on the back of our ankles where the seam in the back of the shoes cut into the flesh, this condition was true of the entire brigade and division, and in that deplorable condition we went into (willingly) and fought the bloody battle of Antietam.

The 104<sup>th</sup> New York was in the newly rechristened First Corps, which had fought hard at Second Manassas. In another letter to his children, Burlingame recalled that in early September 1862, "...we were a very tired and used up lot of boys

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<sup>31</sup> For more on logistical difficulties Confederates faced, see Keith S. Bohannon, "Dirty, Ragged, and Ill-Provided For: Confederate Logistical Problems in the 1862 Maryland Campaign and Their Solutions," in *The Antietam Campaign*, ed. Garry W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 101-142. For Confederate straggling, see Joseph L. Harsh, *Taken at the Flood*, 33-37, 171, 220, 431-33, 475, and its companion volume, *Sounding the Shallows* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2000), 189, 213.

from our continual hard work without any rest to speak of from Cedar Mountain till that date September 3.”<sup>32</sup>

Burlingame’s reminiscences, though written years after the war, reflect what his comrades in arms were noting and sharing during the Maryland Campaign. On September 4, Pvt. George Cramer of the 11<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Reserves wrote to his wife about the regiment’s need for rest:

We reached this camp... Tuesday night about nine o’clock weary and war worn and only since yesterday we are allowed to look over the things that past since the ninth of August. Only since yesterday has the roar of canon and musketry ceased to fill our ears, and may God grant that we will be aloud [sic] rest for a while, which we so much stand in need of.

Cramer later indicated in a letter of September 21 that he was ill during the campaign, so much so that as his regiment was going into action at South Mountain one week earlier, he fell out of the ranks and was sick behind a tree. Noting that several other soldiers were in a similar condition, Cramer told his wife that, following Antietam, the regiment was “in a bad trim”:

Our company has neither captain, lieutenant, nor any sergeant, only corporals to command us. We have but one captain in our regiment. The rest is [sic] killed, wounded or back sick. Our lieutenant colonel got killed at Bull Run. Also our Major was wounded so we have but one field officer in the regiment, and his attention is more required to the brigade now than he can pay to our regiment since [Brig. Gen. George] Hartsuff is wounded.

Written a few days after Antietam, the letter clearly shows that even before the battle, the regiment was in a poor condition due to losses at Second Manassas and South Mountain. Just over one week later, Cramer again informed his wife that the army’s status was not improving:

...for the authorities can’t be blind to the fact that the old army is a set of men wore down almost unfit for service at present. It is true they fought the last battles (there was but few new regiments in the actual fight), and were victorious too, but they fought with the last desperation to stop an invading foe from advancing on to their own fireside, and the same time to make good again that most shameful defeat of Bull Run which was not caused by the want of bravery by the men, but by the ill management, yes, sometimes it is thought through treachery, of some of our generals.<sup>33</sup>

Cramer’s thoughts were echoed by another Pennsylvania soldier, William Clark

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<sup>32</sup> H.W. Burlingame, “Personal Reminiscences of the Civil War, 1861-1865, H.W. Burlingame, 104<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteers” (unpublished typescript copy), pg. 43, 104<sup>th</sup> New York File, ANBL; *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>33</sup> George Cramer letters, September 4, 1862, September 21, 1862, September 29, 1862, typed transcript copies, 11<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Reserve File, ANBL.

of the 28<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry. On September 5, Clark penned a letter to his sister, describing the events following Second Manassas and noting the weakness of the men in his regiment. "...I hope [we] will remain in Camp for a few days, for we are all nearly worn out, stiffened up like Old horses; for twenty days we lay out exposed to everything, part of the time not more than half enough to eat," wrote Clark. He continued with a note of despair, alluding to the recent defeat at Manassas which had demoralized the men: "We have marched 750 miles through Va. for nothing." Yet another Pennsylvanian echoed the exhaustion of Cramer and Clark; A.S. Bright of the 1<sup>st</sup> Pennsylvania Reserves wrote home after Antietam to tell his uncle that he was well, apologizing for the length in between letters by noting, "Between marching and fighting we have been kept pretty busy. We have not been in one place more than ½ hours at a time for about 2 months. After the Battle of Bull Run the Reserves were pretty well used up...."<sup>34</sup>

The thoughts of these Pennsylvanians were echoed in the words of a man in the 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana, a Twelfth Corps unit. Years after the war, this veteran recalled the state of his regiment, as well as many others in the Union army at Antietam: "The men who did most of the fighting at Antietam had marched there a set of long-haired, filthy, lousey [*sic*] tatterdemalions. There never was so much to dishearten and demoralize at any other stage of our service... Many of the regiment were entirely shoeless, while the shoes of those best provided for would scarcely hang to their feet."<sup>35</sup>

For these soldiers, as well as countless others, advancing into Maryland was a matter of putting aside exhaustion and rising to the task at hand. And yet, for many, the problems facing the army were too much to overcome. Stragglers fell out of the ranks by the hundreds as the army marched from Washington. Letters home and diary entries from soldiers testify that, for the common man in the ranks, this was disconcerting. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, as Federal forces began making their way north from Washington, Sgt. Maj. John Ellen of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Ohio lamented the lack of order in the Union ranks: "This whole army seems more like a moving "Rable" [*sic*] than a well disciplined soldiery." Ellen's observation is certainly justified considering the confusion regarding changes in officers and organization at the highest ranks of the army taking place during that first week in September. A soldier in the 16<sup>th</sup> Connecticut, a newly formed regiment, noted as much when he informed his wife in a letter on September 14, "The roads here are crowded with wagons and cannons and troops, it is hard and dangerous to make your way through. On our march from Washington we found quite an army of stragglers they lay in the woods by fires cooking [what]

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<sup>34</sup> William Clark letter, September 5, 1862, typed transcript copy, 28<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania File, ANBL; "Respects to All": Letters of Two Pennsylvania Boys in the War of the Rebellion," Edited by Aida Craig Truxall (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), 30.

<sup>35</sup> "Description, Extract from Twenty-Seventh Indiana," 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana File, ANBL.

the[y] pick up...”<sup>36</sup>

The 16<sup>th</sup> Connecticut was just one of many brand-new regiments in the Army of the Potomac in September 1862. Many of these new units experienced difficulties in Maryland long before they were thrown into their first combat action of the war. Ezra Carman, the colonel of the new and inexperienced 13<sup>th</sup> New Jersey, later wrote that on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September Col. Samuel Croasdale of the 128<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, another green unit, asked him “how to form a line of battle.” According to the historian of the 118<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, a new unit in the Fifth Corps, a private in the regiment asked Maj. Gen. George Morrell on September 12, the day the rest of the Fifth Corps left Washington for the field, where he could find his unit; Morrell responded, “everywhere between here and Washington.” These encounters are emblematic of the experience and ability of many of these new units, whose strength comprised roughly 20 percent of McClellan’s army.<sup>37</sup>

Such difficulties were not limited to rookie regiments alone. New recruits were placed into certain veteran units as well, mostly those from New York and Massachusetts. According to C.J. Mills of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts Infantry, these recruits proved to be little help in replenishing the worn-out regiment’s strength. “There are about 250 men present capable of bearing arms and fit for duty,” Mills noted in a letter home, “Also some 150 recruits, whom we have dragged round thro’ all this marching with us, and who are utterly useless, as they cannot be armed, much less drilled, until we rest somewhere, which all of us begin to think we shall never do.” Several days later, Mills again lamented the presence of new troops in the army, this time considering the effect new units were having on his Twelfth Corps brigade:

We have just got two new Reg’ts in our Brigade. It consisted before, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mass, 3<sup>rd</sup> Wisconsin, and 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Wisconsin is an excellent Reg’t, the 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana worthless. The 13<sup>th</sup> New Jersey and 107<sup>th</sup> New York are new. In point of numbers they are certainly an acquisition, as the whole Brigade was only 1500 before, and these Reg’ts amount to about 2000. But as the Colonel of the New Jersey Reg’t told Col. Andrews yesterday that they had never been drilled in loading and firing, and have done nothing but march since they left home, I do not imagine that they will prove very valuable auxiliaries in the field.<sup>38</sup>

Even with the added strength of new soldiers, as unreliable as they could be, the

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<sup>36</sup> John E. Ellen Journal, September 8, 1862, Western Reserve Historical Society; Jacob Bauer letter, September 14, 1862, typed transcript copy, 16<sup>th</sup> Connecticut File, ANBL.

<sup>37</sup> D. Scott Hartwig, “The Volunteers of ’62,” in *The Antietam Campaign*, edited by Gary Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 147-148.

<sup>38</sup> C.J. Mills letters, September 6, 1862 and September 11, 1862, typed transcript copies, 2<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts File, ANBL. In the latter of the two letters, the New Jersey colonel whom Mills refers to is Col. Ezra Carman.

army was still struggling to regain its fit fighting condition. On September 9, Brig. Gen. Samuel Crawford wrote to Twelfth Corps commander Alpheus Williams to report on the condition of his brigade. Crawford was filling in as a division commander at the time because Williams was acting as temporary corps commander, but he still felt the need to report on his own brigade's status, which was dismal:

Since the engagement at Cedar Mountain, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, and in which my brigade was well nigh destroyed, the service required has been of such a character as to threaten, in its reduced and shattered condition, the very existence of its organization.

No time or opportunity has been allowed, from the necessities of the service, either to rest the men or to reorganize the companies and regiments, which have lost field and staff and company officers, both commissioned and non-commissioned, and I am now in command of a brigade which, consisting nominally of four regiments, numbers at this moment, in the rank drawn up in the advance line to meet the enemy, but 629 effective men.

Every day adds to the report of the medical officers of these regiments, and they unanimously show that it is owing to the nature of the service to which we have lately been subjected, the great exposure they have suffered, the deprivation of proper food, and the want of absolute rest that the present condition has been induced. Depress of spirit adds greatly to the induction of camp diseases, and this exists to a certain extent among our men.

Most of our marches have been made during the heat of the day, and we arrived in camp almost invariably at night, when the men, worn out, throw themselves upon the ground to seek rest, regardless of the dews and indifferent to hunger.

There are many men belonging to the command who cannot, from absolute want of muscular tone, follow in its marches. Men never known to fall behind, upon previous marches, do so now. Three of the regiments are without one field or staff officer; company officers are few, and non-commissioned officers either wholly or partially wanting in all the companies.

The organization, the very existence, of these regiments trembles in the balance. Captains, inexperienced in the service, are commanding the 28<sup>th</sup> New York, the 5<sup>th</sup> Connecticut, and the 46<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania. Corporals are commanding companies, reduced

almost to their proper guards.

The men feel the want of their officers, and there is nothing which keeps them together but the common interest and association, and I have no hesitation in saying that unless some opportunity is afforded these regiments to rest and to reorganize, their regimental character will cease to exist.

My men need rest, and I respectfully urge upon the general commanding that he will use his influence, after the present exigency, to send this brigade to some point where, while they may be useful, they at the same time will have an opportunity to reorganize and recruit both the health and spirits as well as men.

That same day, Williams forwarded the report to McClellan's headquarters, along with adding a few words suggesting a remedy for the brigade's problems: "If recruits could be had, and the vacancies in officers promptly filled, the partial demoralization would be effectually removed." On September 10, Seth Williams responded to the Twelfth Corps commander, noting that the report had been forwarded to Halleck's office in Washington for consideration and that "As much opportunity will be afforded the brigade to rest as circumstances will permit." During an active campaign, such opportunities would be few and far between.<sup>39</sup>

While these officers dealt with problems of health in the Twelfth Corps, Joseph Hooker was likewise attempting to make the First Corps into a serviceable force. After taking command of the corps on September 6, Hooker soon found that the challenges facing him were immense. The corps had severe straggling during the campaign, and many of the units were worn down to the point that Hooker believed entire brigades and divisions to be no longer effective.

Hooker began his corrective efforts on September 8, sending orders to Capt. Dunbar Ransom to request that he oversee the consolidation of the artillery in the division of James Ricketts. Due to battle losses, the division's four batteries were no longer serviceable. Hooker ordered Ransom to consolidate the four batteries into two with four guns each; after all, the division only had enough artillery for two batteries, not four. Ransom was also to "retain those companies having the greatest number of men," dismissing those so short as to be ineffective.<sup>40</sup>

The following day, Hooker turned his attention to the straggling taking place in the ranks. A dispatch was sent from his headquarters to Brig. Gen. John

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<sup>39</sup> *OR* 19, pt. 2, 223-224.

<sup>40</sup> Captain Joseph Dickinson, First Corps Assistant Adjt. Gen., to Capt. Dunbar Ransom, September 8, 1862, *Records of U.S. Army Continental Commands*, Letters Sent, 1862-1865, Entry 3801, Pt. 2, RG 393, National Archives.

Hatch, then commanding the First Division of the corps, informing Hatch that the brigade bringing up the division's rear was reported to have marched "with great irregularity today" and that "the men were observed to straggle, and to quit the ranks at pleasure...." The dispatch requested an explanation for the straggling, and authorized Hatch to relieve the offending officers if no corrections were made.<sup>41</sup>

Also on the 9<sup>th</sup>, in a much more drastic step, Hooker wrote to McClellan's headquarters to request the authorization to completely reshape Ricketts' division. Hooker wanted to dismiss those regiments in the division no longer fit for service. Additionally, rather than continue with regiments without adequate strength, Hooker suggested combining units from the same state to create fewer regiments, with each one having fuller numbers so as to be more effective. As Hooker explained:

No benefit can result from the preservation of a skeleton organization, but on the contrary a positive inquiry. For instance, it is believed that by a judicious selection of the Officers from the three New York regiments in the 1<sup>st</sup> brigade, an efficient regiment can be secured to the service in the place of demoralized fragments as they now exist. No other way suggests itself to my mind of turning them to account.

If these reductions are made judiciously, retaining the best officers in service, I am satisfied one good Regiment can be made up from three or four worthless ones, which will add strength and efficiency to the service. Sooner than retain them in their present condition I would recommend that they all be discharged.

Hooker also requested that, if McClellan signed off on the measure, he be allowed to take the same action with the entire corps. Thus, eight days before Antietam, Hooker was proposing the reorganization and consolidation of every regiment in the First Corps because it was, in his opinion, devastated by battle losses and straggling.<sup>42</sup>

On September 10, Hooker focused once again on the division of James Ricketts, requesting an escort of cavalry to follow the Second Division so as to "pick up all stragglers you may find in the roads and woods." He then sent one of the most pointed letters of his time in command to Brig. Gen. Seth Williams regarding the Second Division's First Brigade, commanded by Brig. Gen. Abram Duryee. Hooker requested that Duryee be replaced as brigade commander, and made his case quite forcefully:

The Brigade is in a wretched condition, and I see no way of

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<sup>41</sup> Dickinson to Brig. Gen. John Hatch, September 9, 1862, in *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker to Brig. Gen. Seth Williams, September 9, 1862, in *ibid.*



reclaiming it, except in the manner proposed.

This Brigade requires a commander of both intellectual and physical force, but if I cannot have a commander combining the two, I deem it indispensably necessary that he should possess at least one of these requisites.

I request that this exchange should be made as speedily as possible, as the Brigade is in want of an efficient Commander, and the next in command I am informed is no improvement on Brig. General Duryee.<sup>43</sup>

Later that same day, Hooker issued orders to James Ricketts yet again to attempt to deal with the straggling under his command. According to the orders, at the end of the day's march, "in case any companies should arrive in camp with fewer men than started, then you will send back the Captains of those companies to find the absentees and bring them into camp."<sup>44</sup>

Individually, these orders and dispatches show a commander attempting to deal with separate problems in his command, as any commander would during an active and important campaign. Yet, collectively, combined with the testimonies from common soldiers regarding the exhaustion and need for rest, as well as the straggling in the campaign, they show that the Federal advance into Maryland was not a parade ground march. Federal forces had severe problems stemming from inexperience, unfamiliarity, exhaustion, and reorganization that resulted in straggling and inefficiency throughout the army, though it appears to have been most acute in the First Corps and other units which were transferred from the Army of Virginia into the Army of the Potomac. The fact that Hooker was advocating such drastic measures of reorganization in the First Corps one week before Antietam indicates just how severe these problems were in the Army of the Potomac.

Among the other units new to the Army of the Potomac was the Kanawha Division of the Ninth Corps. On September 9, Col. Eliakim Scammon, commander of the division's First Brigade, reported to his division commander that at the end of the day's march, the roll call taken immediately upon entering camp showed that there were 149 men absent from their ranks who had been present that morning. On average, each regiment in the brigade saw 50 men drop out of the day's march. However, by the next morning, nearly 100 of those 149 men reported for duty before the brigade broke camp. While this dispatch is but one piece of evidence for one brigade on one day of the campaign, it shows the complications which straggling could have on the army's effectiveness.

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<sup>43</sup> Of course, one week later, Duryee was still in command, and his brigade was the first to emerge on the southern edge of Antietam's infamous cornfield at the start of the battle.

<sup>44</sup> Dickinson to Capt. J.E. Naylor, September 10, 1862, *ibid.*; Hooker to Williams, September 10, 1862, *ibid.*; Dickinson to Ricketts, September 10, 1862, *ibid.*

Straggling and fluctuating numbers no doubt made it difficult to keep an accurate count for a brigade's strength. Such occurrences were emblematic of the larger problems of exhaustion and discipline afflicting the army.<sup>45</sup>

Following the fight at South Mountain, many of these problems did not subside; in fact, army records and correspondence show that they persisted all the way up to the banks of Antietam Creek. On September 16, the day before Antietam, Brig. Gen. Orlando Willcox issued two circulars regarding straggling in his division. Despite having issued orders to deal with the problem one week earlier, straggling had continued. The first circular was a directive from Ambrose Burnside placing the onus on brigade commanders to stop all straggling in their commands. The second circular, this one directly from Willcox, ordered all brigade commanders to form details "to proceed some distance to the rear to arrest and pick up all stragglers belonging to their Division."<sup>46</sup>

These circulars are important for several reasons. Because the first circular originated with Burnside, it suggests that straggling was so widespread that corps commanders were readily aware of it and were taking effective measures to stop it. Additionally, because Willcox himself issued a separate circular, the problem must have been so acute as to merit further weakening forces at the front so as to correct it.

The picture painted by these messages provides a stark contrast between the perception and the reality of Federal forces at Antietam. For years, historians have claimed that George McClellan sat idly by with legions of soldiers on September 15 and 16 when he instead could have crushed Lee's army. In the National Park Service handbook on Antietam, published in 1962, historian Frederick Tillberg suggests that McClellan arrived at Antietam Creek on September 15 with 75,000 soldiers and did nothing for two days. It turns out that on that same day which historians have long excoriated Union forces for not moving, there was perhaps a good reason for the lack of an offensive assault. Beyond the heavy fog obscuring Confederate positions and McClellan formulating a battle plan (with the First Corps crossing Antietam Creek in the mid-afternoon hours of the 16<sup>th</sup>), portions of the army were still trying to gather up the men necessary to launch attacks against the Confederate position, the strength of which was still unknown. Thus, the reality of an army plagued by inexperience and straggling does not meet the perception of inaction despite overwhelming strength.<sup>47</sup>

These orders and circulars suggest that there were severe problems with the condition of the Army of the Potomac in Maryland. They indicate that high ranking corps commanders such as Joseph Hooker, Alpheus Williams, and

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<sup>45</sup> Scammon dispatch of September 9, 1862, *Records of U.S. Army Continental Commands*, Letters Received, Entry 961, Part 2, Record Group 393, National Archives.

<sup>46</sup> Circular, First Division, Ninth Corps, September 16, 1862, *Records of U.S. Army Continental Commands*, Entry 5075, Vol. 1, RG 393, Part 2, National Archives; *Ibid*.

<sup>47</sup> Frederick Tilberg, *Antietam National Battlefield Site, Maryland* (Washington, DC: 1961), 16.

Ambrose Burnside were aware of these issues, suggesting that McClellan was as well. No doubt, the condition of the Army of the Potomac factored into McClellan's strategic thinking at Antietam.

### **McClellan's Men: Making Sense of Troop Strengths at Antietam**

*"Perfect clarity of understanding was impossible, and even reasonable clarity usually came long after decisions had to be rendered."*

*—Joseph Harsh*

Considering the difficulties in restructuring the army after Second Manassas, the obstacles of inexperience and unfamiliarity between units and commanders, and overcoming the exhaustion and straggling plaguing both new and veteran troops alike, the picture of the Army of the Potomac in the Maryland Campaign is much more complex than the perception that rules the popular consensus. Though the disconnect between myth and reality has obscured many of these problems, no aspect of U.S. forces at Antietam has been more misunderstood and debated than their numerical strength. This question of how many men the Army of the Potomac had at Antietam is inextricably linked to the problems discussed thus far. Without inexperience, confusion, straggling, and all the rest, there would seem to be no reason for questioning the traditional numbers given for Union troops at the battle. However, when viewed through the prism of the army's inexperience and condition, the image of the Union army becomes quite different from the perceptions which rule history.

First, before taking a fresh look at Union strength figures, it is necessary to take account of the various numbers and figures which several historians have used to quantify the strength of the Army of the Potomac at Antietam. In his history of the American Civil War, *This Great Struggle*, Steven Woodworth listed 90,000 men present on September 16. In *Crossroads of Freedom*, James McPherson suggests the army had 75,000 combat effective soldiers at the battle. Similarly, both Stephen Sears and Richard Slotkin have used the number of 72,000 effective Federals at Antietam. This last number is excluding those present for duty but who would not fight in the ranks, seemingly making it a much more accurate total, which it appears to be. Yet, Sears has recently credited McClellan with having many more soldiers present. In a 2012 article in *American Heritage* titled "High Stakes at Antietam," Sears alleges that McClellan's army numbered 101,000 men at Antietam, giving Federal forces an advantage of having "roughly two and a half times Lee's manpower."<sup>48</sup>

These numbers, all commonly used to quantify McClellan's army, show something very important regarding historical perception. While they differ by

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<sup>48</sup> Stephen Woodworth, *This Great Struggle: America's Civil War* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), 156; McPherson, *Crossroads of Freedom*, 116; Sears, *Landscape Turned Red*, 171; Stephen Sears, "High Stakes at Antietam," *American Heritage* (Summer 2012) 62, No. 2 <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/high-stakes-antietam> (accessed December 20, 2012); Richard Slotkin, *Long Road to Antietam*, 231, 234.

about 40,000 from the lowest to highest estimate, their one similarity is their implication of overwhelming Federal strength at Antietam. According to this traditional interpretation, because of this advantage, Union forces should have ended the war by annihilating their Confederate opponents. Seemingly the only reason Federal forces did not crush Lee's force was the personality of George McClellan. Indeed, with numbers such as those, one is inclined to agree with Richard Slotkin, who suggests, "To historians armed with hindsight and a good map it is easy to see how McClellan could have ravaged or even destroyed the Army of Northern Virginia on either the sixteenth or seventeenth of September."<sup>49</sup>

Even McClellan's own numbers on the campaign give this same impression. In his August 1863 report, McClellan noted that he had 87,000 men at Antietam. This would suggest that, if anything, McPherson, Sears, and Slotkin are too low in their estimates of Union strength. Furthermore, in the George McClellan Papers at the Library of Congress, a handwritten report on the Army of the Potomac at Antietam lists its strength as being 101,000 men. Placing these reports in context shows that many historians are not far off in their estimates from what McClellan himself thought about his own strength at Antietam.<sup>50</sup>

However, based upon an examination of corps returns, consolidated morning reports, and early histories of the battle, these figures, including those used by George McClellan, are too high. They do not count the number of combat effectives with the army, and they do not reflect the changing nature of Federal strength on the day of the battle.

When considering all of these disparate numbers, it is necessary to have a point of clarity. Understanding troop strengths in the American Civil War is not an exact science. Very seldom did a commander in the field have a precise and exact understanding of the numbers of both his own force and that of his opponent. Certainly, ballpark figures would have been close enough to formulate strategic and tactical decisions. But, as Joseph Harsh noted in *Taken at the Flood*, "Perfect clarity of understanding was impossible, and even reasonable clarity usually came long after decisions had to be rendered."<sup>51</sup> Thus, in gauging Federal strength at Antietam, a topic which has fueled heated debate for years, it is necessary to maintain a level of humility and understand both what the commanders knew at the time and what really happened.

It is also important to note that while many estimates of Confederate strength count the number of effective soldiers, or those carrying guns into the fight, most Federal troop numbers count those present for duty, a broader category that suggests a higher combat strength than actually existed. The present for duty count can include aides, medical personnel, cooks, and other non-fighting

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<sup>49</sup> Slotkin, *Long Road to Antietam*, 231.

<sup>50</sup> *OR* 19, pt. 1, 67; "Memoranda Showing the Strength of the Army of the Potomac at the Battle of Antietam," McClellan Papers, A80, Reel 32.

<sup>51</sup> Harsh, *Taken at the Flood*, 437.

personnel. It is a basic category of strength used on Federal corps returns and consolidated morning reports, and is widely accepted as the de facto quantifying category for Union forces. However, as Joseph Harsh argued, “It is unfair, for example, to compare Federal present for duty totals (always a larger number) to Confederate effectives (always a smaller number.) Either the Federals must be lowered to effectives or the Confederates raised to present for duty before the comparison is meaningful.” This inability to directly compare these figures further complicates understanding the strength of Civil War armies.<sup>52</sup>

On September 7, when McClellan moved his headquarters from Washington to Rockville, the Union pursuit of Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia officially began. Initially, McClellan’s army consisted of the First, Second, Sixth, Ninth, and Twelfth Corps, accompanied by Darius Couch’s division of the Fourth Corps and George Sykes’ division of the Fifth Corps, as well as Pleasanton’s Cavalry Division. Altogether, based on the tri-monthly returns and morning reports submitted on September 10, which McClellan would have used to formulate his own understanding of the army’s strength, this army was approximately 87,000 men present for duty.<sup>53</sup> Comparatively, historian Joseph Harsh has suggested that Confederate strength at this same time at approximately 70,000 to 75,000 men present for duty. Thus, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, the difference in strength between the two armies was, at most, 20,000 men, giving the Federals a slight advantage but nowhere near the

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<sup>52</sup> Harsh, *Sounding the Shallows*, 189-191. Here Harsh gives definitions for various categories of strength that are found on returns for both Federal and Confederate forces. It is an extremely helpful guide to understanding Civil War strength figures.

<sup>53</sup> This number is derived from the following figures and sources: First Corps strength, 15,188, Ambrose Burnside, “Approximate Effective Strength of the Right Wing of Major General Burnside Commanding,” September 10, 1862, *Records of the Adjutant General’s Office*, Returns of Army Commands, Civil War, Box 20, Entry 65, Record Group 94, National Archives; Fifth Corps, Sykes’ Division strength, 4,097, Sykes’ Division Consolidated Morning Report, September 10, 1862, *Ibid.*, Box 13, Entry 65, RG 94, NA; Sixth Corps strength, 12,691, Sixth Corps Consolidated Morning Report, September 10, 1862, *Ibid.*, Box 17, Entry 65, RG 94, NA; Couch’s division, Fourth Corps, 6580, Couch’s September 10 Consolidated Morning Report, *Ibid.*; Ninth Corps strength, 16,781, Ambrose Burnside, “Approximate Effective Strength of the Right Wing of Major General Burnside Commanding,” September 10, 1862, *Ibid.*, Box 20, Entry 65, Record Group 94, NA; the strength figures for the Second and Twelfth corps are based on the work of Ezra Carman because no September 10 returns were found. Carman’s figures for each corps at the Battle of Antietam were increased by an approximation to account for the straggling in other corps where returns for September 10 were found. For the Second Corps, the strength of 18,000 was used as a low estimate, considering that an available report for Sedgwick’s division shows a strength of 7,319 on September 12, which dropped by at least 2,000 before the battle because Carman lists the division having 5,437 men at Antietam, *Ibid.*, Box 3, Entry 65, RG 94, NA; for the Twelfth Corps, the strength of 10,000 was used, Carman lists the corps having 7,631 at Antietam. No returns were found for the strength of the cavalry division, so the number given by George McClellan, 4,320, was used. Ezra Carman, *The Maryland Campaign of 1862: Volume II, Antietam*, edited by Thomas G. Clemens (El Dorado Hills: CA, Savas Beatie, 2012), 569-584.

disparity alleged by the campaign's traditional interpretation.<sup>54</sup>

However, neither army would have that same number of troops one week later at the Battle of Antietam. As Harsh noted in his work on the Confederate army in the Maryland Campaign, one should not read strength backward or forward in military campaigns. Just because Lee's army had roughly 40,000 men at Antietam does not mean the same number was present for the entire campaign. The same principle applies to Federal forces; just because Union forces had over 80,000 men at the campaign's outset does not mean that they had the same strength upon arriving at the banks of the Antietam.<sup>55</sup>

A prime example of changing troop numbers, and the confusion surrounding them, can be found in the case of the Fifth Corps. It is well known that at many times during his career, George McClellan called upon Washington to send him reinforcements in the field. After leaving Washington, McClellan soon began making requests for extra troops. Specifically, he wanted the men of the Third, Fifth, and Eleventh Corps to be sent to his army in the field. On the evening of September 11, Lincoln sent word to McClellan that only the Fifth Corps was being ordered forward. "Porter reports himself 21,000 strong, which can only be by the addition of new troops," Lincoln added. "He is ordered tonight to join you as quickly as possible." On September 13<sup>th</sup>, the day after Porter began moving his troops into Maryland, Halleck wrote to McClellan, denying him further reinforcements and reminding the general, "Porter yesterday took away over 20,000." Thus, as of the 13<sup>th</sup>, on the eve of the fight at South Mountain and four days before Antietam, Lincoln, Halleck, and McClellan all believed that the Army of the Potomac would soon receive a boost of 20,000 fresh soldiers, placing the army's total well above 100,000 men. However, that would not be the case.<sup>56</sup>

Lincoln, Halleck, and McClellan were all basing their understanding of the Fifth Corps numbers on Fitz John Porter's September 10 consolidated morning report, which listed his command as having over 23,000 men present for duty. Yet, a quick glance at the report reveals that significant portions of the troops listed as being in the Fifth Corps remained in Washington and never left for action in the field with the Army of the Potomac, including several regiments of cavalry and some of the new infantry recruits which Lincoln himself had mentioned. On September 12, Porter embarked from Washington with only George Morrell's division, recorded as having 8,888 men present for duty on the September 10 report. By the 14<sup>th</sup>, Brig. Gen. Andrew Humphreys led his Fifth Corps division of new recruits out from Washington; only portions of this division can be found on the September 10 report.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Harsh, *Taken at the Flood*, 171.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *OR* 19, pt. 2, 253-4; *OR* 19, pt. 2, 280-1.

<sup>57</sup> Additionally, the Fifth Corps division of George Sykes was already with McClellan in the field, and thus was not mentioned on Porter's report.

Essentially, the September 10 report for the Fifth Corps reflected the confusion of shifting commands and reorganization, causing Porter, and eventually Lincoln, Halleck, and McClellan, to believe that the corps was much stronger than it actually was. Even more troubling, when compared with other division level reports on the 10<sup>th</sup>, it appears as though Porter had outdated and incorrect numbers. George Morrell’s division is a prime example. While the corps level report listed Morrell’s strength as 8,888 present for duty on the 10<sup>th</sup>, that same day, in his own consolidated morning report for his division, Morrell listed his present for duty strength as 6,806. That difference of two thousand men was for just one division, and the only one listed in its entirety that Porter would take into the field. Because of this confusion, a corps commander, an army commander, the General-in-Chief, and the Commander-in-Chief all believed that the Army of the Potomac was receiving strong reinforcements in

the field when in fact was not.

Amidst this confusion, McClellan was actually receiving roughly 12,000 reinforcements in two divisions, one of which was brand new and didn’t leave Washington until September 14.

Moreover, considering the evidence of Federal straggling, it is likely

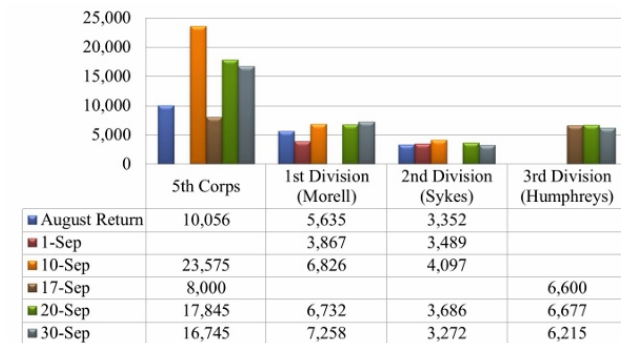


Chart 8. Strength of the Fifth Corps, Army of the Potomac, during the Maryland Campaign. Note the disparity in numbers, reflecting confusion on Fifth Corps strength

that these reinforcements were not increasing McClellan’s strength, but instead helping to replace stragglers in the ranks. In the end, only one of these divisions, George Morrell’s command, was present for the fighting at Antietam; even then, Morrell did not arrive on the field until the battle was several hours old. Thus, of the 23,000 men of the Fifth Corps McClellan was supposed to receive in the field, he only had a small fraction on hand for the Battle of Antietam.<sup>58</sup>

While these corps returns and morning reports give historians some sense of the fluctuating Federal strength during the campaign, they are not of much help when it comes to numbers on the day of Antietam itself. For that, historians must rely on one of their own, a man who was both the most important Antietam historian to study the campaign and a veteran of the battle. Colonel Ezra

<sup>58</sup> Fifth Corps Consolidated Morning Report, September 10, 1862, *Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1780s to 1917*, Box 13, Entry 65, RG 94, National Archives; Consolidated Morning Report of Morrell’s Division, Fifth Army Corps, September 10, 1862, in *ibid*.

Carman led the 13<sup>th</sup> New Jersey infantry into its baptism of fire on the morning of September 17, 1862, moving the regiment around and through Antietam’s infamous Cornfield. He went on to become a Brevet Brig. Gen., taking part in some of the war’s grandest battles and campaigns. After the war, Antietam became his primary topic of study. In 1894, Carman became Antietam’s first true historian and began gathering recollections of the battle from veterans of

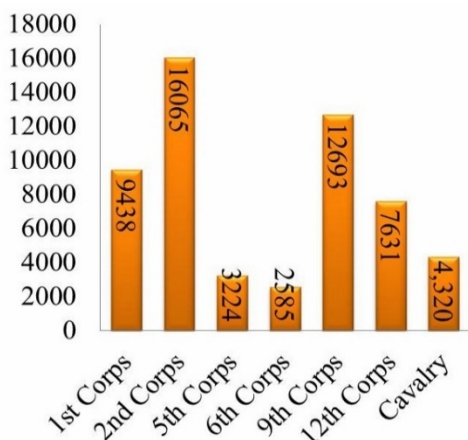


Chart 9. Ezra Carman’s numbers for Army of the Potomac soldiers engaged at Antietam

both the Blue and the Gray.

Based on these first-hand accounts, as well as Carman’s own experiences, he wrote what still stands as the definitive history of the Maryland Campaign. Included in this work is a chapter on the strength of both armies at Antietam. For his statistics, Carman focused upon the number of engaged soldiers, discounting the cooks, aides, medical and supply officers, all of whom are included in present for duty numbers but don’t actually carry guns onto the field. Whereas many modern historians use present for

duty numbers when assessing an army’s strength at a particular fight, thus giving the impression that an army’s combat strength was higher than it actually was, the number of engaged troops, or what Carman used, is the more accurate total for understanding combat strength. While Carman’s numbers are not perfect, because of his first-hand access to veterans of the battle, they are the best estimate of the number of effective soldiers for each army at Antietam and the closest historians will ever come to understanding the strength of both armies on September 17, 1862.

According to Carman’s work, when U.S. forces began arriving piece by piece along the banks of Antietam Creek on September 15, they were far fewer in number than popular perception tells us. By the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>, there were just over 50,000 effective Federal soldiers present near Sharpsburg. This is counting the men of the First, Second, Ninth, and Twelfth Corps, along with George Sykes’ division of the Fifth Corps and Federal cavalry. On September 16, while McClellan spent the morning peering through the dense fog around Antietam Creek and formulating his plan of attack, significant portions of the army were not yet with him near Sharpsburg. This included the entire Sixth Corps and Darius Couch’s division, still several miles away to the southeast in Pleasant Valley guarding against a flank attack on the main force, as well as the Fifth Corps divisions of George Morrell and Andrew Humphreys. Morrell



arrived near Keedysville several miles east of the Antietam the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup>, but would not reach the main force until the next morning once the battle was already underway.<sup>59</sup>

As the battle began to rage on the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup>, George McClellan had on hand roughly the same number that he had the day before, 54,000 men. By noon, however, most of the Army of the Potomac had arrived; the Sixth Corps, roughly 12,000 effectives strong, and George Morrell's division of the Fifth Corps, over 4,000 strong, had reached the field. This addition of over 16,000 new soldiers seemingly boosted Federal strength to a robust 70,000 men, the figure used by many historians.

However, those troops already present at Antietam had not been sitting idly by. They had been engaged in the most sanguinary one day fight in American history. By noon, the First, Second, and Twelfth Corps were virtually destroyed as effective fighting units due to their extremely heavy losses. Nearly one third of each corps was wiped out, making them essentially useless for further fighting. These three corps fought almost exclusively during the morning of the battle, and their total loss was 9,474 casualties. Adding to that number the many who fled from the ranks out of fear, or those who fell back to help comrades to field hospitals, and the loss in strength for those units was almost certainly much higher. Thus, the newly arriving Federal forces were not increasing Federal strength, but simply replacing battle losses, a key distinction to consider.<sup>60</sup>

Considering the reinforcements which had arrived, as well as the Federal battle losses from the first six hours of the fighting, a reasonable estimate is that by noon Federal strength was still no higher than 60,000 men. Due to heavy losses, the First, Second, and Twelfth Corps were no longer effective fighting units. This left the Fifth, Sixth, and Ninth Corps, totaling approximately 34,000 men. These forces were relatively unscathed and were available to launch further attacks against Lee's army. With the Sixth Corps being sent to the Federal right to take the place of the shattered ranks which had attacked that morning, a portion of George Sykes' division being pushed across the Antietam to test Lee's center, and the Ninth Corps engaged in its difficult left wing afternoon assault south of Sharpsburg, that left only George Morrell's division,

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<sup>59</sup> Ezra Carman, *The Maryland Campaign of September 1862*, Vol. 2, 569-584. Carman's numbers are as follows: First Corps, 9,438; Second Corps, 16,065; Ninth Corps, 12,693, Twelfth Corps, 7,631, Cavalry, 4,320. Sykes' division of the Fifth Corps was approximately 4,000 men total, giving the army a strength of roughly 54,000 men on September 16.

<sup>60</sup> Sixth Corps strength figures for September 17, 1862 are taken directly from William B. Franklin's September 30 return for the Sixth Corps. On the return, Franklin tabulated his corps strength for both the battles of South Mountain and Antietam. His total for Antietam was 11,865. September 30, 1862 Consolidated Morning Report, Sixth Corps, in *Ibid.*, Box 17, Entry 65, RG 94, National Archives. The number for Morrell's division of the Fifth Corps is derived from Fitz John Porter's after-action report, where he notes that late in the day on the 17, he only had 4,000 men available to be committed to the fight. He was most likely referring to Morrell's strength at that point. *OR* 19, pt. 1, 339.

the rest of Sykes' command, and Brig. Gen. Alfred Pleasanton's Cavalry division as a Union reserve. While historians have long held that 20,000 to 30,000 Union soldiers went through the battle being completely unused, the actual number was closer to 10,000, a reasonable reserve given all of the unknowns facing the Federal high command at Antietam.

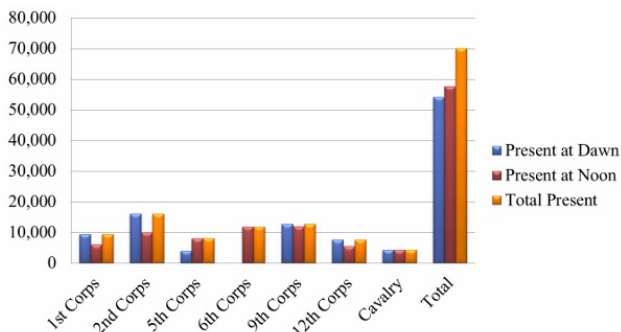


Chart 10. Combat strength for the Army of the Potomac throughout the day on September 17, 1862

Thus, while the figure of 70,000 troops—used by numerous historians—is more accurate than McClellan's own reports, it is still too high because it does not take into account the changing nature of Federal strength. While two divisions of the Sixth Corps and one of the Fifth Corps arrived before noon on September 17, they should not be included with strength estimates for the Union army at dawn. When the battle began, there were no guarantees that those soldiers would arrive on the field at all; McClellan had to fight Lee with what he had on hand, which was roughly a three-to-two advantage in numbers. Given the difficulties the Army of the Potomac encountered that day—unknown enemy strength, being spread out over two sides of terrain Federal soldiers would encounter, especially those of the Ninth Corps, those odds were far from ideal for McClellan.

Based on these numbers, the strength for the battle appears as such. At the break of dawn, McClellan had 54,000 men at Sharpsburg. Whether he realized exactly how many men he had or not, McClellan formulated his battle plans based on the men he had present that morning. By noon, he received reinforcements when George Morrell's division came up from Keedysville and the Sixth Corps arrived from Pleasant Valley. This boosted his total to 60,000, although nearly half of that force was decimated by battle losses from the morning. Having approximately 34,000 fresh troops to use in the afternoon, the 12,000 of the Sixth Corps were deployed defensively on the Federal right, the 12,000 of the Ninth Corps were used offensively on the Federal left, and the remaining 10,000 soldiers were kept in reserve in the Federal center.

For comparative purposes, it is worth noting that Ezra Carman's study of Antietam lists the number of Confederates engaged at the battle as 37,351.

Whereas McClellan had significant portions of his army arriving during the fighting itself, most of Lee’s forces were on hand at Sharpsburg on the morning of September 17, aside from A.P. Hill’s division, the last of Jackson’s command to arrive from Harpers Ferry. In *Taken at the Flood*, Harsh notes that most accounts during and after the war placed Lee’s strength at around 40,000 effectives at Antietam, which fits with Carman’s own figures.<sup>61</sup>

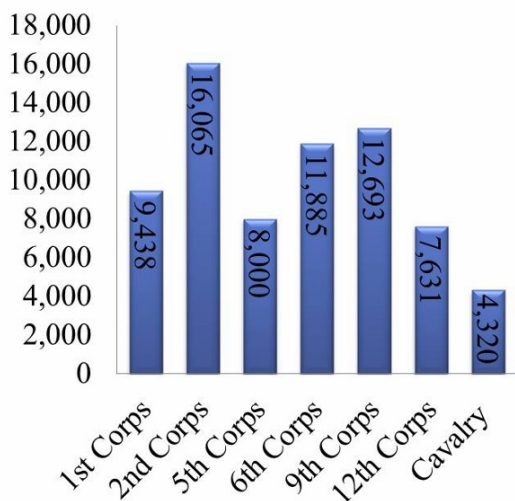


Chart 11. Total approximate strength of the Army of the Potomac at Antietam, broken down by each corps

### September 18: The Day After

***“Much depends upon our getting reinforcements at once.”—Brig. Gen. Seth Williams***

While we have considered the construction, experience, condition, and overall strength of the Army of the Potomac prior to and during the Battle of Antietam, new questions now present themselves. What about immediately after the battle? Furthermore, why did McClellan fail to continue the battle on September 18? Were there exigent circumstances for not continuing the fight, beyond McClellan’s own alleged timidity? After all, if McClellan knowingly possessed an overwhelming numerical edge, failure to resume offensives against Lee’s assuredly threadbare Army of Northern Virginia would amount to military malpractice, and would thus rightfully earn the scorn and derision which McClellan has received for generations. To understand why the battle did not resume on the 18<sup>th</sup>, we must first examine the scene at the end of the day on September 17, as darkness pulled a curtain on the sights of America’s bloodiest day.

<sup>61</sup> Carman, *The Maryland Campaign of 1862: Antietam*, 599; Harsh, *Taken at the Flood*, 171.

In the preceding hours, over 23,000 soldiers from both sides were either killed, wounded, or missing. While the sounds of the wounded and dying filled the crisp September evening air, George McClellan was trying to discern what his next move would be. He knew that his army had sustained terrible losses that day, and that the Confederates had as well. That evening, McClellan knew he still had two divisions that could serve as reinforcements; the Fourth Corps division of Darius Couch, and the rookie Fifth Corps division of Brig. Gen. Andrew Humphreys. The only problem; neither was with his army just yet.

The arrival of these reinforcements was of the utmost importance for George McClellan. The men he had on hand at Sharpsburg had just endured the bloodiest single day of the war. Entire commands had been shattered, officers killed and wounded, and the ammunition and physical stamina of many were exhausted. The army was completely out of its long range 20-pound Parrott rifle ammunition, severely restricting the capabilities of Union artillery. After the sudden arrival of A.P. Hill's division late in the day, McClellan and his staff still had good reason to be uncertain of Confederate strength in and around Sharpsburg, not knowing how many more men Lee potentially had coming up to replenish his depleted ranks. All of this made the arrival of Couch and Humphreys vital for George McClellan.

Starting at 7 a.m. on the 17<sup>th</sup>, when the fight at Antietam was a little over one hour old, the staff officers for both George McClellan and Fitz John Porter began sending messages to Andrew Humphreys, ordering him to move his command to Sharpsburg as quickly as possible. As one ominous message put it, "The commanding general desires you to lose not an instant in getting to the front. Hasten your command. Much depends upon our getting reinforcements at once." During the mid-afternoon hours, Porter's Chief of Staff, Alexander Webb, sent the following to Humphreys:

We are in the midst of the most important and extended battle of the war. The rebels are desperate. We have driven them some distance, but it is of vital importance to get up all our troops. Come on as soon as possible, and hurry up with all haste. Do not render the command unfit for service, but force your march.

Altogether, at least five messages were sent to Humphreys that day, all coaxing him to hurry his division to the battlefield.<sup>62</sup>

At 7 p.m., Humphreys finally sent his response, indicating that his command was two miles outside of Frederick, Maryland:

We will march all night—slowly and resting at intervals, and come in the morning fit for something. Every effort has been made on my part, that of the Brigade and Regiment commanders to move forward from the beginning with the utmost expedition possible. I hope we shall be in time....

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<sup>62</sup> *OR* 51, pt. 1, 843.

PS Each brigade is 3300 strong, making about 6600 men for the Division. They are in tolerably good condition, being raw troops they feel the marching. We shall be at Centerville [Keedysville] by 9 am tomorrow unless you order us to hurry up faster. It will be a night march of at least 23 miles.

This message was both reassuring and troubling for Porter and McClellan. On the positive side, Humphreys had indicated that by morning his force of 6,600 men would be near the field. However, potentially outweighing that information was his analysis of the fitness of his command. Telling Porter and McClellan that the new troops were struggling with the march, and that they would be “fit for something” upon arrival was not cause for confidence. Furthermore, a night march of 23 miles over both Catocin and South Mountain was a difficult feat for veteran soldiers, let alone new recruits not used to such difficulties. Whether such a force could be used for battle right after such a march was another question as well.<sup>63</sup>

With all of these uncertainties regarding the status and condition of Humphreys, McClellan’s Chief of Staff Randolph Marcy sent a dispatch to Couch at midnight on the 17<sup>th</sup>, ordering him to bring his command to Sharpsburg and report to Sixth Corps commander William Franklin “as soon after daylight as you can possibly do so.” Knowing that Humphreys’ arrival and ability to fight were questionable, McClellan wanted to make sure that Couch’s more experienced command was on hand for any possible action the following morning.<sup>64</sup>

By the time Humphreys and Couch arrived on the morning of September 18, McClellan had decided against an attack that day. He had likely done so during the evening on the 17<sup>th</sup> after learning of Humphreys’ status. There were still many uncertainties, such as questions regarding how many Confederates were left to possibly launch a counterassault against weakened Union lines. Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup>, McClellan received numerous dispatches from signal stations on the nearby mountains indicating that there was significant movement behind Lee’s lines, possibly signaling Confederate reinforcements arriving on the field. Considering the available evidence of what he knew at the time, it is likely that McClellan believed his own force to be too beaten up, having sustained too many losses both in the ranks and in the chain of command to continue the fight. His lack of certainty regarding reinforcements supports this conclusion.<sup>65</sup>

Further possible evidence of McClellan’s thinking at this time can be found in the George B. McClellan Papers at the Library of Congress in the form of an

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<sup>63</sup> Humphreys to Porter, McClellan Papers, A80, Reel 32.

<sup>64</sup> *OR* 51, Part 1, 844.

<sup>65</sup> These dispatches of September 17 and 18 from the mountain signal station can be found in the McClellan Papers, A80, Reel 32.

undated note listing officers either killed or wounded at Antietam, as well as rough estimates of troop strengths for several divisions. Although it is impossible to confirm when precisely this note was written, there are several clues as to its origin. In the list of officers, there are names which are mislabeled. For example, Brig. Gen. George Hartsuff, a brigade commander in Ricketts' First Corps division, is listed as mortally wounded; yet, Hartsuff survived his Antietam wounds. Also, Brig. Gen. Isaac Rodman is listed as "W. badly"; Rodman died on September 30, meaning the note was surely written before that time. These notations suggest that the note was written immediately after the battle, either on the night of the 17<sup>th</sup> or the 18<sup>th</sup>, when there was still tremendous uncertainty over which officers would live and which would die.

Moreover, at the top of the paper, the note lists four Union divisions, totaling 21,000 soldiers from the commands of Couch, Sykes, Morrell, and Humphreys. Those divisions all have one thing in common—none had been heavily engaged on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Thus, it is likely that those four divisions were the ones considered available for what the Army of the Potomac had left to offer. With the evidence of the names of wounded officers and the 21,000 soldiers listed at the top, it is likely that either McClellan or someone on his staff was tabulating the army's ability to launch a new attack, a calculation which clearly ended with deciding against the matter.<sup>66</sup>

It would be reasonable to estimate that, adding the 12,000 men of the Sixth Corps to the four divisions listed on the note in the McClellan Papers, McClellan may have believed there to have been as many as 33,000 Federal soldiers available for combat on September 18 who had not been heavily engaged the day before.<sup>67</sup> Because of the number of casualties on the 17<sup>th</sup>, including the officers lost, McClellan likely considered the First, Second, Ninth, and Twelfth corps to be unavailable for further offensive attacks. Thus, the day after Antietam, when McClellan had no idea how many Confederates remained, Federal forces did not have a two or three-to-one advantage when considering those men actually ready and available for battle. Using hindsight, the remaining Confederates on the field likely numbered between 25,000 and 30,000, though the effectiveness of those troops is debatable. These figures place the Union decision not to attack any further on the 18<sup>th</sup> in a much different light than traditional interpretation has long held.

While this is a reasonable conclusion for what George McClellan thought he had available on September 18, historians will never know for sure exactly what the Union general knew about the strength of either army at the Battle of Antietam. As we have seen, there were many complicating factors regarding

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<sup>66</sup> McClellan Papers, A80, Reel 32.

<sup>67</sup> While many have claimed that 30,000 Union soldiers were unused at the battle, this figure of 30,000 includes many who were not available to McClellan at dawn on the 17<sup>th</sup>, such as men of the Sixth Corps, who were used to shore up the Federal right flank later in the day. As was stated, the actual number of unused Union troops at Antietam was closer to 10,000 men.

Federal strength in the Maryland Campaign, including inexperienced commanders and men, straggling, battle losses at South Mountain, and inaccurate reports. Taking these things into consideration, it is very likely that on September 17, 1862, the day on which so much of the country's future was decided, George McClellan did not know exactly how many effective fighting soldiers he had under his own command. Any estimates of what McClellan had, or what he thought he had, were the same for McClellan as they are for us—estimates.

Because the last strength reports he received before the battle were in many cases the returns and morning reports of September 10, McClellan likely overestimated his own strength at Antietam.<sup>68</sup> As evidence, one must only look to his August 1863 report, where McClellan listed his Antietam troop strength at 87,000 men, and the memorandum in his official papers, where the aggregate figure listed was 101,000 men. Furthermore, it is important to point out that McClellan's overestimation of his strength was not a character trait or personality flaw as many may suggest, but rather, the computation of the various pieces of information which he had received during the campaign. A commander is only as good as the information he is given, and as has been seen, for numerous commanders in the Army of the Potomac in September 1862, at times they were working with spotty information. On September 17, George McClellan was working with outdated numbers that did not reflect the straggling and battle casualties that affected the strength of the army in the week leading up to the fight along the banks of Antietam Creek.<sup>69</sup>

And yet, while personality was not a contributing factor in McClellan's understanding of his numbers at Antietam, the general's political ambitions and personality can still be useful in one regard. It is certainly no secret that George McClellan was a highly political man. He had a fundamental, philosophical disagreement with the Lincoln Administration and Republicans in Washington over how the war was being fought. This disagreement was the primary contributor to McClellan's removal as army commander in November of 1862. McClellan strongly opposed the Emancipation Proclamation, clashed with the Lincoln administration on many occasions, and exhibited a deep mistrust of many in Washington.

Considering these aspects of McClellan's personality, one could reasonably assume that, if he had known he had fewer than 70,000 men available to fight at Antietam, he would have said as much in his writings after the battle. Accomplishing what he did with fewer men than had been alleged would only increase the remarkable nature of the success and increase his profile as a

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<sup>68</sup> While many may argue that this suggests McClellan should have done more and been more aggressive, it is important to remember that he also overestimated Confederate strength. This, however, is a topic best for a separate research project and paper.

<sup>69</sup> *OR* 19, pt. 1, 67; "Memoranda Showing the Strength of the Army of the Potomac at the Battle of Antietam," McClellan Papers, A80, Reel 32.

commander. The fact that McClellan continued to overstate his strength in his writings after the battle suggests that even years afterwards, he still did not know just how beleaguered his army really was at Antietam. Unfortunately for McClellan, many historians have used this against him.

So, with this confusion over the strength of different corps, straggling, and inexperience, where does this leave the effort to understand Federal strength at the battle of Antietam? Perhaps the most important statement any one could make is that no one will ever know the exact number of Federal or Confederate troops at Antietam. Trying to do so is fraught with confusion, uncertainty, and estimations based on the best available evidence. Despite the uncertain nature of the task, historians still analyze the battle and its participants with a brazen certainty that does a great injustice to the men who fought at Antietam. In my research, I have done the best I could, but I recognize the possibility that I may have erred. I have simply tried to add a new perspective to the debate. As historians, we should acknowledge blind spots, both in what historical actors had in their time, and those that we have in our own time as well.

In *To Antietam Creek*, historian Scott Hartwig offers his own take on the strength of both armies in the Maryland Campaign, and he does it in the spirit I have tried to emulate here. While suggesting that the Union army numbered approximately 72,000 men, Hartwig offers an important qualifier that all historians should bear in mind:

Trying to arrive at accurate army strengths for the campaigns of the Civil War is generally unproductive, but in this case it is necessary for a more balanced understanding of the Maryland Campaign. These tables are not the last word on the army strengths, but rather a departure point for further study.<sup>70</sup>

### **Conclusion: Perceptions, not Realities**

While many unknowns remain in our understanding of the past, it is important for historians to take stock of what we do know about the Army of the Potomac Antietam. What we do know is that in September 1862 George McClellan's army was not the mythical force of history. It was not a well-oiled fighting machine. It was, in fact, something much more complicated. The Army of the Potomac was an amalgamation of five commands, built out of spare parts and exhausted men, many of whom were in no way ready to begin what was arguably the most important campaign of the American Civil War. It did not possess a numerical advantage strong enough to guarantee an easy victory, if there ever was such a thing.

What we do know is that in September 1862, the Army of the Potomac had a vast deficiency in experience compared to its opponent, the Army of Northern Virginia. While the Army of Northern Virginia was a battle hardened, cohesive,

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<sup>70</sup> Hartwig, *To Antietam Creek*, 675.



veteran force, large portions of the Army of the Potomac had never before been in battle. The shortage in experience was greatest at the level of brigade command, perhaps the most important rank for combat leadership in the heat of battle.

What we do know is that the long-held belief that the Army of the Potomac greatly outnumbered the Army of Northern Virginia at the rate of two or three-to-one throughout the Maryland Campaign is an exaggeration. On September 10, the present for duty strength of the two armies was likely separated by roughly 17,000 soldiers. At Antietam, the Army of the Potomac had no more than 60,000 men available for combat at any one time, at least 27,000 men fewer than the numbers given in George McClellan's own reports. While the Union army did have a numerical advantage, much of that extra strength was dissipated by difficult terrain and a lack of knowledge regarding Confederate forces and positions in the area. This was not the alleged two-to-one Federal numerical advantage which is embedded in the popular understanding of the battle.

What we do know is that the Battle of Antietam represented a low point in strength for *both* armies in the campaign. Strength figures dropped and fluctuated throughout September for both McClellan and Lee. In the days and weeks after the battle, each army began to grow once again. By the end of September, Federal strength was close to 90,000 men and Confederate strength was back above 60,000. By mid-November, Lee's present for duty strength was 85,000 men.<sup>71</sup>

What we do know is that understanding troop strengths was something that troubled the generals of both armies. In a September 13<sup>th</sup> letter to Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee indicated that as of that date, several weeks after his victory at Second Manassas, "I have received as yet no official list of the casualties in the late battles, and from the number of absentees from the army, and the vice of straggling, a correct list cannot now be obtained."<sup>72</sup> Similarly, because of Fitz John Porter's inaccurate September 10 report, Lincoln, Halleck, and McClellan all dramatically overestimated the strength of the Fifth Corps, which was ordered from Washington to reinforce McClellan in the field on the evening of September 11. The last army-wide strength report McClellan received before Antietam was on September 10. Between that date and the battle on the 17<sup>th</sup>, significant straggling occurred in Federal forces, as evidenced by letters and diaries from soldiers in the ranks, as well as the correspondence and orders of several leading generals. Additionally, September 14 saw fierce fighting at South Mountain, resulting in significant casualties in the First and Ninth corps. All of this suggests that troop levels were fluctuating for both armies, and neither commander had an exact understanding of his army's strength in Maryland.

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<sup>71</sup> Harsh, *Taken at the Flood*, 475. Federal strength is derived from corps returns for the month of September for each of the army corps. *Record's of the Adjutant Generals Office*, Returns of Army Commands, Civil War, Boxes 1, 3, 13, 17, 20, 24, Entry 65 RG 94, NA.

<sup>72</sup> *OR* 19, pt. 2, 605-606.

Perhaps the greatest conclusion we can reach regarding all of this is that uncertainty was as prevalent for the commanders fighting the battles as it can be for the historians trying to understand them. Remembering that is an important piece of the story. As Joseph Harsh wrote, “Perfect clarity of understanding was impossible, and even reasonable clarity usually came long after decisions had to be rendered.” If the generals in the field could not be certain, then historians should make their judgments accordingly. Approaching history with humility instead of hubris is never a bad thing.<sup>73</sup>

After all, the story of the Maryland Campaign is dramatic enough. In September 1862, the fate of the nation hung in the balance. In this moment of crisis, Federal forces overcame the chaos of defeat, straggling, confusion, and moved into Maryland, meeting a tired, ragged, yet bravely determined Confederate army in the bloodiest single day battle in U.S. history. On each side, ordinary soldiers accomplished extraordinary things by overcoming the immense obstacles they faced. This human element of history is one that cannot be forgotten. In the words of Joseph Harsh:

Soldiers are not brightly colored pins, and the hills they climb and the rivers they wade are not the flat, smooth paper of maps. Commanding a large 19<sup>th</sup> century army and getting it to do what was wanted when it was wanted, and staying in good shape while doing it, was not an easy task—not for George McClellan and not for Robert E. Lee.<sup>74</sup>

The reality of the Maryland Campaign is this: George McClellan accomplished far more with the army he had in September 1862 than he did with the much larger and grander army which exists only in history books. In less than a week’s time in early September 1862, George McClellan built a new fighting force out of spare parts from several defeated armies, which he then moved through the state of Maryland to engage Confederates in battle at South Mountain on September 14, achieving a victory on daunting terrain. Three days later, the Army of the Potomac again engaged Lee’s veteran force in combat, this time outside of Sharpsburg, in a battle that still stands as the bloodiest day in American history. Two days later, Confederate forces were so battered they had no choice but to retire back across the Potomac into Virginia, where yet another battle was fought at Shepherdstown on September 19 and 20.

George McClellan had managed not only to build an army amidst some of the most trying circumstances in American military history, but he successfully kept an invading force away from Washington, D.C., and after less than two weeks in the field, he repelled the rebel forces from the state of Maryland, denying Robert E. Lee the grand victory on northern soil which he had sought at the campaign’s outset.

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<sup>73</sup> Harsh, *Taken at the Flood*, 437.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

Thus, Antietam was not a stalemate. Antietam was a United States victory for these reasons and more. It had the same strategic result as the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863, in that due to heavy casualties, Lee's army was forced to abandon a campaign into Northern territory, regardless of what pursuit Federal forces did or did not offer.

Furthermore, the difficulties and uncertainties which the Army of the Potomac faced in September 1862 only accentuate how impressive the victory truly was in its grand impact on the war and on American history. Antietam gave new life to the United States war effort and provided President Lincoln the victory necessary to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. In that regard alone it stands as perhaps the most consequential battle of the American Civil War, if not all of American military history.

And yet, while George McClellan led U.S. troops at Antietam, the victory was not his per se, but rather, a collective United States victory. It belonged in part to McClellan, certainly, but it was not his alone. While McClellan fared better than historical memory credits him, he was far from perfect and made his fair share of mistakes. George McClellan was vain, overtly political, and at Antietam, lacked strong communication and coordination with all parts of his army. Battles and military campaigns, especially on Antietam's scale, are complex affairs, and rarely lend themselves to simple, tidy judgments.

In a larger sense, though, Antietam was not McClellan's victory alone because battles are not fought simply between commanders, but by armies composed of tens of thousands. Battles are won or lost because of common soldiers. They are the ones who climb the slopes of a mountain under fire, lead the first wave of soldiers into a wall of lead at the southern edge of a cornfield, or charge headlong into a storm of bullets coming from a sunken road. Enlisted men in the ranks bear the brunt of battle, and it is to those men whom the credit for the United States victory in the Maryland Campaign belongs.

The personalities and decisions of army commanders certainly influence battles, but it takes the bravery, resolve, and sacrifices of common soldiers doing uncommon things to achieve victory on the battlefield. In September of 1862, it was ultimately the private soldier who was tired, footsore, and hungry, but who nonetheless persevered in the face of great adversity who decided the course of battle, and in doing so, determined the future of freedom in the United States. As one Ohioan who fought at Antietam later proclaimed:

It was the private soldier who stood between this nation and its destruction, it was the private soldier whose courage and devotion on these fields of blood and carnage upheld the glory of the country and forever preserved its unity.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> General Robert P. Kennedy address at dedication of Ohio monuments on Antietam Battlefield, October 13, 1903, in D. Cunningham, and W.W. Miller, *Antietam Report of the Ohio Antietam Battlefield Commission* (Springfield, OH: Springfield Publishing Company, 1904), 123.

# The Loudoun Valley Campaign of 1862

## by Matt Borders

Following the titanic fighting at Antietam Creek and the bloody exclamation point at the end of the Maryland Campaign, the Battle of Shepherdstown, both the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia were in need of rest and refitting. The next five weeks saw to the needs of both armies, though neither would recuperate as fast or efficiently as their respective commanders would have preferred. The Army of the Potomac in particular was plagued by delayed supplies and misunderstandings with the War Department that stretched the patience of both Washington and the army headquarters of Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan. Adding to this period of rebuilding were aggressive actions by the Confederate cavalry and a visit to the Union army by President Abraham Lincoln himself. This concoction of military necessity, political pressure, and Confederate guile, set the stage for a campaign that while promising at its offset, has been generally overlooked in most studies of the American Civil War. The Loudoun Valley Campaign of 1862, also occasionally referred to as McClellan's Second Virginia Campaign, saw a re-forged and strengthened Army of the Potomac once more advance south, maneuvering to place itself between Robert E. Lee and the Confederate capital at Richmond. How this campaign was conducted, the intrigues that occurred during it, and its results had a far greater impact on the war, and how it would be waged, than its mere 13 days would seem to imply. At its abrupt conclusion, the Army of the Potomac had lost its most controversial commander and would soon be headed towards its most one-sided defeat.

### **After the Bloodiest Day:**

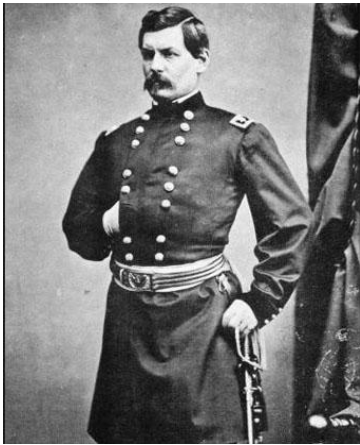
With the repulse of the first Confederate invasion of the north both Union and Confederate forces looked to the Potomac River as a border that needed to be secured. For Robert E. Lee, his initial impulse had been to continue the campaign and gain a crossing point on the Potomac to move back into Maryland. To do this he sent Confederate cavalry and infantry under Maj. Gen. James Ewell Brown (J.E.B.) Stuart along the Virginia side of the Potomac River to the Williamsport crossing on September 19, where the Confederate cavalier and his support succeeded in driving back Federal pickets and securing the crossing. The continuation of the campaign was not to be however as Federal troops returned on the 20<sup>th</sup> in force. Stuart and his mixed command succeeded in returning to Virginia unharmed, but the Potomac crossing points were quickly being blocked by the various elements of the Army of the Potomac.<sup>76</sup>

It was the Fourth Corps division of Maj. Gen. Darius Couch, along with

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<sup>76</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 820-21.

support from Brig. Gen. Alfred Pleasonton's cavalry that secured the Williamsport crossing. That same day, September 20, the Twelfth Corps, now under Brig. Gen. Alpheus Williams, gained Maryland Heights. Williams found the high ground above Harpers Ferry to be steep, rocky, and unable to support his entire command. He therefore left a token force on the heights and moved the rest of the Twelfth Corps into Pleasant Valley. With the arrival of Maj. Gen. Edwin Sumner's Second Corps at Harpers Ferry itself on the 22<sup>nd</sup>,<sup>77</sup> a division of the Twelfth Corps was sent over to secure Loudoun Heights as well.<sup>78</sup> Harpers Ferry was secure once more and would act as the main point of supply for the Army of the Potomac in any future campaign that McClellan might plan.<sup>79</sup> This was seen as necessary by the Army of the Potomac leadership as they were now over 20 miles from the rail depot at Frederick, and 15 from the depot at Hagerstown, Maryland. The landscape, depleted as it was on both sides of the Potomac, was not seen as conducive to supplying a large army beyond the



*Major General George B. McClellan*  
(National Archives)

Potomac River by wagons.<sup>80</sup>

At this point however, the plan was to rest, resupply, and rebuild the army after a grueling campaign. On September 26, McClellan received a telegram from the General-in-Chief of the Army Henry Halleck, requesting details about the future movements of the Army of the Potomac prior to authorizing large sums of money to repair the railroad bridge across the Potomac to Harpers Ferry. Halleck was also concerned about the apparent buildup of Federal forces around Harpers Ferry, and recommended that Washington, for its defense, should be the base of future operations.<sup>81</sup> General McClellan's response on the 27<sup>th</sup> makes it clear that it was his intention

to rebuild the army, that it was not in any condition to begin offensive operations again until not only much needed supplies could be obtained, but also the troop strength of the army increased. He also addressed the old War Department concern regarding the safety of Washington, stating that:

All the information in my possession goes to prove that the main

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<sup>77</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 68-69.

<sup>78</sup> Alpheus S. Williams, edited by Milo M. Quaife, *From the Cannons Mouth: The Civil War Letters of General Alpheus S. Williams*, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1959), 131 & George Brinton McClellan Papers, National Archives, Correspondence I, 1783-1888, Box A, Reel 32, 1862; Sept. 23-30. #15465

<sup>79</sup> Stephen W. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865*, (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1989), 477.

<sup>80</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 339.

<sup>81</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 360.

body of the enemy is concentrated not far from Martinsburg, with some troops at Charlestown; not many in Winchester. Their movements of late have been an extension towards our right and beyond it. They are receiving reinforcements in Winchester, mainly, I think, of conscripts perhaps entirely so.<sup>82</sup>

With the Potomac River still low, McClellan believed the conflict would be resumed in Maryland, far from Washington, and likely due to movements by the Confederates. The reconnaissance of the last several days had all implied that the Confederate forces were not going anywhere, still picketing near Shepherdstown, Virginia, and were indeed concentrating.<sup>83</sup>

To prepare for this perceived Confederate aggression, one of McClellan's proposals for increasing his troop strength had to do with incorporating some of the new regiments around Washington into the brigades of seasoned veterans. This would not only bulk up depleted brigades, divisions and corps that already existed within the Army of the Potomac, but would help train and acclimate the raw soldiers to the field army that much quicker.<sup>84</sup> This is opposed to what had occurred in the Maryland Campaign, where whole brigades, and occasionally nearly whole divisions of inexperienced troops were deployed together, with often disastrous results.

McClellan was also hoping to replenish his forces by sweeping the rear areas of the army, the depots, the hospitals and the like for those soldiers on extra duty. He felt strongly that soldiers assigned to these positions, never, or rarely returned to active duty in the field. He proposed an aggressive sweep by deputy provost marshals throughout the North to clear out the rear echelons of the army, as well as round up deserters. General McClellan was not the only one thinking on this matter and was very pleased by the War Department's General Orders #140, which was issued on September 24, 1862, and began just this process.<sup>85</sup>

With the reorganization and reinforcement underway, there was still the issue of supply. The supply issues of the Army of the Potomac were noted from headquarters, all the way down to the enlisted men in the ranks. It had been Lt. Col. Rufus Ingalls, Chief Quartermaster of the Army of the Potomac, who had first pointed out the distances of the Hagerstown and Frederick depots from the army. His back and forth with the War Department regarding not only

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<sup>82</sup> George B. McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story: The War For The Union, The Soldiers Who Fought It, The Civilians Who Directed It and His Relations To It And To Them*, (New York, NY: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1887), 625.

<sup>83</sup> Pleasonton's reports for September 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, along with a message from McClellan to Halleck late on the 25<sup>th</sup>. George Brinton McClellan Papers, National Archives, Correspondence I, 1783-1888, Box A, Reel 32, 1862; Sept. 23-30. #16493, 16506, 16508&16509.

<sup>84</sup> *OR*, Vol. 19, Pt 2., 366 & *GBM Papers, Box A, Reel 32, 1862; Sept. 23-30.* #16485.

<sup>85</sup> Oliver Diefendorf & Thomas M. O'Brien, *General Orders of the War Department, Embracing The Years 1861, 1862 & 1863, Vol. 1*, (New York, NY: Derby & Miller, 1864), 394.

transportation of supplies, but distribution, continued well into October,<sup>86</sup> and often pulled into the conversation not only General McClellan, but the Quartermaster General himself, Montgomery Meigs.

As late as October 26, Brig. Gen. Alpheus Williams, who commanded a division of the Twelfth Corps noted to one of his daughters in a lengthy letter:

By some fatality, or by the general crowding, we are lacking much. There seems to be an unaccountable delay in forwarding supplies. We want shoes and blankets and overcoats—indeed, almost everything. I have sent requisition upon requisition; officers to Washington; made reports and complaints, and yet we are not half supplied.<sup>87</sup>

A month previous, on September 26, Col. Charles Wainwright, Chief of Artillery for the First Corps noted:

There is said to be a good deal of suffering among our men for want of clothing, especially blankets and shoes. The losses of the Pope affair have not been made good yet. Many of the men are quite barefooted, and others are without a blanket. The necessary requisitions for them have been made, but none have yet been received.<sup>88</sup>

Making up part of the forces now garrisoning Harpers Ferry and its immediate vicinity was the 7<sup>th</sup> (West) Virginia. They had arrived on Bolivar Heights on September 22, “very much exhausted, a great many of us without the necessary clothing and shoes”, according to James Murdock of Company A. Fortunately for these men, their supply woes appear to have been taken care of quicker than other elements of the army. On October 13, Sgt. Calvin Bell of Company E wrote in a letter home that, “we have drawn new warm clothes and are pretty well prepared for winter.”<sup>89</sup>

The issues of supply for the Army of the Potomac, and the debates surrounding who called for them, what was sent and how often, are part of the larger conversation about Maj. Gen. George McClellan. This period of resupply and reinforcement is often pointed to as damning evidence against McClellan as a commander. Very recent research however has done much to shed new light on the supplies and demands of the Army, while looking at the failures and machinations of the War Department as a very real potential culprit during the period of September 20 to October 26, 1862.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt 2., 388, 397, 405-406, 410-411.

<sup>87</sup> *From The Cannon's Mouth*, 140.

<sup>88</sup> Allan Nevins, Editor, *A Diary Of Battle: The Personal Journals of Colonel Charles S. Wainwright, 1861-1865*, (Gettysburg, PA: Stan Clark Military Books, 1962), 107.

<sup>89</sup> David W. Mellott & Mark A. Snell, *The Seventh West Virginia Infantry: An Embattled Union Regiment From The Civil War's Most Divided State*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2019), 90, 94.

<sup>90</sup> See Steve Stotelmyer's excellently researched, *Too Useful To Sacrifice: Reconsidering George B. McClellan's Generalship in the Maryland Campaign from South Mountain to Antietam*, (Savas

### Four Days in October - A Presidential Visit:

With Federal forces concentrating around Harpers Ferry, but still not ready to advance, there were those in Washington who were curious, even concerned about the Army of the Potomac and its commander. One of those men was none other than President Abraham Lincoln himself. The vaunted “Four Days in October,”<sup>91</sup> Abraham Lincoln's visit to the Army of the Potomac, is usually seen as a paramount event in the weeks following the Battle of Antietam. The President of the United States had become so concerned with the apparent inaction of the army that he decided to go and personally try to kick McClellan into an advance. General McClellan himself feared that this was the president's purpose when he wrote his wife Ellen on October 2. “His ostensible purpose is to see the troops & the battlefields. I incline to think that the real purpose of his visit is to push me into a premature advance into Virginia.”<sup>92</sup>

The actual purpose of the visit is likely somewhere in between. The visit to the army allowed the President to escape the confines of Washington, something he would do repeatedly throughout the war. This seems to be supported by the fact that the president's trip on October 1 was not well known to those in the capital, not even to his own cabinet members. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles made note of the President's absence in his diary:

October 1<sup>st</sup>, Wednesday. Called this morning at the White House, but learned that the President had left the city. The porter said he had made no mention wither he was going, nor when he would return. I have no doubt he is on a visit to McClellan and the army. None of his Cabinet can have been aware of this journey.<sup>93</sup>

President Lincoln's train left Washington, DC at 6 a.m. on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, traveling to Harpers Ferry, or at least the point immediately opposite the city on the Maryland side of the Potomac.<sup>94</sup> His companions were a variety of personal friends, such as Ward Hill Lamon, a Virginian by birth who Lincoln knew from his time as an Illinois lawyer and politician. Lamon was made the U.S. Marshal to the District of Columbia by Lincoln and acted as an unofficial bodyguard to the president. Also included in the party was Illinois Secretary of State, Ozias M. Hatch and former Illinois politician, Brig. Gen. John McClelland. Finally,

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Beatie, 2019), especially chapter 5, “Supplies & Demands: The Demise of Major General George B. McClellan.”

<sup>91</sup>This is a reference to the book of the same name by Antietam Battlefield Guide and historian, Rev. John Schildt. Being one of the first chroniclers of Lincoln's visit to the army, John's title “Four Days in October”, which was self-published first in 1978, has stuck as a kind of overarching title for the whole episode.

<sup>92</sup> *Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 488.

<sup>93</sup>Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles: Secretary Of The Navy Under Lincoln And Johnson; Volume 1*, (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 157.

<sup>94</sup>John W. Schildt, *Four Days in October: Lincoln and McClellan*, (Self-published 1978, revised edition 2015), 10.



on the more professional side, the President was also accompanied by John W. Garrett, the president of the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad, upon which they were traveling and so much of the army supply was carried. Lastly, Joseph C.G. Kennedy, the superintendent of the census, who was also considered an expert on munitions and manpower, accompanied the President.<sup>95</sup>

Abraham Lincoln spent October 1–4 reviewing the various commands of the Army of the Potomac, both around Harpers Ferry and in the vicinity of Sharpsburg. While McClellan may have had initial reservations regarding the President's visit, that seems to have lifted once the two men were able to converse, which they did at some length on October 4, prior to Lincoln's return via Middletown to Frederick, Maryland. The President's remarks are commented on by McClellan in a letter to his wife shortly after Lincoln's departure and were reiterated decades later not long before the general's death:

The Presdnt was very kind personally - told me he was convinced I was the best general in the country etc etc. He was very affable & I really think he does feel very kindly towards me personally. I showed him the battle fields & am sure he departed with a more vivid idea of the great difficulty of the task we had accomplished...I will try to find time to think over the whole affair today & tonight, & do my best to hit upon some plan of campaign that will enable me to drive the rebels entirely away from this part of the country.<sup>96</sup>

Their conversation was fleshed out in more detail in the general's autobiography:

We spent some time on the battle-field and conversed fully on the state of affairs. He told me that he was entirely satisfied with me and with all that I had done; that he would stand by me against "all comers"; that he wished me to continue my preparations for a new campaign, not to stir an inch until fully ready, and when ready to do what I thought best. He repeated that he was entirely satisfied with me; that I should be let alone; that he would stand by me. I have no doubt that he meant exactly what he said. He parted from me with the utmost cordiality. We never met again on this earth.<sup>97</sup>

Unfortunately, while McClellan was still devising his plans for the upcoming campaign, the War Department was acting. Much to Little Mac's astonishment, just two days after Lincoln's visit to the army, new orders arrived for the Army of the Potomac.

### **The War Department Demands—The Confederacy Acts:**

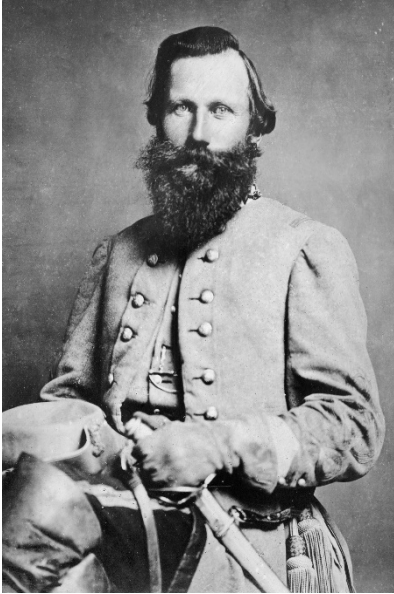
On October 6, 1862, General-in-Chief Henry Halleck sent a telegram to

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<sup>95</sup> Stotelmyer, *Too Useful To Sacrifice*, 217.

<sup>96</sup> George Brinton McClellan Papers, National Archives, Letterbooks and Telegram Books, 1852-1862; Extracts of letters to wife, 1861-1862, Box C7, Reel 63, Image 89.

<sup>97</sup> *McClellan's Own Story*, 627-628.



*Major General J.E.B. Stuart (National Archives)*

McClellan demanding that, by the direction of the President, the Army of the Potomac must move against Confederate forces to give them battle or drive them further south while the weather and roads remained in good condition. The telegram also laid out two different avenues of approach that McClellan might consider, as well as the amount of reinforcements that could be expected for either route.<sup>98</sup>

To make matters more confusing, on October 4 the War Department had begun ordering soldiers *away* from the Army of the Potomac, not to it. Brigadier General Jacob Cox's division of the Ninth Corps was ordered detached and sent to Point Pleasant, Virginia on the Ohio border for operations on the Kanawha River.<sup>99</sup> Due to these seemingly conflicting orders and concerned about the quality of the

potential reinforcements that would be sent to the army, McClellan responded late in the afternoon of October 6, trying to get some clarification:

Your telegram ordering Cox's division to Clarksburg was received before the one directing the offensive across the Potomac. Is it still intended that Cox should march at once? It is important in making my decision regarding the route to be taken by the army that I should know, first, what description of the troops I am to be reinforced with upon the Shenandoah route, and also upon the other route between the enemy and Washington; whether they are to be old or new troops, or what proportion of each...<sup>100</sup>

It was during the first week of October that a number of events occurred almost simultaneously. The first was the President's directive on October 6. The next day McClellan made the first reference to what would be his plan for the Second Virginia Campaign. After consultation with his corps commanders, the initial plan had been to advance on Winchester by way of the Shenandoah Valley, forcing Lee to give battle, which is what McClellan anticipated, or fall back, thus abandoning the Valley. The Shenandoah approach was the second option proposed by President Lincoln, and the route that would have provided fewer reinforcements from Washington. This may be why McClellan reiterated his call for not only more reinforcements at this time, but for very specific units,

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<sup>98</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 10-11.

<sup>99</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 380.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.

such as Maj. Gen. John J. Peck's division, which he had requested repeatedly.<sup>101</sup>

In addition to the burgeoning campaign, the Young Napoleon also reacted to one of the key developments in Federal war aims, the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. A result of the bloodletting and subsequent Union victory at Antietam, the Preliminary Emancipation was not universally hailed in the Federal army. Many troops and even General McClellan expressed at various times a desire to avoid the issue of slavery all together if possible. McClellan's General Order's #163 however reiterates the subservient role of the military to the civilian government stating, "Armed forces are raised and supported simply to sustain the civil authorities, and are to be held in strict subordination thereto in all respects." He went on to remind his forces that conversation or discussion that becomes uncivil has a detrimental impact on the discipline of the army and that, "The remedy for political errors, if any are committed, is to be found only in the action of the people at the polls."<sup>102</sup> While not a glowing endorsement for the Federal policy, this order made clear the boundaries for discourse within the army.

With all this tumult going on within and around the Army of the Potomac, it is little wonder that Confederate forces were able to take advantage of the situation. On October 8, Lee ordered Maj. Gen. J.E.B Stuart to take a portion of his command, cross the Potomac moving through Maryland and enter Pennsylvania stating:

Proceed to the rear of Chambersburg and endeavor to destroy the railroad bridge over the branch of the Conococheague. Any other damage that you can inflict upon the enemy or his means of transportation you will also execute. You are desired to gain all information on the position, force, and probable intention of the enemy which you can...<sup>103</sup>

Stuart brought a raiding force of 1,800 troopers and four pieces of artillery together the next day. At 3 a.m. on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, dismounted soldiers carefully crossed the Potomac at McCoy's Ford, dispersed or captured the Federal pickets and opened the way for Stuart's command, which crossed about daylight. Ironically, while traveling on the National Pike, Stuart's horsemen nearly overtook Cox's division of Ohio troops that had been ordered west to the Kanawha River a few days previous. With a large Federal force in relatively close proximity, Stuart abandoned his original intention to raid the depots at Hagerstown and instead pushed north. Moving swiftly through Maryland, the Confederate cavaliers reached Mercersburg, Pennsylvania about noon. They made for Chambersburg by way of St. Thomas and succeeded in capturing Chambersburg that night about 7 p.m. With no military or civil authorities making themselves known, the town was surrendered by several prominent

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<sup>101</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 11-12.

<sup>102</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 395-396.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

citizens. Between 275 to 300 convalescing Union soldiers were found in the city hospitals and were paroled. Finally, the bridge over the Conococheague Creek, was found to be iron and could not be destroyed. The railroad was obstructed however and the telegraph lines about Chambersburg cut.<sup>104</sup>

The next morning the Chambersburg rail depot, its various buildings and large quantities of Federal stores, including both uniforms and weapons, were burned by the raiders. Brigadier General Wade Hampton estimated that 5,000 new muskets were destroyed in the fire. His men helped themselves to pistols, as well as uniforms before putting the rest to the torch.<sup>105</sup>

Turning first towards Gettysburg, in an apparent effort to confuse Federal pursuit, Stuart led his cavaliers south moving back into Maryland via Emmitsburg. The Confederate raid would no longer be a joy ride however. By October 11, Federal forces were well aware of the Confederates behind their lines and were moving to cut them off. Pickets along the Potomac were alerted and larger forces moved into blocking positions at Poolesville, the Monocacy Aqueduct and Monocacy Junction with the intention of intercepting the raiders. This however was not to be. Stuart crossed the Monocacy River north of Frederick moving east of the city. He crossed the B&O railroad near New Market, obstructing the rails and cutting the telegraph lines, but did not make a run at the depots near Frederick. Riding through the night Confederate forces were in Hyattstown by sun up on the 12<sup>th</sup>. They pressed on to Barnesville and to avoid the division of Brigadier General George Stoneman based out of Poolesville, moved cross country heading for the Potomac and White's Ford.<sup>106</sup> Much to the chagrin of the Federal pursuers, the government and the press, Stuart succeeded in crossing back into Virginia between 9 and 10 a.m. on the morning of October 12. General Stuart's cavalry had rode 90 miles in the last 24 hours of the raid, had taken approximately 1,000 horses from Maryland and Pennsylvania, as well as other stores and equipage that could be carried. He had done an estimated \$200,000 in damage to the depots at Chambersburg, the warehouses of Wunderlich & Need and had not lost a man killed, though several stragglers would be picked up by Federal patrols over the coming days.<sup>107</sup>

The raid was hailed by those in the South, not just the military, but also the public. In her diary, Anne Madison Willis Ambler made mention of the raid, "Tuesday [October] 14<sup>th</sup> - General Stuart returned from Maryland today. It was a brilliant affair. Went to Pennsylvania and Maryland. Got about 1500 horses and 700 prisoners..."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59.

<sup>106</sup> Major George B. Davis, Leslie J. Perry, Joseph W. Kirkley, compiled by Captain Calvin D. Cowles, *The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War*, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1891-1895), Plate 25, Map 6.

<sup>107</sup> "A Daring Rebel Raid!", *The Herald of Freedom & Torch Light*, October 15, 1862, 2B.

<sup>108</sup> Anne Madison Ambler Baylor, "Diary of Anne Madison Willis Ambler: A Civil War

Stuart's expedition around the Army of the Potomac did much to embarrass the Union cavalry and high command. The deficiencies in the cavalry had become particularly glaring and were being noted not only in the dispatches of the army, but by the men themselves and the press. McClellan's fight with the War Department about supplies, while continuing to note the needs of his men, now expanded to horse flesh as well. A series of dispatches began during the days of Stuart's raid and continued into late October on just this subject. Both McClellan and his Chief Quartermaster, Rufus Ingalls, crunched the numbers regarding horses delivered to the army, all the while Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs laid out his own statistics of horses purchased and delivered. The differences between these two calculations is over 2,000 animals.<sup>109</sup>

Colonel Charles Wainwright referred to the whole incident as, "a burning disgrace" and that, "It is said that what little cavalry we have is so badly off for horses that they can do nothing...I fear our cavalry is an awful botch."<sup>110</sup>

On October 17, Middletown, Maryland's newspaper, *The Valley Register*, noted a comment from the Washington *Star*, another paper:

The lack of horses at this time in our army doubtless had much to do with encouraging the rebels to essay this venture. Our cavalry is well nigh afoot for the time being; while too much of what should be transportation is transportation but in name, as army wagons cannot be moved with our horses. It is notoriously true that in the battle of Antietam so pressing was the need for more effective horses that the train of the headquarters was stripped of them to supply different batteries in actual engagement.<sup>111</sup>

While doubtless there is some exaggeration here, it is not far off the mark. Brigadier General Alfred Pleasonton did note in his report of the pursuit of Stuart that at one point his command was down to a mere 400 troopers and that the horses of Pennington's battery were so exhausted that they could not pull the guns up the steep hills. He specifically states that the condition of his force is what allowed Stuart and his command to escape.<sup>112</sup>

### **Reconnaissance, Plans, and Cavalry:**

While all this back and forth, as well as finger pointing, was occurring, President Lincoln sent a letter by courier to McClellan. The October 13 letter from Lincoln laid out in further detail the plan he had proposed on the sixth of the month. It also challenged McClellan to think like his opponent, who would be forced to worry about his lines of communication if Federal forces moved on the "inside track" of the Loudoun Valley towards Richmond. Lincoln's

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Experience", *Magazine of the Jefferson County Historical Society*, Vol. 37, December 1971, 28.

<sup>109</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 77-81.

<sup>110</sup> *A Diary Of Battle*, 115.

<sup>111</sup> "Daring Rebel Raid", *The Valley Register*, October 17, 1862, 2C.

<sup>112</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 39.

strategic thinking and use of established military maxims was sound. However, the comparisons of the Army of Northern Virginia to the Army of the Potomac's mobility was inappropriate. Lincoln, with the 1862 elections looming, was worried about time, both in the Eastern and Western theaters of the war. He wanted decisive action against the Confederate armies prior to the November elections to help boost the Republican Party at the polls. Lincoln prodded and lightly chastised McClellan for not worrying about time, but that was exactly the issue between the two contending armies.<sup>113</sup> Lee's forces were lighter in manpower, equipment and would be falling back on their lines of supply and communication negating much of the advantage of the Union's inside track, while an advancing Army of the Potomac would be moving away from its base of supply and have to carry with it the extensive impedimenta of a large army operating in the field.

Lincoln's letter made it to McClellan's headquarters on the morning of October 16. The commander of the Army of the Potomac penned a quick response stating that he was headed to the front and would give a proper response in due course. That same day a reconnaissance-in-force had been sent out to Charlestown, Virginia under the command of Brig. Gen. Winfield S. Hancock, who commanded the First Division, Second Corps, as well as about 1,500 men from additional commands. Skirmishing began just beyond Halltown. Federal forces pushed forward and entered Charlestown around 1 p.m. General McClellan was noted to have arrived shortly thereafter. Federal forces remained in the vicinity of Charlestown until the next day before beginning a slow withdrawal. They were back at their Bolivar encampments by the 18<sup>th</sup>. Casualties on both sides were limited, though nearly 100 Confederate medical staff and convalescing soldiers were found scattered about Charlestown, many of them being paroled.<sup>114</sup>

While Hancock was advancing from Harpers Ferry with one force, another Federal column was moving from Sharpsburg to Smithfield, modern-day Middleway, under the command of Brig. Gen. Andrew Humphreys, Third Division, Fifth Corps. The two wings of the joint reconnaissance were coordinated, both Hancock and Humphreys communicating with one another throughout the period. Humphreys' advance ran into more resistance than Hancock's, having not only Confederate artillery and cavalry involved, but also infantry. Even with the larger engagement, casualties on both sides were light, the Federals actually under-estimating Confederate losses slightly. Beyond the casualties, the results of these movements helped determine that Lee's forces were still in the area of Winchester and Bunker Hill. Prior to being interrupted by the Federal advance the Confederates had been in the process of destroying the railroad between Charlestown and Winchester.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 13-14.

<sup>114</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 90-97.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-89.

The presence and movements of these large forces, as well as that of McClellan, did not go unnoticed by the citizens in the region. James Hooff, a Quartermaster Sgt. in 2<sup>nd</sup> Virginia Infantry, lived near Charlestown and made note that McClellan had been in town in the October 18 entry of his journal, also stating, “The enemy did not remain long in our town – Why cannot say.”<sup>116</sup>

Anne Ambler, who lived at Rock Hall near Summit Point, Virginia, also made note of the fighting in mid-October:

Friday 17<sup>th</sup> – Yesterday evening there came news that two fights had occurred in town and our men had to retreat, leaving the enemy in possession...

Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> – The news is that the Yankees have fallen back from Charlestown and our troops are advancing. About 2000 cavalry passed by our gate.<sup>117</sup>

Finally, a Shepherdstown resident made similar remarks about the Federal troop movements through town in their own diary:

October 16<sup>th</sup>. About 20,000 Yankees crossed the river and went up the Smithfield [Middleway] pike, and with heavy loss had to make quick retreat from Jackson's forces.

October 19<sup>th</sup>. “Stonewall” Jackson burned the railroad shops in Martinsburg and tore up the railroad tracks.<sup>118</sup>

General McClellan's response to President Lincoln came on the 17<sup>th</sup>, while the reconnaissance operations were still underway. He explained that he believed that Lee's forces were still between Bunker Hill and Winchester and that he intended to give the President's detailed plan full consideration. He further stated that it was his intention to advance as soon as his men and cavalry were ready, making reference to the need for shoes and horses once again. McClellan concluded his brief message by promising to fully explain any variations between the President's plan and what the army would do.

As it turned out, the intelligence gathered around Charlestown and Shepherdstown, in conjunction with a reconnaissance led by Brig. Gen. John Geary to Lovettsville on October 21 went a long way to determining that the President's plan for an advance would be the plan adopted by the Army of the Potomac, as the Loudoun Valley was found to have far fewer defenders than

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<sup>116</sup> James Lawrence Hooff, *The Journals of James Lawrence Hooff Charlestown, Virginia now Charles Town, West Virginia, October 17, 1859 - June 1, 1864*, (Jefferson County Museum Collection), 145.

<sup>117</sup> *Magazine of the Jefferson County Historical Society*, Vol. 37, December 1971, 29.

<sup>118</sup> Contributed by D.C. Gallaher, “Fragments of a Diary of Shepherdstown Events During the War of 1861-65”, *Magazine of the Jefferson County Historical Society*, Vol. 62, December 1996, 85.

the Shenandoah.<sup>119</sup>

On October 22, McClellan telegraphed the War Department indicating that he intended to advance, “upon the line indicated by the President in his letter of the 13th instant, and have accordingly taken steps to execute the movement.”<sup>120</sup> The steps referred to specifically was the placement of a massive pontoon bridge at Berlin, modern Brunswick, Maryland. As it would turn out these same pontoons would be used by the Army of the Potomac in December, 1862, during another river crossing meant to surprise the Army of Northern Virginia.

This seemingly positive discourse between the Commander-in-Chief and the commander of his primary field army was about to come to an abrupt end however. Just prior to what would be the stepping off date for the new campaign, General McClellan received a scathingly sarcastic note from President Lincoln concerning the condition of the cavalry in the Army of the Potomac.

War Department, Washington City, October 24 [25?], 1862.

Major-General McClellan: I have just read your dispatch about sore-tongued and fatigued horses. Will you pardon me for asking what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam that fatigues anything?

A. LINCOLN.<sup>121</sup>

This was an unfair and unfounded accusation from a tired and obviously distressed President. McClellan was aware of the President's and the public's desire to see the army move, and according to his private letters, he shared that desire, “I see that there is much impatience throughout the country for a move – I am just as anxious as anyone, but am crippled by want of horses.”<sup>122</sup>

It was not just the number of horses that was the concern for Little Mac, but also their condition. As stated in his response to the President's jab, the cavalry of the Army of the Potomac had been in near constant use since the Battle of Antietam:

I have the honor to state, from the time this army left Washington, on the 7th of September, my cavalry has been constantly employed in making reconnaissances, scouting, and picketing. Since the battle of Antietam, six regiments have made a trip of 200 miles, marching 55 miles in one day, while endeavoring to reach Stuart's cavalry.

General Pleasonton, in his official report, states that he, with the remainder of our available cavalry, while on Stuart's track,

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<sup>119</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 99-100.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 464.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 485.

<sup>122</sup> Extracts of letters to wife, 1861-1862, Box C7, Reel 63, Image 90.



marched 78 miles in twenty-four hours.

Besides these two remarkable expeditions, our cavalry has been engaged in picketing and scouting 150 miles of river front ever since the battle of Antietam, and has made repeated reconnaissances since that time, engaging the enemy on every occasion, and, indeed, it has performed harder service since the battle than before.<sup>123</sup>

McClellan held back in his official response to the President. However, his private correspondence reveals that he was deeply insulted by the President's missive. Writing to his wife Mary Ellen McClellan, whom he called Ellen, on the 26<sup>th</sup>, the day his campaign began, the general stated, "I was mad as a 'march hare' yesterday at a telegram received from the Presdt asking what my 'cavalry have done since the battle of Antietam to fatigue anything'—it was one of those dirty little flings that I can't get used to when they are not merited."<sup>124</sup>

### **A Difficult Crossing—The Campaign Begins:**

With tensions high between the administration and army headquarters, the orders to begin crossing the Potomac came down on Sunday, October 26. The previous day the pontoon bridge at Berlin (Brunswick) was finished and a second one would soon be established. In addition, the pontoons across the Potomac at Harpers Ferry and across the Shenandoah had been in place for some time. The Army of the Potomac at this point, besides the ongoing horse crisis, was looking very good. In the days preceding the crossing McClellan had been able to get much of the supply issue under control and he put his troop strength at approximately 110,000 men of all arms. In the coming movement the railroad would no longer be an option for supply. Thus, the wagon train for this massive force would be at least 1,830 wagons. This does not include the additional animals and vehicles required to carry the forage for all the animals, nor the ammunition reserve, ambulances, quartermaster supplies, etc.<sup>125</sup>

At 1:30 a.m. on the 26<sup>th</sup>, Brig. Gen. Alfred Pleasonton received orders to move his brigade of cavalry to Berlin in preparation for a 9 a.m. crossing of the Potomac on the pontoon bridge. The Ninth Corps under Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside would coordinate with Pleasonton and the cavalryman was to have his troopers just beyond Lovettsville, Virginia by nightfall.<sup>126</sup> As could be expected, the advance was trumpeted in the press:

*Special Dispatch to the Baltimore American.*

Harper's Ferry, Sunday, Oct. 26-6 P.M.

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<sup>123</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 485.

<sup>124</sup> *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 511.

<sup>125</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 80-81.

<sup>126</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 894.

I am happy to be able to inform you that the advance of the Army of the Potomac commenced this morning, and I have reason to believe that before tomorrow night the movement will be general along the whole line, placing the Potomac in our rear.

At daylight this morning the cavalry force of Gen. Pleasonton, with four pieces of artillery, crossed the new pontoon bridge at Berlin, eight miles east of Harper's Ferry, and proceeded direct to Lovettsville, in Loudon County.<sup>127</sup>

The President, perhaps trying to smooth over their earlier spat regarding the cavalry, telegraphed McClellan on the 26<sup>th</sup>, “rejoiced to learn from your dispatch to General Halleck that you begin crossing the river this morning.”<sup>128</sup>



*Pontoon Bridges over the Potomac at Berlin (Brunswick), Maryland, 1862. (Library of Congress)*

With the crossings at Berlin, and shortly to follow Harpers Ferry, begun, the plan of the campaign was to be three pronged. The column from Berlin, consisting of the cavalry under Pleasonton, as well as the First, Sixth, and Ninth corps would advance in conjunction with the column crossing at Harpers Ferry, the Second and Fifth corps. These forces would move south, parallel with the Blue Ridge angling for Warrenton, Virginia. As the army advanced it would seize the various gaps in the Blue Ridge, holding them until well after the main

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<sup>127</sup> “From the Army of the Potomac”, *The New York Times*, October 28, 1862, Page 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/20609427>.

<sup>128</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 490.

body of the army had passed, so as to protect their lines of communication. A third column out of the defenses of Washington consisting of the Eleventh Corps and the division of Brig. Gen. Daniel Sickles would unite with the advancing army at Thoroughfare Gap in the Bull Run Mountains. Upon reaching the Manassas Gap Railroad the passes in the Blue Ridge would be abandoned as no longer necessary to cover the lines of communication and supply.<sup>129</sup>

The plan for the campaign was laid out by McClellan in a very similar manner in both the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, as well as in his post war memoir. He goes on to say:

It was my intention, if, upon reaching Ashby's or any other pass, I found that the enemy were in force between it and the Potomac, in the Valley of the Shenandoah, to move into the valley and endeavor to gain their rear.

I hardly hoped to accomplish this, but did expect that by striking in between Culpeper Court-House and Little Washington I could either separate their army and beat them in detail, or else force them to concentrate as far back as Gordonsville, and thus place the Army of the Potomac in position either to adopt the Fredericksburg line of advance upon Richmond or to be removed to the Peninsula...<sup>130</sup>

It appears that even with an order to cross at 9 a.m., Pleasonton may have done so an hour earlier, several sources list the crossing of the Potomac for 8 a.m. on October 26.<sup>131</sup> The Union cavalry was escorted by a division of the Ninth Corps, with the rest of the corps following behind the cavalry once it was over the river. The infantry was not in the horse soldiers' way for long. Once over the river they filed onto side roads, allowing the eyes and ears of the army to push on. By 11 a.m. Pleasonton's troopers had reached Lovettsville. Though following behind the advance a few days later with the First Corps, Col. Charles Wainwright gave a glowing description of the Loudoun Valley and the region immediate around Lovettsville:

We have left the limestone country, and are now in a high rolling grassy region, largely cleared and well watered. I have passed through no such farming region before, in either Virginia or Maryland, as we have here in Loudoun County.<sup>132</sup>

While the crossing of the Potomac continued, the river itself began to rise. The rain, long looked for by army command, had begun. While pleased that it

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<sup>129</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 87.

<sup>130</sup> *McClellan's Own Story*, 645-646.

<sup>131</sup> "From the Army of the Potomac", *The New York Times*, October 28, 1862, Page 1; Patrick J. Brennan, "Little Mac's Last Stand", *Blue & Gray*, Vol. XVII, Issue 2, December 1999, Page 10.

<sup>132</sup> *A Diary Of Battle*, 119.

would help negate any potential of Confederate forces crossing into Maryland along the upper Potomac, the rain did slow the crossing. McClellan recounted in his report on the campaign:

Heavy rains delayed the movement considerably in the beginning, and the First, Fifth, and Sixth Corps were obliged to halt at least one day at the crossings, to complete, as far as possible, necessary supplies that could not be procured at an earlier period.<sup>133</sup>

The troops were moving however and on October 27, Pleasonton and his brigade of cavalry reached Purcellville. Using the town as a base of operation, Pleasonton sent out his patrols to find and make contact with any Confederate forces in the area. One of the initial clashes of the campaign occurred that day at Snickers Gap. The 8<sup>th</sup> New York Cavalry had decided to climb the gap to get a view of the Shenandoah Valley. They were only able to advance half a mile before Confederate artillery opened upon them with canister, causing confusion in the ranks. According to the historian of the 8<sup>th</sup>, “The order was given to about-face and retreat. Away the regiment went down the road faster than they came up.”<sup>134</sup>

By the 28<sup>th</sup> the First Corps, as well as Army Headquarters, was encamped at Berlin in preparation for their crossing. By this point however the Federal movements would no longer be unchallenged and intelligence reports from the Maryland Heights signal station indicated that something was stirring in the Shenandoah Valley. The Sixth Corps would actually be delayed in crossing the Potomac while its cavalry attempted to determine what was going on.<sup>135</sup>

October 28 saw Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia begin to react to this latest Federal incursion into Virginia. The dust being kicked by the wagon trains and the movement of troops indicated Confederate forces concentrating near Winchester. Lee ordered the recently promoted Lt. Gen. James Longstreet up the Shenandoah Valley, southward, towards Front Royal so as to cross the Blue Ridge to Culpepper. It was a 75-mile march, but if successful would put Confederate forces once more between McClellan and Richmond. Lieutenant General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson was recalled from the vicinity of Martinsburg to Winchester. He was to watch the gaps in the Blue Ridge for an opportunity to take the Federals in the flank. Finally, Maj. Gen. Stuart was ordered with about 1,000 cavalry through Snicker's Gap into the Loudoun Valley to oppose and delay the Federal advance as much as possible.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 87.

<sup>134</sup> Henry Norton, *Deeds of Daring, or History Of The Eighth N.Y. Volunteer Cavalry*, (Norwich, NY: Chenango Telegraph Printing House, 1889), 39.

<sup>135</sup> *OR*, vol. 51, pt. 1, 896-897.

<sup>136</sup> David W. Lowe, *Civil War in Loudoun Valley: The Battle of Unison, November 1-3, 1862*, (Washington, DC: Cultural Resources GIS of the National Park Service, 2008), 10. & “Little Mac's Last Stand”, *Blue & Gray*, 11.

Those civilians within the vicinity of the Army of Northern Virginia made repeated references to the movement of the army in the closing days of October. Anne Ambler noted in her diary on October 28 that she was, “astonished to see a body of infantry passing the road by Mrs. Luke's. Pa thought they were going to camp in our woods but they went beyond...” The rest of the day, and for the next several days the family had to deal with stragglers and stealing. They also received a number of Confederate officers to dinner including, “General A.P. Hill, Pender, Archer, Dr. Hoyt, Capt. Williams and Col. Thomas.” Finally, on the 31<sup>st</sup>, following a canceled review, Anne, “heard that the troops were moving.”<sup>137</sup>

### **Continued Crossings—Initial Clashes:**

As the Union's reserve artillery crossed the Potomac at Berlin and the Second Corps began to cross the Shenandoah River at Harpers Ferry on the 29<sup>th</sup>, McClellan updated Lincoln on the position and strength of Confederate forces. The intelligence reports he was receiving from Pleasonton and others varied greatly, with some even speculating on a potential Confederate attack at Harpers Ferry. With all this variation, one fact became clear, the Confederates were moving.<sup>138</sup>

Stuart entered the Loudoun Valley on October 30 at the head of Brig. Gen. Fitzhugh Lee's brigade of Virginia cavalry, at that time commanded by Col. Williams Wickham, as well as a battery of horse artillery under Maj. John Pelham. Opposing Stuart was not only Pleasonton's cavalry brigade, but also the brigade of Brig. Gen. George Bayard, who had been ordered from the western defenses of Washington, all the way to Aldie Gap in the Bull Run Mountains. Bayard was under the impression he was to be coordinating with Pleasonton and was not aware of the Confederate movement into the valley. When three squadrons of the 1<sup>st</sup> Rhode Island went into camp that night near Mountville, they had no idea their presence had been made known to the Confederate cavalry chief, setting up the first real clash of the Loudoun Valley Campaign.<sup>139</sup>

October 31, 1862, turned out to be an especially scary day for the 1<sup>st</sup> Rhode Island Cavalry at Mountville. Rising before dawn, Stuart took two battalions of cavaliers from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Virginia Cavalry by back roads towards the Rhode Islanders' camp on the Snickersville Turnpike near Mountville. He had left instructions for the 4<sup>th</sup> Virginia, as well as a section of Pelham's guns to follow. The pickets of the Federal camp were captured by eight picked riders, allowing the 9<sup>th</sup> Virginia to charge headlong into the camp. Stuart later reported that, “I succeeded in surprising the enemy, who were in force of about 100, and dispersing the whole without difficulty; killed and captured nearly the whole

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<sup>137</sup> *Magazine of the Jefferson County Historical Society*, Vol. 37, December 1971, 29-30.

<sup>138</sup> *OR*, vol. 51, pt. 1, 897-898.

<sup>139</sup> *Civil War in Loudoun Valley*, 11.

number, among the former Captain Gove, of the 1<sup>st</sup> Rhode Island Cavalry.”<sup>140</sup>

The history of the 1<sup>st</sup> Rhode Island corroborates this stating that the picket:

Against such a heavy, well planned, sudden stroke our men vainly attempted to form and make resistance. In the brave effort to make a stand, our noble and honored Lieutenant L. D. Gove who, since July, had been acting Captain received a mortal wound in the spine, near the small of the back, which instantly paralyzed the lower extremities, and from which he died on the following morning (November 1<sup>st</sup>)...<sup>141</sup>

The sudden attack swept up 58 of the Rhode Island cavalrymen. Lieutenant Lorenzo D. Grove, the acting Captain at the time of his mortal wounding, had just received on October 5, “a beautiful army sabre and belt a gift from his friends in New Hampshire.”<sup>142</sup>

Following behind the initial assault, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Virginia Cavalry pursued those Federals who were able to make it to their horses. The chase continued for about five miles towards Aldie. As the remains of the 1<sup>st</sup> Rhode Island's pickets dashed through the town, the 1<sup>st</sup> New Jersey Cavalry, who had been re-shoeing their horses, was formed and struck the Confederate pursuers with a volley, throwing them into confusion.<sup>143</sup>

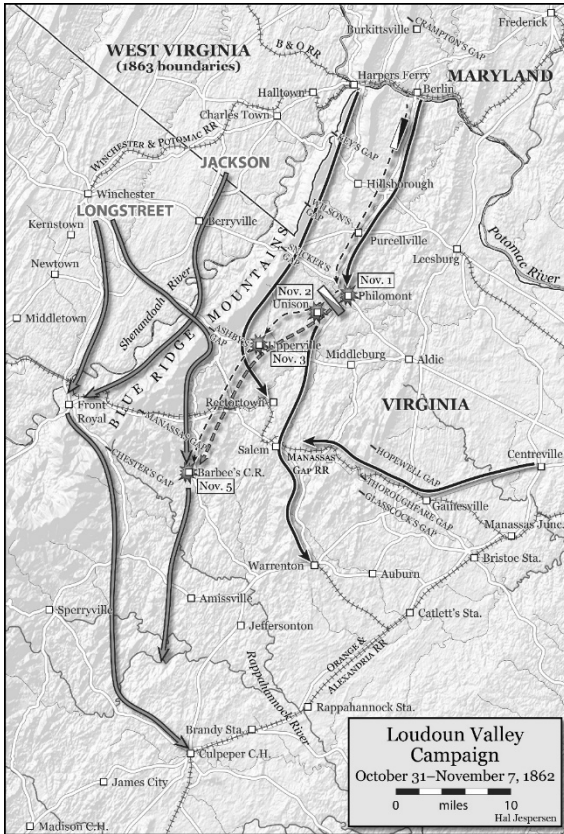
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<sup>140</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 141.

<sup>141</sup> Rev. Frederic Denison, *Sabres And Spurs: The First Regiment Rhode Island Cavalry In The Civil War, 1861-1865*, (The First Rhode Island Cavalry Veteran Association, 1876), 169.

<sup>142</sup> *Sabres And Spurs*, 163.

<sup>143</sup> “Little Mac’s Last Stand”, *Blue & Gray*, 16.



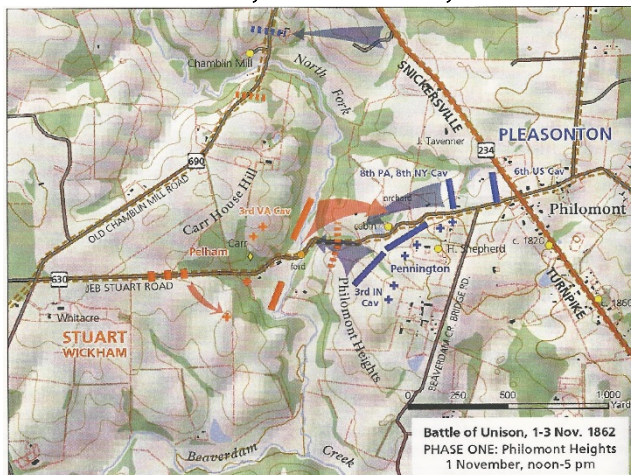
Now began a series of charges and counter charges as the 1<sup>st</sup> New Jersey flew into the staggered foe, forcing them to fall back. Only to be in turn thrown back themselves after a short distance by the arrival of Stuart's reserve, the 4<sup>th</sup> Virginia Cavalry and Pelham's horse artillery. As the Jersey men tumbled back toward Aldie, their own artillery, as well as the 2<sup>nd</sup> New York Cavalry, was brought forward, stabilizing their position. According to the history of the 1<sup>st</sup> New Jersey, "now each side had taken its position, from which the other was to seek to drive it... so there was a fair opportunity of testing the ability of the famous rebel under circumstances very favorable to him."<sup>144</sup>

Now squared off, both sides fell into fitful skirmishing for much of the rest of the day, punctuated by limited advances on both sides that were soon turned back. As evening came on, news reached Stuart of potential Federal advances out of Mountville. Breaking contact, the Confederate cavalry slipped west to Middleburg where they camped for the night. Federal forces also withdrew from Aldie, leaving only a few pickets behind. General Bayard retreated entirely out of the Loudoun Valley, falling back to Fairfax Court House on November 1.<sup>145</sup> Alfred Pleasonton noted the firing in the area of Aldie and had also received numerous reports of Stuart being active in the area. Along with orders from McClellan to screen his advance, Pleasonton advanced the next day, November 1 towards Philomont.

<sup>144</sup> Henry R. Pyne, *The History Of The First New Jersey Cavalry, (Sixteenth Regiment, New Jersey Volunteers)*, (Trenton, N.J.: J. A. Beecher, Publisher, 1871), 128.

<sup>145</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 136-137.

## The Battle of Unison, November 1–3, 1862:



*Battle of Unison: Philomont Heights (National Park Service)*

Corps was at Wheatland and Warterford, and the Sixth Corps had begun crossing the Potomac at Berlin.<sup>146</sup> McClellan also informed the President that morning about his own movements: army headquarters was now moving into northern Virginia as well.<sup>147</sup>

General Pleasonton's advance on the morning of November 1 was led by the 8<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania and 3<sup>rd</sup> Indiana cavalry regiments. Pleasonton had intended to push his troopers as far as Upperville, just east of Ashby's Gap in the Blue Ridge and trotted into Philomont around 11:00 a.m. Shortly thereafter a squadron of the 8<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania moved down the Unison Road, modern day JEB Stuart Road, towards the Philomont Heights, intending to cross the ford on the North Fork, also known as Butcher's Branch. It was here on the high ground that Stuart's pickets waited and unleashed a withering fire into the Union advance, compelling it to fall back. The rest of the 8<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, as well as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indiana Cavalry were then ordered forward. A member of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indiana Cavalry, Samuel Gilpin, noted in his diary following the skirmish, "We double-quickened across the field and raising a yell charged through the woods making the gray coats light out. Our carbine charge would have amused the infantry."<sup>148</sup>

The Confederate cavalry pickets fell back across the North Fork ford, taking cover behind the stone walls in the area. Both sides then settled in to exchange fire across the ford. The artillery was soon on scene, at least two of Pelham's guns going into action near the Carr House, overlooking the ford. The Federals

<sup>146</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 86.

<sup>147</sup> George Brinton McClellan Papers: Letterbooks and Telegram Books, 1852-1862; Telegram book, 1862; Box C20; Reel 66, Oct. 29-Nov. 4. #16.

<sup>148</sup> *Civil War in Loudoun Valley*, 13.



responded by rushing forward the guns of Battery M, 2<sup>nd</sup> United States Artillery, under Lt. Alexander Pennington. With the arrival of the 8<sup>th</sup> New York Cavalry the fighting around the North Fork ford continued to seesaw with approximately 1,000 men and ten guns engaged between both sides. By the end of the day, the Federal cavalry had barely moved since noon. Both sides broke off the action at night fall heading back to Philomont and Unison respectively. Stuart had succeeded in delaying the Union advance and kept them from discovering that Confederate reinforcements were on the way. That same day, the division of Maj. Gen. Daniel Harvey Hill, approximately 5,000 soldiers passed through Ashby's Gap and were now encamped between Paris and Upperville. Stuart was not the only one receiving infantry support however, he noted grimly in his after-action report following the fighting at North Fork that, "The playing of bands and other indications rendered it almost certain that there was a large force of infantry present."<sup>149</sup>

November 2 was another active day for the forces then in the Loudoun Valley. McClellan laid out an ambitious plan for the movements of the day to Lincoln after letting him know that the last division of the Sixth Corps was crossing the Shenandoah River. "I move headquarters this morning to Wheatland. The entire army will advance rapidly to-day, and, if possible, the cavalry advance to-night will be near Springfield, on the Manassas Gap Railroad."<sup>150</sup>

The Union cavalry would have to deal with Confederates in front of them first however. General Pleasonton ordered his troopers forward that Sunday to the ground they had contested the day previously and found all quiet. Major Heros Von Borcke, the famed Prussian officer on Stuart's staff, described the day as, "a rich, soft day, with all the splendour of the autumnal sunshine, and all the quietude of the Christian Sabbath."<sup>151</sup> Confederate forces, upon seeing the Federal advance around 8 a.m., had fallen back to Unison and threw out a defensive line to Dog Branch, just northeast of town, to be held by the 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Virginia Cavalry, as well as a section of Pelham's artillery commanded by Capt. James Breathed.

The Federals however, as feared by Stuart, had indeed been reinforced with infantry. The brigade of Lt. Col. J. William Hofmann, Second Brigade, First Division, First Corps, consisting of the 7<sup>th</sup> Indiana, 56<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, 76<sup>th</sup> and 95<sup>th</sup> New York and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battery New Hampshire Light Artillery, brought Pleasonton's forces up to approximately 2,500 men and 12 cannon. With Confederate forces behind Dog Branch, General Pleasonton decided to lean on his infantry support, while he sent his cavalry to find and harass the flanks of Stuart's line. The 8<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Cavalry was sent north towards Bloomfield, while the 6<sup>th</sup> United States Cavalry, which had arrived late on November 1, was

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<sup>149</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 142; *Civil War in Loudoun Valley*, 14-15.

<sup>150</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 531.

<sup>151</sup> Heros Von Borcke, *Memoirs Of The Confederate War For Independence*, (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood And Sons, 1866), 20.

sent south towards Pot House. These regiments would be removed from the action for much of the rest of the day, though the 8<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania did succeed in overrunning an outpost of the 9<sup>th</sup> Virginia Cavalry near Ebenezer Church and rescued a captured Union staff officer.<sup>152</sup>

Pleasanton then moved against Dog Branch. With skirmishers popping and the artillery barking, Hofmann's infantry was ordered into action. The 56<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania and 95<sup>th</sup> New York deployed to the left of what is today JEB Stuart Road and slipped down the embankment to wade Dog Branch and swung south across the Plaster farm, avoiding Confederate sharpshooters along the banks of Dog Branch. With the Federals now committed, the Confederate cavalry and artillery pulled back, having bought General Stuart more time to establish his defense in Unison. Reforming his commands, Pleasanton ordered them to press on towards the town. The Confederates would continue this delaying tactic throughout the day.<sup>153</sup>

Pleasanton was now moving toward Unison in force and throwing the cavalry out to his flanks. General Stuart was forced to respond in kind. He sent the 9<sup>th</sup> Virginia Cavalry towards Bloomfield and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Virginia Cavalry towards Pot House. Now reduced in numbers, Stuart intended to delay the Federal advance through Unison for as long as possible with three regiments of cavalry and Pelham's horse artillery. A key part of the Confederate defense for this part of the Loudoun Valley was the extensive field stone walls, miles of which still exist to this day. Built as property lines or to flank the many farm roads in the area, these walls were incredibly effective defensive structures, forcing the Federals to fight from one line of stone to the next, often with large open fields between them.

As the Federals advanced on Unison, the Confederate artillery took up position on the high ground across from what is today the Unison United Methodist Church. Now overlooking the town, the Confederate guns had a clear view of the two Federal batteries deploying at the other end of town, just over half a mile away. Heros Von Borcke in his usual dramatic style described the scene:

A double line of tirailleurs [sharpshooters skirmishers] advanced in excellent order; four batteries opened upon our guns from different points; the air shook with the continuous roar of the cannonade; on every side the bullets buzzed like infuriated insects; on the whole the outward signs were rather those of a great battle than a mere cavalry combat.<sup>154</sup>

As the infantry and cavalry skirmished about Unison, the artillery duel was kept up for about an hour. The town itself received significant damage from the artillery as well as from small arms fire as the two sides probed, attacked and

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<sup>152</sup> *Civil War in Loudoun Valley*, 16-18.

<sup>153</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 131.

<sup>154</sup> *Memoirs Of The Confederate War For Independence*, 20.

counter attacked through and just south of Unison. With parts of Unison and its immediate area now ablaze, Stuart once again began to pull his men out. This time they fell back slightly less than a mile to the field stone Quaker Meeting House. The Meeting House no longer exists, but the burial ground just behind the structure is still maintained today.

It was from this position that two incidents, both involving the Stuart Horse Artillery, occurred during the afternoon of November 2. Federal forces passed through Unison after Stuart pulled back, shaking out their battle lines south of the Unison Road. Confederate skirmishers moved forward to the wooded Keene's Creek to resist the advance, while Pelham's guns went into action just in front of the Quaker Meeting House. The Federal artillery also moved forward, their guns being deployed south and west of the Unison Methodist Church. Another intense artillery duel now opened, this time at a range of about 800 yards.

One of Pelham's artillerymen, Henry Matthews, who would be wounded himself during the exchange, described the effects of the converging Federal fire coming down on the horse artillery:

We were at one time firing on both flanks and in our immediate front. We being pressed very heavily... one of our caissons was exploded at this position by a shell from the enemy's artillery, killing the horses of the caisson, and burning the two men who were at the caisson at the time, Melvin Bollman and John Culbreth. The rapidity with which we were throwing iron into these Federal batteries made it necessary to have two men at the caisson - the limber of the gun being exhausted of its ammunition. A shell exploded in front of my gun (the 2<sup>nd</sup>) doing considerable damage to the piece, wounding three men.<sup>155</sup>

Responding to the intense fire, Maj. Pelham, in one of the daring exploits he was quickly becoming famous for, took a single gun out onto the flank of the now advancing Federal infantry, sighting in on the color guard of the 7<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry. This shot exploded directly above the color guard, tearing Sergeant Isaac McGee to pieces, killing one of the color corporals and wounded several others. With artillery now enfilading their line the Federal infantry under Hofmann ground to a halt, taking cover behind one of the many stone walls. A squadron of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indiana Cavalry was deployed to take Pelham's gun, or at least shoo it away. This allowed Stuart to once again redeploy his forces, falling back over Beaverdam Creek to the heights beyond. The fight through Unison was over, but the day was not.<sup>156</sup>

Both Union and Confederate reports mentioned the spectacular artillery fire

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<sup>155</sup> David P. Bridges, *Fighting With JEB Stuart: Major James Breathed and the Confederate Horse Artillery*, (Arlington, VA: Breathed Bridges Best, Inc., 2006), 106.

<sup>156</sup> Robert J. Trout, *Galloping Thunder: The Stuart Horse Artillery Battalion*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002), 127; *Civil War in Loudoun Valley*, 21-23.

outside Unison. Stuart crowed in his after-action report, “Major Pelham, directing one of the shots himself at the color-bearer of an infantry regiment, struck him down at a distance of 800 yards” while in the same report he also mentions one of his caissons being destroyed.<sup>157</sup>

Thomas Wallace Colley, a member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Virginia Cavalry, was passing by Pelham's position when the caisson was struck. He too made note of it in his post war recollections:

Just as I was coming up near our battery, Pelham commenced pouring the Grape and Canister into their ranks and that put a check to their hilarity and advance. At this instance, one of our caissons was blown up, killed some 3 or 4 horses and men. "The shock was awful, me and my horse were thrown off our feet but were up again in an instant."<sup>158</sup>

Even the commander of the Army of the Potomac made note of the extensive artillery fire on November 2. He initially had difficulty determining if it was Pleasonton's advance or something else. Writing to Lincoln late in the day, McClellan was on his way to Snicker's Gap, as messages indicated a potential threat. When he arrived the artillery of Brig. Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock had already driven back a Confederate column that had probed the gap's defenses.<sup>159</sup>

By the time the message to the President had been sent, McClellan was likely hearing the firing from beyond Beaverdam Creek. When Stuart's forces fell back across the creek, Pelham had sent all but two of his guns to the rear as the Stuart Horse Artillery was badly beat up and needed to rest and rearm. As Federal cavalymen worked their way down to Beaverdam Creek, skirmishing with their Confederate counterparts, Pelham's guns fired upon their former position near the Quaker Meeting House, dispersing the Federal troops lingering there. As the Federal numbers began to creep around the Confederate flanks covering the Beaverdam crossing, Pelham and the rest of the Confederates once more began to pull back.

According to the history of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indiana Cavalry, General Stuart “was contesting every step of the advance of the federal cavalry under Pleasonton.”<sup>160</sup> What he hoped would be his final defensive line was approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile from Beaverdam Creek at Seaton's Hill, located near the intersection of Welbourne Road and Quaker Lane. As Federal forces crossed Beaverdam Creek after a brief respite, the infantry once more deployed into line, this time

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<sup>157</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 142.

<sup>158</sup> Michael K. Shaffer, editor, *In Memory of Self and Comrades: Thomas Wallace Colley's Recollections Of Civil War Service In The 1<sup>st</sup> Virginia Cavalry*, (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2018), 44.

<sup>159</sup> Ethan Rafuse, *McClellan's War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for the Union*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 370; *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 88; *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 517.

<sup>160</sup> W.N. Pickerrill, *History of the Third Indiana Cavalry*, (Indianapolis, IN: Aetna Printing Co., 1906), 35.

east of Quaker Lane, moving south. Pelham's guns, now rearmed, opened upon the 56<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, a shell exploding in their midst killing two and mortally wounding two others. Lieutenant Colonel Hofmann noted with pride in his report, "I would be doing injustice to this regiment to omit mentioning the prompt manner in which the gap, formed by the loss of the 4 men, was closed..."<sup>161</sup>

The 95<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry was thrown out further to the left of the 56<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania in an attempt to flank the Confederate position on Seaton's Hill. Further south, closer to the Welbourne Road, the 6<sup>th</sup> United States Cavalry, back from its scout to Pot House, skirmished with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Virginia Cavalry. As the sun began to set Stuart ordered a general withdrawal leaving behind two dozen sharpshooters on Seaton's Hill to keep the Federals heads down.



*Battle of Unison: Seaton's Hill (National Park Service)*

At the end of the day the Federal cavalry had fallen far short of their hoped-for objective, the Manassas Gap Railroad. However, Snicker's Gap was now firmly in Federal hands and McClellan hoped to take Ashby's Gap the next day. This was the same gap which Stuart had been falling back towards all day. Stuart soon discovered that he would continue to defend Ashby's Gap, but he would do so alone. Daniel Harvey Hill's infantry division had been ordered to Manassas Gap and was already on the move by the time Stuart was notified of his new predicament. The cavalier was not left entirely empty handed however, his forces were now behind Pantherskin Creek and Hill had promised him another battery, Robert Hardaway's Alabama Artillery.<sup>162</sup>

The Confederates were not the only ones moving on the night of November 2. Brigadier General William W. Averell, with his three cavalry regiments and

<sup>161</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 132.

<sup>162</sup> *Civil War in Loudoun Valley*, 28.

a battery of artillery, had been ordered to join Pleasonton on November 1 and reached Unison around 5 p.m. on the 2. Averell pushed on after a short time and crossed over Beaverdam Creek. With Averell's arrival Pleasonton now had around 4,000 men, and 18 cannon.<sup>163</sup>

After two days of excellent marching weather, November 3 dawned cold, wet and blustery. There was good news however, the Army of the Potomac was now entirely over its namesake river. McClellan recorded in his report of the campaign that:

On the 3d the First Corps moved to Philomont, Union, Bloomfield, the Second Corps to the vicinity of Upperville; the Fifth Corps remained at Snicker's Gap; the Sixth Corps moved to Purcellville; the Ninth Corps moved toward Upperville.<sup>164</sup>

Back near Upperville, Pleasonton, now reinforced with Averell's brigade was preparing to drive Stuart from his position behind Pantherskin Creek. The approach was daunting. Three roads crossed Pantherskin Creek. Trappe Road came out just west of Upperville, Greengarden Road just east of the village and what is today Willisville Road, the main road from Unison which passed over the Clifton Mill dam a half mile further east of Greengarden Road. Once over the creek the landscape rose towards Upperville. Stuart concentrated his defense in an arc running from the Clifton Mill dam on the Willisville Road back up the rising ground to the Fletcher house. The 9<sup>th</sup> Virginia and 4<sup>th</sup> Virginia cavalry regiments covered the other approaches to Upperville. Heros Von Borcke described the Federal approach around 10 a.m. with his usual dramatic prose:

The tremendous host of Yankees advancing upon us across the fields, which I could compare only to a mighty avalanche, seemed likely to crush everything before them.<sup>165</sup>

With Pennington's and Lt. Frederick Edgell's batteries going into action on the high ground north of Pantherskin Creek, a lively artillery duel erupted between them and the five guns that remained in the Stuart Horse Artillery. Skirmishing soon broke out along the line of the creek as Averell's skirmishes worked their way down Greengarden Road and began driving back Stuart's cavaliers located around Kinchloe's Mill. This allowed a third Federal battery, the "Wild Cat Battery", Battery A, 2<sup>nd</sup> United States Artillery, under Capt. John C. Tidball to go into action, dueling with two guns of Hardaway's Battery that had come up to assist Stuart.<sup>166</sup>

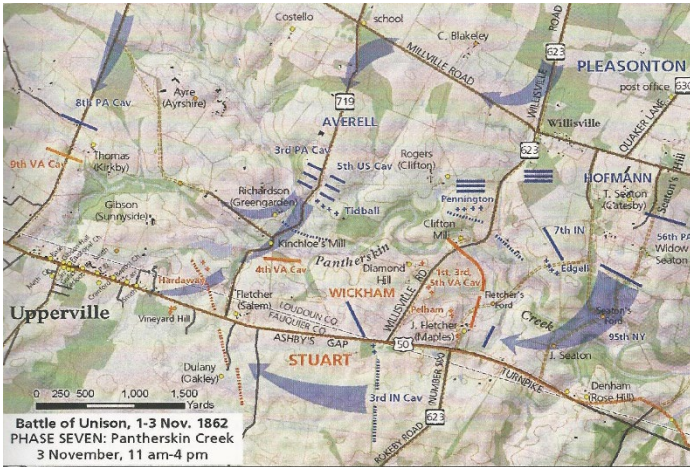
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<sup>163</sup> *OR* vol. 51, pt. 1, 911-912; *Civil War in Loudoun Valley*, 30.

<sup>164</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 88.

<sup>165</sup> *Memoirs Of The Confederate War For Independence*, 28.

<sup>166</sup> *Civil War in Loudoun Valley*, 32-33.



*Battle of Unison: Pantherskin Creek (National Park Service)*

On the Federal right the drive down Trappe Road had been stymied by accurate long range rifle fire, but on the left the Federals were making headway. The 95<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry succeeded in working around

the Confederate right flank unopposed. There they waded Pantherskin Creek and started up the rising ground toward the Fletcher House. Lieutenant Colonel Hofmann, commanding the infantry brigade the 95<sup>th</sup> New York was a part of described the taking of the house in his after-action report:

The battery soon opened on the enemy, who was posted in the rear of a large house and barn, on our left and front. The Ninety-fifth Regiment was ordered to take possession of the house, which order they executed in gallant style the instant that the fire of our battery ceased. They held possession of the house during the day.<sup>167</sup>

Leading the charge on the Fletcher house was Lt. Col. James B. Post, he described how “his little force” waited for the artillery fire and then:

We immediately charged at double quick down to the house and the battery sent another shell which struck in the front door & went in & exploded causing a general smash up in the room in which it went. We entered the grounds and took possession.<sup>168</sup>

Stuart's line had been taken in the flank. The 95<sup>th</sup> New York was quickly supported by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indiana Cavalry and they began to roll up the line. Stuart's line bent back in an attempt to contain the situation, now running along the Greengarden Road facing east. The fight however was going against them and Stuart began to pull his forces out, falling back through Upperville to Paris southeast of Ashby's Gap. By 4 p.m. the Confederate situation at Kinchloe's Mill had also deteriorated and Stuart was nearly caught up in the hasty retreat that bordered on a rout. Weary cavalymen and guns trudged westward. The

<sup>167</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 132.

<sup>168</sup> James B. Post Letters, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, 20.

Federals pursued but finally broke off the action that evening after the bolts of Hardaway's Whitworth Rifle smashed into the advancing Federals. Stuart held Paris until after dark and then fell back through Ashby's Gap. The Federal cavalry also maneuvered that night. After several hours rest Averell's brigade was sent south six miles toward Piedmont Station while Pleasonton's troopers took their place on the Ashby's Gap Turnpike.<sup>169</sup>

### **A Lost Race—A Campaign in Jeopardy:**

Besides the stubborn Confederate defense of Upperville and Ashby's Gap on November 3, there were also significant movements by other elements of Lee's army. Jackson's corps was now heading for Front Royal south of Manassas Gap, the dogged defense of Ashby's Gap by Stuart having allowed him to get beyond the immediate reach of McClellan's forces. Also on November 3, James Longstreet's corps reached Culpeper. Over the next two days his entire command arrived and dug in along the Orange & Alexandria Railroad.<sup>170</sup> The Confederates had succeeded in getting back in front of the Army of the Potomac, blocking the direct route to Richmond. Now however the two wings of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia were not only separated but had the Army of the Potomac between them. This played to the Federal advantage and was exactly what McClellan had proposed at the opening of the campaign.

Unfortunately, that was not how it was seen in Washington. President Lincoln had decided to use the Loudoun Valley Campaign as a test. As described in Carl Sandburg's multi-volume biography of Lincoln:

If that commander should permit Lee to cross the Blue Ridge and place himself between Richmond and the Army of the Potomac, Lincoln would remove him from command. Now when Lee's army reached Culpeper Court House the test of McClellan was over. Lincoln prepared a removal order.<sup>171</sup>

This decision would not be known to McClellan for several days. As such the campaign continued at pace. "On the 4th the Second Corps took possession of Ashby's Gap; the Sixth Corps reached Union (Unison); the Ninth Corps, Upperville; the cavalry occupied Piedmont."<sup>172</sup>

McClellan was still attempting to keep Lincoln up-to-date at this time as well. On the morning of the fourth he sent a brief missive, "Cavalry advance at Piedmont. Infantry in Upperville and in front of Ashby's Pass, where resistance is probable to-day. I go to the front to see."<sup>173</sup>

Though rolling forward, the advance on November 4 saw some of the

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<sup>169</sup> *Blue & Gray*, 47; *Civil War in Loudoun Valley*, 35 & 37.

<sup>170</sup> *McClellan's War*, 373.

<sup>171</sup> Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years, Volume I*, (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1939), 601.

<sup>172</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 88.

<sup>173</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 542.



resistance predicted by McClellan. The previous night Col. Thomas Rosser, who had taken over command of Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry brigade following Col. Williams Wickham's wounding at Upperville, had moved to take Piedmont on the Manassas Gap Railroad. This had not happened. By dawn William Averell's Federal cavalry were in Piedmont and succeeded in surprising Rosser on the road from Paris. Rosser extricated his command, falling back to Markham, but he was determined to delay Averell's pursuit. Placing the battery of Captain Mathias W. Henry of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Stuart Horse Artillery on a hill facing towards Piedmont, Rosser deployed his troopers in support. By noon the skirmishers of the contending forces were engaged. Soon thereafter the 5<sup>th</sup> United States Cavalry charged down upon the Confederate cannons but were delayed once again by the stonewalls of the region, allowing Rosser to pull his guns further back. Untangling themselves from the stonewall, the Union cavalry attacked again and briefly took the guns of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Stuart Horse Artillery. A stubborn defense by the artillery however, as well as a counterattack by Rosser's troopers rescued the pieces, throwing back Averell's horse soldiers. Averell needed aid and sent word back to Pleasonton at Piedmont for support. At 4:45 p.m. Pleasonton reported to McClellan that:

I have sent Colonel Gregg and the Sixth Cavalry to reinforce Averell, at Markham. On looking at the road from here to Markham, I find it would not do to move my whole command to that point, the country being very hilly, and no places to turn round in case of repeat. I have, therefore, directed Averell not to attempt to push farther and, if too hard pressed, to fall back upon me.<sup>174</sup>

With Federal reinforcements arriving, but apparently not inclined to press the issue, Rosser's troopers fell back to Barbee's Crossroads and later Orlean. Heros Von Borcke described, "the dark masses of the enemy with glittering arms and fluttering pennons, and beyond them the rapidly-disappearing lines of our horsemen."<sup>175</sup>

As the Federal cavalry was wrapping up operations near Manassas Gap on November 4, the results of the mid-term elections were also trickling into Washington, DC. Lincoln's Republican Party had maintained control of the House and Senate, but as anticipated, had lost seats. More troubling however was the loss of two state governorships to the Democrats, New York and New Jersey. With the midterms now out of the way, and thus the need to appease the Democratic Party with the War Democrat McClellan, the President drafted his removal order the next day.<sup>176</sup>

For the Army of the Potomac, November 5 was an auspicious day as not only did the various Corps advance, but the next stage of the campaign was in site. With the gaps secured and the railroad in hand, the shifting of the base of supply

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 115-116.

<sup>175</sup> *Memoirs Of The Confederate War For Independence*, 39.

<sup>176</sup> *McClellan's War*, 372.

from the Berlin depots in Maryland to the Manassas Gap Railroad and the Orange & Alexandria Railroad began.<sup>177</sup>

McClellan stated in his campaign report:

First Corps moved to Rectortown and White Plains; one division of the Second Corps to the intersection of the Paris and Piedmont with the Upperville and Barbee's road; the Sixth Corps to the Aldie pike, east of Upperville; the Ninth Corps beyond the Manassas Railroad, between Piedmont and Salem, with a brigade at Manassas Gap. The cavalry under Averell had a skirmish at Manassas Gap, and the brigade of Pleasonton gained a handsome victory over superior numbers at Barbee's Cross-Roads. Bayard's cavalry had some sharp skirmishing in front of Salem.<sup>178</sup>

The cavalry actions alluded to by General McClellan were the last efforts to secure both Manassas Gap and Chester Gap. These gaps were near each other and Chester Gap had been utilized by Longstreet's Corps during its move to Culpeper.<sup>179</sup> Barbee's Crossroads in particular was important as it was part of Pleasonton's efforts to reach Chester Gap. Scouts had been sent that direction the night previous and, on the 5<sup>th</sup>, Pleasonton led his brigade out of Piedmont and turned south at Markham. Averell's command, according to Pleasonton's dispatches, was believed to be in a bad way from the previous day's fighting and was also calling for more ammunition. As such he was ordered to hold Manassas Gap and skirmished there for part of the day.<sup>180</sup>

General J.E.B Stuart had begun to fortify the small hamlet of Barbee's Crossroads around midnight on November 5. His force had been augmented by the troopers of Brig. Gen. Wade Hampton's cavalry brigade and now Hampton's, as well as Rosser's men waited at Barbee's Crossroads, modern day Hume, with a barricade across the north-south road. Barbee's Crossroads is located about five miles south of Markham, as Pleasonton's men approached to within a mile of the crossroads that morning a pair of Pelham's guns announced the Confederate presence. With this Pleasonton deployed his troopers, the 8<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania and 6<sup>th</sup> United States on the left, the 8<sup>th</sup> New York on the right and the 8<sup>th</sup> Illinois in the center, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indiana being held in reserve. The advance of the 8<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania and 6<sup>th</sup> United States took advantage of a woodlot and broken ground and succeeded in outflanking the section of Pelham's guns. As the Confederate guns pulled back behind the barricade, they unleashed waves of canister that checked the Federal advance down the main road.<sup>181</sup>

As the morning skirmishing and artillery duel was developing, the 8<sup>th</sup> New

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<sup>177</sup> *OR* vol. 51, pt. 1, 923, 927.

<sup>178</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 88.

<sup>179</sup> *Blue & Gray*, 11.

<sup>180</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 116-117.

<sup>181</sup> *Galloping Thunder*, 130.

York had succeeded in getting behind some rising ground and deploying skirmishers, the majority of the regiment remained in cover and the men in the ranks could tell by looking at their commander, Col. Benjamin “Grimes” Davis, that they were going to have a fight on their hands:

The General [Colonel] was quite a smoker. He had an old clay, pipe and when he got engaged he would keep his pipe in his mouth for an hour after it was smoked out. The boys knew that there was going to be business that day, for he had his pipe in his mouth bottom side up.<sup>182</sup>

As the skirmishing continued into the afternoon, Stuart got word that Federal troops had gained Warrenton, southeast of his position. Fearing that Pleasonton's advance was a mere feint, he signaled a retreat from the field ordering Hampton to Flint Hill and Rosser to Orlean. As the Confederate guns pulled out the 8<sup>th</sup> Illinois and 3<sup>rd</sup> Pennsylvania went forward once more scattering the 9<sup>th</sup> Virginia. Federal troops were now closing on the crossroads from several directions. Hampton, in hopes of stemming the Federal pursuit ordered up his reserve regiment, Lt. Col. James B. Gordon's 1<sup>st</sup> North Carolina. As the North Carolinians moved north shortly after noon, Gordon noticed a concentration of blue coated cavalry off to his left. He later wrote that, “I discovered that I could be flanked and cut off in moving farther up. I therefore moved in the direction of the enemy...” Moving his troopers into a depression to shield them from the fire of the dismounted New Yorkers, Gordon called for instructions. Hampton was soon on the scene and Gordon requested permission to charge but warned him that the stonewall could be shielding sharpshooters. Hampton was incredulous, stating that he had scouted that portion of the field himself and had seen no wall. Gordon was ordered to charge by squadrons and he was to be supported by the 2<sup>nd</sup> South Carolina in this endeavor.<sup>183</sup>

As suspected the charge was a disaster. Gordon's men were almost immediately thrown into disarray by a weed chocked gully, before having to maneuver through a stonewall in their front. As they did so dismounted troopers from the 8<sup>th</sup> New York rose up from behind the stonewall to Gordon's right, as he had feared, pouring on “a withering fire from 150 dismounted men and one piece of artillery.”<sup>184</sup>

Thoroughly disrupted and unable to get at their opponents, Gordon began to pull back. As he did his regiment was struck by a counter charge led by “Grimes” Davis himself:

From an eminence on which I was standing I galloped back to the Reserve Squadrons, brought them up over the hill and charged the enemy somewhat obliquely just as the main body had arrived nearly opposite to our position. Although less than half their

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<sup>182</sup> *Deeds of Daring*, 44-45.

<sup>183</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 145-146; *Blue & Gray*, 53.

<sup>184</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 146.

numbers the charge was made with such vigor and intrepidity that he hesitated, pulled up, opened fire with pistol and carbines and finally as the leading files were closing upon him, turned about and fled in the utmost confusion. The men followed with the greatest eagerness close up to the reserves, sabering and taking prisoners at every step.<sup>185</sup>

The mounted cavalry clash at Barbee's Crossroads turned out to be the climax of the battle that day. Shortly thereafter the Confederates were gone, falling back towards Warrenton. Alfred Pleasonton gave full credit to his troopers, writing in a dispatch, "My command marched 12 miles to-day, and was fighting for six hours; pretty good day's work. I cannot say too much of my men and officers."<sup>186</sup>

Sporadic skirmishing continued throughout November 6 and 7 as the Army of the Potomac shifted towards Warrenton. The spur of the Manassas Gap Railroad was ideal for supplying the army. Unable to contend with the entire army, the Confederate cavalry, which had done such a masterful job in delaying the Federal advance, could do no more. On November 7, the army ground to a halt as the first major snowstorm of the season set in.<sup>187</sup>

### **A Change of Command—The Campaign Ends:**

President Lincoln's order removing McClellan from command had been making its way through the bureaucracy for several days. A copy of the order was to be hand delivered to McClellan, whose headquarters were then at Rectortown. Lincoln's removal order was in the hands of Brig. Gen. Catharinus P. Buckingham, who had taken the train to Salem and then ridden through the snowy night of November 7 to the camp of Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside, then in the vicinity of Waterloo. As expected from the man who had already turned down command of the army twice, Burnside protested in the strongest terms. Buckingham however replied that there was no saving McClellan and that if Burnside did not take up the mantle, Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker was next in line. Detesting Hooker, Burnside reluctantly accepted.<sup>188</sup>

The two generals rode back out into the night to Salem, where Buckingham's train then took them another five miles to Rectortown. They arrived at McClellan's quiet headquarters at about 11 p.m. Snow was still coming down, and would continue for several days, but a light glowed within McClellan's headquarters tent. When they entered the tent McClellan later claimed he

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<sup>185</sup> "Col. Benjamin 'Grimes' Davis at Barbee's Cross Roads", Small But Important Riots, last updated September 5, 2019, <https://smallbutimportantriots.com/2016/10/04/col-benjamin-grimes-davis-at-barbees-cross-roads/>

<sup>186</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 117.

<sup>187</sup> "Army Operations in Virginia", *The New York Times*, November 8, 1862, Page 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/20610608>

<sup>188</sup> William Marvel, *Burnside*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 159-160.

suspected the nature of their visit, but politely entertained with small talk until Buckingham finally suggested to Burnside that they get to the matter at hand. Receiving the messages, McClellan made pains not to react in front of either man, simply stating, "Well, Burnside, I turn the command over to you."<sup>189</sup>

The general's personal correspondence reveals a man deeply troubled by the order however, but resigned and still willing to do his duty. In a letter to Ellen, McClellan described how distraught Burnside appeared and how sorry he felt for him. He then poured his heart out writing:

They have made a great mistake—alas for my poor country—I know in my innermost heart she never had a truer servant. I have informally turned over command to Burnside—but will go tomorrow to Warrenton with him, & perhaps remain a day or two there in order to give him all the information in my power...

Do not be at all worried—I am not. I have done the best I could for my country—to the last I have done my duty as I understand it.<sup>190</sup>

That duty continued the next day when McClellan moved his camp to Warrenton. From there McClellan dispatched a final farewell to the Army of the Potomac on November 8:

Officers and Soldiers of the Army of the Potomac:

An order of the President devolves upon Major-General Burnside the command of this army.

In parting from you, I cannot express the love and gratitude I bear to you. As an army, you have grown up under my care. In you I have never found doubt or coldness. The battles you have fought under my command will proudly live in our nation's history. The glory you have achieved, our mutual perils and fatigues, the graves of our comrades fallen in battle and by disease, the broken forms of those whom wounds and sickness have disabled—the strongest associations which can exist among men—unite us still by an indissoluble tie. We shall ever be comrades in supporting the Constitution of our country and the nationality of its people.

Geo. B. McClellan,  
Major-General, U. S. Army.<sup>191</sup>

The effect of General McClellan's removal was immediate within the army, Major Rufus Dawes of the 6<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry summed up the situation in

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<sup>189</sup> *McClellan's Own Story*, 651-652.

<sup>190</sup> *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 520.

<sup>191</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 551.

the famed “Black Hat” Brigade. “There was considerable expression of feeling. No acts of insubordination occurred. There was talk of resignations by officers, but not in our brigade.”<sup>192</sup>

That “expression of feeling” was on display at the corps level as well. Colonel Charles Wainwright, the Chief of Artillery for the First Corps, made note in his diary that, “The greatest indignation is expressed by everyone here, even those who have blamed McClellan. Most say the change is a bad one, and the time chosen worse.”<sup>193</sup>

The press coverage for the change of command was also extensive. In the *New York Times* alone McClellan's removal and send off was headline news for three days starting on November 9.<sup>194</sup>

The sendoff occurred on November 10 with a review of the First, Second, and Fifth corps, those in the immediate vicinity of Warrenton. Captain Francis Adams Donaldson of the 118<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry wrote extensively on the removal of McClellan, in one of the letters to his brother on November 10 stating:

Genl. McClellan took leave of us today. The army is in tears—my heart is to full of bitterness to say more at present. Am still in good health, tho' much depressed—defeat is before us - how can I help feeling badly...<sup>195</sup>

Pageantry and melancholy aside, the war continued. McClellan had already issued orders for the movements of November 8 and 9, closing the army up around Warrenton and the Manassas Gap Railroad. On November 10, the day of McClellan's departure, one more clash would occur between Pleasonton and Stuart to finish out the campaign. Near Amissville at Corbin's Crossroads Stuart, backed up by the 16<sup>th</sup> Mississippi Infantry, attacked Pleasonton. The Federal cavalry commander fell back to Amissville and called up infantry support. Captain James Wren of the 48<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry was among those sent in support of Pleasonton and described his brief action in his diary, “formed Line of Battle after which advanced a skirmish Line with the 48<sup>th</sup> regiment to the support of Gen. Pleasonton's Cavalry. After a Considerable engagement with

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<sup>192</sup>Rufus R. Dawes, *A Full Blown Yankee of the Iron Brigade: Service With The Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), 105.

<sup>193</sup>*A Diary of Battle*, 124.

<sup>194</sup>“HIGHLY IMPORTANT: Gen. McClellan Relieved of His Command”, *The New York Times*, November 9, 1862, Page 1, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/20610668>; “IMPORTANT NEWS: Gen. McClellan Relieved of the Command of the Army of the Potomac”, *The New York Times*, November 10, 1862, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/20610895>; “NEWS OF THE DAY: THE REBELLION”, *The New York Times*, November 11, 1862, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/20611141>.

<sup>195</sup>J. Gregory Acken, editor, *Inside the Army of the Potomac: The Civil War Experience of Captain Francis Adams Donaldson* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1998), 159. Captain Donaldson gives an incredibly in-depth account of his feelings, and those of the men around him, the next day, November 11, in another, much longer letter to his brother Jacob.

Artillery & Cavalry, the enemy fell back..."<sup>196</sup> General Pleasonton received orders to suspend his advance that evening, the campaign was over.<sup>197</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

The Loudoun Valley Campaign offered the Army of the Potomac one of its single greatest opportunities to separate Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and destroy it in detail. This plan was developed and implemented by George B. McClellan at the urging and suggestion of President Lincoln. Under his leadership the army had begun to rebuild and resupply itself after an exhaustive campaign in Maryland. It stepped off into a new campaign late in the season and pressed southward aggressively, initially stealing a march on Lee. Confederate forces had to react and did so by separating their army. Though successful in getting a portion of the Army of Northern Virginia back in front of the Federal advance, the two halves were dangerously apart. By all appearances, with the Union army closing in around Warrenton and the vital railroad line there, Lee was actually preparing to pull out of the Shenandoah Valley entirely in a desperate bid to close up his command by way of Swift Run Gap, the only gap still viable to Jackson.<sup>198</sup>

McClellan was proud of his army and near the end of his final report and in his memoirs, he laid out its condition and his intentions:

The army was thus massed near Warrenton, ready to act in any required direction, perfectly in hand, and in admirable condition and spirits. I doubt whether, during the whole period that I had the honor to command the Army of the Potomac, it was in such excellent condition to fight a great battle. When I gave up the command to Gen. Burnside the best information in our possession indicated that Longstreet was immediately in our front near Culpeper; Jackson, with one, perhaps both, of the Hills, near Chester and Thornton's Gaps, with the mass of their force west of the Blue Ridge...

Had I remained in command I should have made the attempt to divide the enemy, as before suggested; and could he have been brought to a battle within reach of my supplies, I cannot doubt that the result would have been a brilliant victory for our army.<sup>199</sup>

Major General George Brinton McClellan had rebuilt the Army of the Potomac and given new confidence to its branches. This included the cavalry, which had fought toe to toe with the vaunted horsemen of Major General J.E.B.

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<sup>196</sup> John Michael Priest, editor, *Captain James Wren's Diary: From New Bern To Fredericksburg* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing, 1990), 87.

<sup>197</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 2, 127.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 704.

<sup>199</sup> *McClellan's Own Story*, 648-650; *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 89.

Stuart, giving as good as they got. The campaign though was ended prematurely, and soon the Army of the Potomac would be heading in a new direction, under a new commander, towards a new, as yet unheard-of disaster.

The movements of the contending armies in the Loudoun Valley had not only changed themselves, but the very landscape. Charles Wainwright had described the Loudoun Valley at the opening of the campaign as some of the finest farm land he had ever seen. Another participant in this grand drama described Loudoun at the end of the campaign:

The country, where rested the remains of so many brave men of both armies, and which had been marched and countermarched over so often by both armies, in the dreary, late autumn days of 1862, had much the appearance of a barren waste, and vast sections of it had ceased to be the habitation of man or beast. Here and there stood a lone chimney surrounded by the charred embers of some destroyed home and an occasional straggling apple tree was all that was left to mark the civilization which in earlier and happier years marked the proud old Virginia as the mother of Presidents.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> *History of the Third Indiana Cavalry*, 36.



# Antietam Artifacts: Private Charles L. Perry's Identification Tag

by Joseph Stahl

One of the more famous landmarks in the Civil War is the Burnside Bridge on the Antietam battlefield. It became famous on September 17, 1862 when Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside crossed Antietam Creek at the bridge that would later bear his name with his Ninth Corps and attack the Confederate right flank. One of the soldiers at the bridge that day was Pvt. Charles L. Perry of Company D, 9<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire Infantry. How did Charles arrive at the bridge on that bloody day?

Private Perry mustered into the regiment on August 9, 1862 in response to President Lincoln's call for 300,000 additional troops in the summer of 1862. Charles joined Company D at Concord, New Hampshire. He enlisted for three years and received a bounty of \$25. In his service records there is no description of him at the time of his enlistment. Charles is shown "present" from August 23, 1862 to February 1863.<sup>201</sup> How did he get to Antietam? The 9<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire was mustered into the service of the United States between July 3 and August 23, 1862. It was 990 men strong.<sup>202</sup> The regiment arrived in Washington, DC on August 27, 1862, and went into the defenses of the city. After the Battle of Second Bull Run when the Union army was reorganized, the 9<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire was assigned to the Brig. Gen. James Nagle's First Brigade in Brig. Gen. Samuel Sturgis' Second Division of the Ninth Corps on September 6, 1862.<sup>203</sup> As such, the regiment joined a veteran brigade. The other regiments were the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maryland Infantry, 6<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire Infantry, and the 48<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry. It was going to see action quickly, for the Confederates were on the move. The Union army followed the Confederates into Maryland. In less than a month the 9<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire, including Charles, would have its first taste of combat by engaging the Rebels on September 14 at South Mountain. The regimental history reports that the regiment lost 26 men, two of whom died later, in this, its first engagement.

On September 17, the Ninth Corps was on the Union left flank. They were ordered to cross Antietam Creek at what was known as the Rohrbach Bridge at that time. Its name would be changed forever by the next day. Shortly thereafter, Brig. Gen. Nagle's brigade made an attempt to cross the bridge. Two veteran regiments were ordered to attack: the 2<sup>nd</sup> Maryland and the 6<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire.

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<sup>201</sup> Charles L. Perry, Military Service Records, Company D, 9th New Hampshire Volunteer Infantry, National Archives.

<sup>202</sup> *The Union Army*, 10 Vols. Wilmington NC: Broadfoot, 1997. First Published 1908 by Federal Publishing Company, Vol I, 85-86.

<sup>203</sup> Lord, Edward O., editor, *History of the Ninth Regiment New Hampshire Volunteers in the War of the Rebellion*, (Concord, N. H.: Republican Press Association, 1895 reprinted by Higginson Book Company Salem Massachusetts).

Perry's regiment supported the attack, which was not successful. However, the 9<sup>th</sup> did cross the bridge after the successful attack by Brig. Gen. Edward Ferrero's brigade. In the fighting on September 17, the regiment lost 10 men killed, 49 wounded, and none missing.<sup>204</sup> Private Perry was not one of them so he survived his first two combat actions.

Probably in the fall of 1862, Charles bought a brass identification tag. It is typical of those sold to the soldiers by the sutlers. This style is based on the United States \$10 gold coin of the period. Scoville Brass Company of New York made tokens with the same design as early as 1858. On it is stamped "C.D. PERRY CO.D. 9<sup>th</sup> REGT. N.H.V. CONWAY." This is shown in the first photograph. The reverse is shown in the second photograph. He might have bought it before the Battle of Antietam while the regiment was stationed in Washington, DC. This style of identification tag was being sold as early as February 1862 to other units so it is possible Charles bought it as soon as he mustered into the regiment.

After the Battle of Antietam, the regiment returned to Virginia and was engaged at the Battle of Fredericksburg. After that battle, the regiment stayed around Fredericksburg until February 1863 when it was sent west with the rest of the Ninth Corps. While the corps moved west, Perry decided he had had enough of the war. The bimonthly report for March and April 1863 in Perry's service record states that he is listed as "deserted on the march from Boonsboro, Ky April 17, 1863 since arrested and confined Richmond Ky." For May-June, Perry was "held by provost guard awaiting sentence of court martial." Apparently, he was returned to the regiment as he is shown as "present" but "under arrest" until November-December 1863 when he is reported as "sick in post hospital." The first hospital he was in was at Paris, Kentucky. From March until July-August 1864, he was at Annapolis, Maryland, before he returned to his regiment. The Ninth Corps had returned to Virginia and was now engaged in the fighting as the Army of the Potomac moved south toward Richmond. On September 30, 1864, the 9<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire was involved in the fighting at Poplar Spring Church. Brigadier General Simon Griffin, the commander of the brigade the 9<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire was assigned to at that time, wrote in his report, "I formed my command in two lines of battle, the Ninth New Hampshire on the right of the Eleventh Hew Hampshire.... I advanced steadily, driving the enemy's skirmishers before me.... Orders came to advance. I obeyed the order, but on arriving at the Jones House we met the enemy also advancing, with a line of battle stronger than our own, and overlapping us on both flanks." Later in the report he said, "attacked on three sides by superior numbers they were (the brigade) compelled to abandon the place, (Jones House) losing heavily and having some of their men captured."<sup>205</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> reported losses of 3 killed, 22

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<sup>204</sup> *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 197.

<sup>205</sup> *OR*, vol. 42, pt. 1, 587-588.

wounded, and 95 missing.<sup>206</sup>

Perry was among the missing. His service record continues to list him as missing as a prisoner of war until the unit was mustered out on June 10, 1865, where it was noted on the company muster-out roll that the government owed him \$75 of his bounty. The roll also shows that Pvt. Perry was last paid on August 31, 1864, so he had at least a month's pay due him and he had drawn \$55.20 against his clothing allowance.

The last item in Perry's service records is the Memorandum from Prisoner of War Records. It lists Perry as missing. However, there is a very interesting note on it that says "joined the Rebel army while a Pris. Of war, at Salisbury N.C. date not given." So far, no soldier has been identified in the Confederate States Army by the name of Charles Perry in a unit in Salisbury, North Carolina. So, Charles' story ends as a mystery.

Is the note true? Charles never filed for a pension and the regimental history contains nothing besides his being reported missing. It appears that Charles did not return to New Hampshire. Did he go west, or die in a prisoner of war camp? Did he join the Rebels and get killed in combat or die of disease? We will probably never know but Charles left us with his identification tag to remind us of him and for us to wonder if he still had it at the end of the war, or did some Confederate take it when he was captured?



*Courtesy of Joseph Stahl*

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<sup>206</sup> *OR*, vol. 42, pt. 1, 142.

# In Antietam's Footsteps: From Fox's Gap to Antietam National Cemetery, the 45th Pennsylvania Infantry

by J.O. Smith

The Civil War was a million tragedies. More than a million. The dead alone probably numbered at least 700,000.<sup>207</sup> Each one of those abbreviated lives altered the lives of countless others—spouses, children, parents, siblings, friends. While we know little of most individual stories, the Civil War traveler can still pay respects to individual soldiers on hallowed ground, sometimes in more than one place. The experience of the 45<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment at Fox's Gap on September 14, 1862, offers such an opportunity at two separate locations. The first stop is the small clearing around the 1889 monument to Maj. Gen. Jesse L. Reno at Fox's Gap, a clearing that was part of a larger killing field on the day of the battle. Second is a row of graves at Antietam National Cemetery beneath which rest the men of the regiment who were killed in action on September 14.

The 45<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania was organized in October 1861; most of its men hailed from the central and north-central part of the Keystone State. The regiment's first colonel was Thomas Welsh and its early postings included Baltimore, Fort Monroe, Virginia, and the South Carolina coast. After leaving Aquia Creek, Virginia, on September 6, 1862, the regiment arrived in Frederick along with the rest of the Second Brigade, First Division, Ninth Corps on September 13. The brigade, now under the command of Welsh, marched west on the National Road toward Turner's Gap during the morning of September 14 and then diverted southwesterly in the direction of Fox's Gap, a notch in the South Mountain ridgeline through which passes the Old Sharpsburg Road (modern Reno Monument Road).<sup>208</sup>

Under the command of Lt. Col. John I. Curtin, the 45<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania deployed in mid-afternoon several hundred yards from Fox's Gap. About 4:00 p.m., the regiment went forward along and to the south of the Old Sharpsburg Road, passing through a cornfield and woods to reach a rail fence at the edge of a clearing. To the front of the regiment, veteran Eugene Beauge remembered, "the enemy's line of battle was discovered between two stone fences something like 80 yards across an open field." Today's small clearing around the Reno Monument is a remnant of that open field, also known as Wise's south pasture. More Confederate troops were in the Old Sharpsburg Road to the right, and

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<sup>207</sup> The traditional figure has long been cited as approximately 620,000. See e.g., James. M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 854. More recent studies, based on census data, suggest the number may have been 750,000 to 850,000. See J. David Hacker, "A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead," *Civil War History* 57 no. 4 (December 2011): 307-348.

<sup>208</sup> Allen D. Albert, ed., *History of the Forty-Fifth Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Regiment, 1861-1865* (Williamsport, PA: Grit Publishing Company, 1912), 17, 23-35, 47.

Confederate artillery from the direction of Turner's Gap also fired into Curtin's men. A bloody firefight ensued. The regiment's smoothbore Harpers Ferry muskets, "with a good sized ball and three buckshot, at short range, [did] fearful execution." The Confederates, for their part, inflicted a heavy toll on the 45<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, which reported 27 killed and 107 wounded out of a total strength of 700, the second highest number of casualties suffered by a Federal regiment that day. Where today's visitor to Fox's Gap hears only the sounds of wildlife and the occasional passing car or hiker, on the late afternoon of September 14, 1862, "reports of cannon, bursting shells and musketry blended together in one continuous, deafening roar." The sights and smells that day also resonated with those who were there, for "clouds of white-blue smoke hung over the field like a thick fog, and the air was stifling with the smell of gunpowder." By evening, the Ninth Corps held Fox's Gap.<sup>209</sup>

The next morning the regiment faced the sad task of burying their dead, whom they "wrapped in their blankets [and] laid . . . tenderly away at the front of the hill they had helped to make immortal!" Lieutenant Samuel Haynes, who missed the fighting in Maryland because of illness, passed through Fox's Gap on September 20. He recalled what he saw:

[I] saw the place to-day where 28 were buried in a row on the battlefield. They are buried as nicely as possible and each grave is marked plainly with a headboard. Poor fellows! Dwight Smith and Jimmie Cole lie together and the first tears that have started from my eyes since my mother died fell on their graves. They were indeed the most intimate and truest friends I had in the army and fell at their posts, fighting like true soldiers and brave men. Henry Fenton, George Brewster and Jacob Squire of Company G; George English of Company I, and Gillett Holiday of Company H, were all the boys I was acquainted with and embraces all of Companies G and I, that were killed, but there were more of Company H whose names I do not recollect.

Haynes' traveling companion, Capt. John Campbell (mortally wounded at the Battle of the Wilderness), recorded that even six days after the battle, "all along the lines the ground was covered with clotted blood." Veteran Lafayette W. Lord recalled that the "dead of our regiment [were] buried in a trench under a large chestnut tree in a field just back of the battle line." The exact location of the battlefield grave is lost to history, but a mature chestnut tree appears in at least two post-war sketches and stood not far from where the Reno Monument is today. A post-war pictorial history noted that the tree "bore the scars of many wounds made during the battle."<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Albert, *History of the Forty-Fifth Regiment*, 53-55; D. Scott Hartwig, *To Antietam Creek: The Maryland Campaign of September 1862* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 349-351, 356; *OR*, vol. 19, pt. 1, 186.

<sup>210</sup> Albert, *History of the Forty-Fifth Regiment*, 54-55, 207, 229, 251; for depictions of a prominent

The regiment's dead at Fox's Gap were later moved to Antietam National Cemetery. They now rest, buried together just as they were on the battlefield. The regimental history tells us that beneath graves 3870 to 3895 in the Pennsylvania section of the cemetery "are the remains of the soldiers of the Forty-fifth Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry who were killed at South Mountain, Sunday, September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1862." Several men of the regiment who died of wounds at a later date are buried elsewhere in the cemetery. Eugene Beauge remembered that Henry Fenton (grave no. 3879), "a giant in strength and fearless as a lion, was shot through the heart" and Jacob Squires (grave no. 3876) "was shot through the head after the battle was practically over and died without a struggle." Twin brothers, James and Martin Glenn, enlisted on August 16, 1861. James (grave no. 3881) was killed at Fox's Gap while Martin fell at the Wilderness on May 6, 1864. The family of Amos Walton (grave no. 3870) suffered a similar loss; Amos' brother Hiram was killed at Cold Harbor on June 3, 1864.<sup>211</sup> These 26 stones—like the others in the cemetery—are multipliers, marking not only each individual life lost on the battlefield, but also countless others at home who bore the grief. The solemn quiet of Antietam National



Cemetery reminds us of the sacrifice the men of the 45<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania made to save their country.

*Fox's Gap and the Reno Monument are located at the intersection of the Appalachian Trail and Reno Monument Road, N 39.47088953668264, W 77.617204623565. Antietam National Cemetery is located on*

*E. Main Street (Route 34) in Sharpsburg, MD 21782, N 39.45937340083984, W 77.74127611794611. The Pennsylvania section is to the right as you enter the cemetery.*

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chestnut tree on the Wise farm, see Daniel H. Hill "The Battle of South Mountain, or Boonsboro," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. II (New York: The Century Co., 1887-1888), 573 and Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial History of the Civil War in the United States of America*, vol. II (Hartford: T. Belknap, 1868), 470.

<sup>211</sup> Albert, *History of the Forty-Fifth Regiment*, 54, 58, 431, 444; "Antietam on the Web: Private James H. Glenn," accessed June 7, 2021, [Antietam: Pvt James H. Glenn \(aotw.org\)](http://Antietam: Pvt James H. Glenn (aotw.org)). Four of the graves listed as unknown in Albert's *History* are members of the 100<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry.

# Institute Interview: Sitting Down with Rev. John Schildt by Laura Marfut

John W. Schildt's passion for preserving the memory of the people and places of Antietam and its surroundings draws parallels to O.T. Reilly, Antietam's first guide who witnessed the battle at age five and dedicated his life to it. Over the past 70 years, Rev. Schildt has written 31 books, given thousands of tours, talks, and lectures, and pioneered public education in Civil War field medicine.

He is a pastor, Antietam Battlefield Guide, and founding member of the National Museum of Civil War Medicine, Save Historic Antietam Foundation, and the Antietam Institute. His books include *Drums Along the Antietam*, *Roads from Gettysburg*, *These Honored Dead*, *September Echoes*, *Islands of Mercy*, *Hunter Holmes McGuire*, and *Stonewall Day by Day*.

*Antietam Journal* editorial board member Laura Marfut (LM) sat down with Rev. Schildt (JS) for our inaugural issue.

## **LM: What sparked your initial interest in the Civil War?**

JS: I was about five years old when my great-grandmother introduced me to the Civil War with her stories of feeding bread and milk to Union soldiers from Hancock's Second Corps on their way to Gettysburg. Then my first-grade teacher gave me a copy of the 75<sup>th</sup> Battle of Antietam Anniversary Program, which I nearly wore out. Then on February 12, she talked about Lincoln and gave each of us a penny.

I took my first trip to Antietam in 1951, when I was a junior in high school. I hiked all day, took notes, snacked at Mrs. Lohman's stand at Bloody Lane. There was no Dunker Church<sup>212</sup> and the Visitor Center was located in two little rooms upstairs in the Lodge House, which still stands at the entrance to the National Cemetery. The Superintendent gave me one of the [Carman-]Cope maps. The battle anniversary was coming up, so on a lark, I wrote an article about Antietam and sent it to the *Frederick News Post*. I didn't hear back, so I was surprised a few days later when I picked up the paper and saw my article!

I gave my first tour of Antietam as a college student on the teacher track at Shepherd College (now University). We had to conduct a class for a grade, and I chose a field trip to Antietam. My uncle made a map for me to use. The trip must have gone okay because I got an A.

## **LM: Your first book, *September Echoes*, was published in 1960. How did the book propel you into an active role at Antietam?**

JS: *September Echoes* was the first full-length book on Antietam since Francis Palfrey wrote his account in 1882.<sup>213</sup> It sold out in three weeks, so there were two

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<sup>212</sup> The Dunker Church fell down in a windstorm in 1921. It was reconstructed in 1962.

<sup>213</sup> Francis Winthrop Palfrey, *The Antietam and Fredericksburg* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1882).

more printings in 1960. Mrs. Lohman sold about 300 copies from her souvenir shop at Bloody Lane. The *Baltimore Sun* gave it a nice review, which resulted in my selection as the youngest member of the Maryland State Civil War Centennial Commission. The Kickoff Dinner for the commission was held at the National Guard Armory in Frederick, where I met the guest speaker, Maj. Gen. U.S. Grant III, grandson of the former president.

The following year, I took part in the dedication of Reuben Darby's Antietam-Sharpsburg Museum on April 9, [1961,] the anniversary of Lee's surrender. The museum stood where the parking lot for the National Cemetery is now located. P.G.T. Beauregard, great-grandson and namesake of the Confederate general, was the guest speaker and Jim Murfin, who later wrote *Glean of Bayonets*, presided over the event.<sup>214</sup>

Darby's museum offered battlefield tours in 1962, mainly for VIPs coming from Washington, and I was one of the tour guides. After the museum closed, I continued to lead school groups both locally and nationally.

I was asked to write an account of the battle for the Battle of Antietam Centennial Program and Guide. Jim Murfin wrote the other segments. Around that time, I participated in a Hagerstown Civil War Round Table symposium with guest speakers Bud Robertson, Jr., founding director of the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies, and Frank Vandiver, author of *Mighty Stonewall*.<sup>215</sup>

**LM: What are your memories of the Battle of Antietam Centennial?**

JS: Events were scheduled in different towns on different days. I appreciated the emphasis each town took in turning back the clock to envision things as they were. I really enjoyed the big parade in Frederick. My friend, Norman Grahl, portrayed General Jesse Reno stopping by the home of Barbara Fritchie. Years later, I shared a photo of the event with Norman's son, who didn't know his dad had done that.

My favorite moments included the "Hills of Glory" pageant in Hagerstown, which took place at the stadium, and the re-dedication of the Dunker Church. Mrs. Ruth Otto, whose father was the last preacher at the Dunker Church prior to its closure, had been consulted and made sure everything inside the church was in its proper place. I watched the re-enactment of the Bloody Lane battle from the hill behind the unfinished Visitor Center.

**LM: Your books cover a range of topics from field medicine to "Stonewall" Jackson's doctor to Lincoln's travels. From where do you draw inspiration for such a diverse line-up?**

JS: The battlefield always speaks to me. Often times, thoughts cross my mind and book titles are born.

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<sup>214</sup> James V. Murfin, *The Glean of Bayonets: The Battle of Antietam and the Maryland Campaign of 1862* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1965).

<sup>215</sup> Frank E. Vandiver, *Mighty Stonewall* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1957).



One snowy New Year's Eve, I was thinking about the history of this area that I love and *Drums Along the Mohawk* (Revolutionary War novel written in 1936) came to mind. I thought, why not *Drums Along the Antietam*? Few places have the significance of this area in our nation's history, from the time of the Native Americans and early settlements to the Emancipation Proclamation. The chapter titles came from *The Battle Hymn of the Republic: Sifting out the Hearts of Men* (local pastors); *A Hundred Circling Camps* (prelude to Antietam); *Rows of Steel* (the battle); *His Righteous Sentence* (the Emancipation Proclamation); and so on. I wrote *Drums* in 1972, when there was talk of building townhouses on the land between Branch Avenue and Harpers Ferry Road, which is the Final Attack area on the battlefield. Thankfully, only one house was built on that land. *Drums* is still my favorite book.

One rainy night, I was driving near Taneytown and saw a plaque about troops on their way to Gettysburg, which led to *Roads to Gettysburg* in 1978. And since there was a *Roads to Gettysburg*, there had to be *Roads from Gettysburg*.

I got the idea for *Stonewall Jackson, Day by Day* in 1980 from a tour of Jackson's Valley Campaign with the Chicago Civil War Round Table. Of all my books, this one sold the most with 10,000 copies. At the time, the [Antietam Visitor Center] bookstore was run independently. The proceeds from the book were kept in-house and raised lots of money, which led to the development of the National Park Service maintenance buildings on Mondell Road.

One hot July evening, I was thinking about the 18,000 wounded at Antietam. What did that look like? What happened to them? That was the origin of *Antietam Hospitals*, which I wrote in 1996. As a result of the book, I worked with the Save Historic Antietam Foundation and local property owners to mark structures used as hospitals with small plaques.

*Four Days in October* and *Lincoln's Wartime Tours from Washington, D.C.* were inspired by Ted Alexander, who sadly passed away in 2020. Ted was the former historian at Antietam National Battlefield and director of the Chambersburg Civil War Seminars. He heard me give a presentation on Lincoln's wartime travels and encouraged me to turn it into a book.

**LM: Were there times when your roles as pastor, teacher, and Antietam guide converged on the field?**

JS: One of the biggest was in 1989. I participated as the Protestant Chaplain for the burial in the National Cemetery of four soldiers from the Irish Brigade. Their remains were discovered on the battlefield in 1988. I can say I had a part in the burial of Civil War soldiers.

In the 1980's, I was good friends with a retired Air Force chaplain who became Chaplain to the Corps of Cadets at Virginia Military Institute. Twice he arranged for the Cadet Glee Club to come to Bethel United Methodist Church in Chewsville, Maryland, where I was the pastor. They

arrived on Saturday evening for a spaghetti and salad dinner, stayed in the homes of our members, and then sang at church. Of course, their signature song was *Shenandoah*. We gave them lunch, then a tour of Antietam. These were great moments.

I led the U.S. Army Chaplain's Advanced Course in annual staff rides for six years in a row. One day we got caught in an unexpected snow storm. The brigadier general gave me his field jacket. We always concluded at the rear of the National Cemetery. As a result of those staff rides, I led Twilight Cemetery tours for twelve years, sometimes weekly, sometimes monthly, always concluding at the rear of the cemetery where I asked, "What do you see? What do you hear? The advancing men in blue, the colors waving in the breeze, the shouts of command, the thunder of the cannon, and the whistle of the bullet." I tried to paint a picture. On one moonlit night, a member of the group started singing the Battle Hymn of the Republic. Afterward, the group walked off in silence.

I was the guest speaker at the 125<sup>th</sup> Battle Anniversary. I spoke in the evening at the National Cemetery and then at the Visitor Center. It poured down rain in the evening, tears of heaven washing the land. This was also the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the signing of the Constitution. School children from around the country came and released balloons.

A film crew flew in from Arizona to do the Antietam segment for the 1982 CBS miniseries, "The Blue and the Gray." Ranger Paul Chiles and I were resources for the crew. We concluded inside the United Church of Christ in Sharpsburg, which had been the church of many of the farmers whose land had been contested in battle: the Roulettes, Pipers, Mary Jane Rohrbach and her family. The church was used as a hospital after the battle, and in the late 1800's the 16<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Infantry Regiment donated a stained-glass window to commemorate their dead. When Paul and I finished speaking, Jan, the anchor who had been a music major in college, sat down at the piano and played *Battle Hymn of the Republic*. Even the eyes of the film crew were moist.

On Labor Day Sunday in 1987, our 29<sup>th</sup> Division Association had its reunion in Hagerstown. We held a service at Bethel United Methodist Church in the afternoon, then loaded all 500 onto 10 buses for a tour of Antietam. It was raining, but everybody got out and walked Bloody Lane in the rain.

September 16, 2015, was the day a Canadian general and color guard presented the formerly lost sword of Col. Charles Tew to the color guard of the Citadel in the Sunken Road. Tew had been the valedictorian of the first class of the Citadel and died in the Sunken Road, his sword disappearing in the fight. The sword had been found in Ottawa, Canada. I gave the benediction for the ceremony.

**LM: Many of your books provide deeply personal accounts of the soldiers and civilians of Antietam, often through stories and letters passed down through**

**their families. What connections have you made with descendants of Antietam veterans?**

JS: Meeting the descendants of Civil War personalities has always been a highlight. In the 1960s and 1970s, I met the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the original cast of Antietam civilians who were still around, namely the Mummas, Pipers, Roulettes, Groves, and Poffenbergers.

An interesting thing happened in 2014. I was always drawn to the Geeting house (Crystal Spring farm in Keedysville), which became a hospital after the battle. Dr. James Oliver treated wounded soldiers there for three months. I did some research to find living relatives and Dr. Oliver's great-grandson, Thomas Kendrick, responded. I met Tom and his wife at Crystal Springs and Tom gave me a copy of Dr. Oliver's wartime journal and a rare photograph of the farm. Later, I met the great-nephew of Dr. Jonathan Letterman, McClellan's medical director, at Crystal Springs and read him a description written by Dr. Oliver in his journal of Letterman's visit to the hospital in the days following the battle.

**LM: You have given over 2,000 tours. What are some of your most memorable experiences on the field with tour groups?**

JS: Lots of memories come flooding. Every experience was unique, but some stand out.

I've given tours to groups from every state and 27 nations. One group came from Veritas Academy in Oregon for five years in a row. They were the only group to have a prayer at Burnside Bridge. In 1987, I spent two days at the Pry House as a guide. Two visitors stand out. One was from Boonsboro and had driven past the lane for years and wondered "what that place was." The other was an aged lady who had come from Oregon and wanted to see where her great-grandfather, who was in the 1<sup>st</sup> Minnesota Infantry Regiment, had camped. She cried, even though we could not show her the exact encampment.

Then there were the "flying physicians." They all had their own private planes and flew into Frederick, toured the Monocacy Battlefield and the National Museum of Civil War Medicine, then came to Antietam. One of the doctors was also a bagpiper. He led the group along Bloody Lane, from the Roulette farm lane to the observation tower, playing "Amazing Grace" and "Going Home." Awesome.

I once gave a tour to a Georgia teacher and her husband who owned part of Confederate General John B. Gordon's boyhood home. Only a chimney remained. She sang "Goober Peas" in the Bloody Lane, the song about boiled peanuts, which were especially popular with Confederate soldiers. She told me she related the well-known song from the Civil War to her kids.

Among the military groups were members of the Air Force band. One airman had rendered taps more than 3,000 times at Arlington National Cemetery. Also, a platoon of "the Old Guard," from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, which guards the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington.

One tour was with the Commander of the London Military District, which included the Queen's Guard. He gave me a plaque as a gift. At our last stop in the National Cemetery, I recited a saying I got from somewhere: "Politicians make the wars, generals lead or mislead the troops, the officers and men do the fighting and dying." He replied, "and the folks at home do the crying." He said he knew how each side could have won: have two cell phones.



Rev. Schildt with his plaque from the London Military District

On two different occasions, I had the commander of the Australian Army. For some reason, I have given more tours to folks from Australia than any other foreign country.

In late October after 9/11, I gave a tour to ten members of the NYPD Drum and Bugle Corps. They had lost many friends. They had begun at Petersburg and were working their way north. They gave me a NYPD cap. They said they would like to play on Memorial Day, but it turned out there were too many events in New York and it didn't happen.

In 2014, I gave a tour to four members of a Ukrainian media company who were in the United States to find out how newspapers and television stations with medium-sized markets operate. Their media outlets do not enjoy the

level of free speech as in the United States. In fact, their offices had been bombed years before by communist extremists. They were interested in President Lincoln and came to Antietam to find out more. The following year, one of them returned and stopped by my house to drop off a Ukrainian flag, Cossack doll, and a small bottle of vodka.

One time, I gave a tour to a 95-year-old man with a walker. He wanted to see Antietam. When we finished our tour, everyone in the Visitor Center came out to greet him. He had been at a radar station at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and told his lieutenant that a large flight was incoming. The lieutenant thought the planes were ours. Then on September 2, 1945, he was on the deck of the U.S.S. *Missouri* for the surrender of Japan. It was amazing.

On another memorable occasion, I obtained permission to take the grandson of a Massachusetts veteran into the Roulette barn. The ancestor had been treated in the barn. It was an emotional moment.

**LM: What's your connection to the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, known for its historic role on Omaha Beach in 1944?**

JS: I served as a corporal in the 115th Infantry Regiment, 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in the early 1950s. I participated in many firing parties for military funerals of Korean War dead and remained active as Chaplain of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division

Association through the years.

I served as a full-time chaplain for 17 years. My chaplain's cross was pinned on me by Frank Oberle, who graduated from high school in 1943 and a year later landed on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. He said everybody attended the divine service on the night of June 5. The chaplain spoke on Isaiah 43, of "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze." He said above the din of battle, his boat group navigated Omaha Beach by yelling, "Remember Isaiah!"

I had always wanted to go to Normandy. Never dreamed I'd get there once, let alone six times, and for such big events.

I was in Normandy for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1994. I met the daughter of Thomas D. Howie, who landed on Omaha Beach with the 29<sup>th</sup> Division and was killed a month later in the fighting to reach St. Lo. Immortalized for his courage, he was dubbed, "The Major of St. Lo." Shortly before President Clinton spoke at the United States Cemetery in Normandy, his daughter, Sally, placed the American flag on her dad's grave, and I placed the French flag. We became good friends.

Also in 1994, I participated in the dedication of a monument where the Germans struck the 2nd Battalion, 115th Infantry Regiment (29<sup>th</sup> Division) in the middle of the night. The Catholic priest gave me the instrument to sprinkle the incense. That was new, never done anything like that. The French called me Padre, I liked that.

We have an "adopted" St. Lo family from my first visit. There was a parade of veterans where the veterans lined up and a French girl and French boy took each veterans' hands. The veterans of 1944 told us to get in line, but I said, "No, this is your day." Someone pushed me into the line of march. Never found out who it was. After the parade, the little girl gave me her address. Her mother had been an au pair in Syracuse, and long story short, we became pen pals. On my subsequent trips to Normandy, they always gave us a picnic, and always there were tearful farewells. The Boulets—mom, dad, Lucie, and Alexia—spent a week at our home in 1999 and 2005.

I became good friends with Jean Mignon, who was a 15-year-old altar boy in 1944. Bombs were falling when he reached Eglise Notre Dame, a Catholic Church in Calais. The priest said, "Son, there will be no service today." His family later had medical problems. Army doctors helped the family and Jean never forgot it. He saw to it that my first group tour received a welcome at City Hall in St. Lo.

As Chaplain of the Association, I conducted funeral services for nearly 30 vets. One was the radio man of the 115th Infantry. After the regiment crossed the swiftly flowing River Roer in 1945, he had sent a message to the colonel, "Safely across." The colonel replied, "Thank God."

In 1996, I was made an Honorary Citizen of several Normandy towns for promotion of French/American friendship and for being part of the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

**LM: Is there an area on the Antietam battlefield that holds special meaning for you?**

JS: That would probably be the Burnside Bridge area because of David L. Thompson, who was a private in the 9<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry (“Hawkins’ Zouaves”). In high school, I received a copy of *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* for Christmas. In it was an account by Thompson about going forward in the Final Attack on September 17: “In a second the air was full of the hiss of bullets and the hurtle of grape-shot. The mental strain was so great that I saw at that moment the singular effect mentioned, I think, in the life of Goethe on a similar occasion—the whole landscape for an instant turned slightly red.”

**LM: What is your advice to those who want to help preserve and protect Antietam and its surroundings?**

JS: We are all “keepers of the fields.” Be aware. Be involved. Remember the original cast of Antietam.

*Rev. Schildt grew up in Walkersville, Maryland, and holds a teaching degree from Shepherd College (now University) and a Master of Theology from Wesley Theological Seminary.*

## Book Reviews

*Radical Sacrifice: The Rise and Ruin of Fitz John Porter* by William Marvel (The University of North Carolina Press, 2021). Hardcover, 7 maps, photos, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-1-4696-6185-8. \$35.00.

Review by James A. Rosebrock

“Fitz Porter has, on the contrary, stuck through it all most nobly—he is all that I thought him and more.” George B. McClellan

Until now, there has not been a comprehensive and objective biography of the life of Fitz John Porter, arguably the most capable and certainly the most loyal of George B. McClellan’s corps commanders.<sup>216</sup>

William Marvel takes up his finely-honed pen to correct this injustice and give us that long-needed account of Porter’s life. The author of many important Civil War works including *Lincoln’s Autocrat: The Life of Edwin Stanton* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015) and *Burnside* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), Marvel writes what is certain to become the definitive and authoritative work on the life of this important Civil War figure.

While Porter’s actions during the Second Manassas Campaign and his subsequent court battles are central elements of Marvel’s work, this is a complete biography of Porter’s life. It covers everything from his father’s failed naval career, his mother’s influence in obtaining a West Point appointment for her son, Porter’s heroic exploits as an artillery lieutenant during the capture of Mexico City, and the important assignments that he held in the antebellum regular army. Among these was a stint as an instructor at West Point during Robert E. Lee’s superintendence and as assistant adjutant general for Albert Sidney Johnston in the Mormon War. Porter played a key role in securing Maj. Robert Anderson’s appointment to command the Federal forts in Charleston harbor and he organized the evacuation of Maj. William French’s artillery battalion from rebel Texas.

Marvel’s treatment of the Peninsula Campaign and Porter’s role is particularly valuable. Known in Civil War military history circles for his stand at Gaines’ Mill on June 27, 1862, Porter confronted the largest infantry assault ever launched by Robert E. Lee against the Army of the Potomac. The author cites

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<sup>216</sup> The others are Walter H. Hebert, *Fighting Joe Hooker* (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1944); William Marvel, *Burnside* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Mark A. Snell, *From First to Last: The Life of Major General William B. Franklin* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); Laurence H. Freiheit, *Major General Joseph King Fermo Mansfield A Solder From Beginning to End* (Camp Pope Publishing, 2019); Thomas K. Tate, *General Edwin Vose Sumner, USA: A Civil War Biography* (Jefferson NC: McFarland and Company, 2013).

compelling evidence that Porter believed that his stand at Gaines' Mill was intended to draw off the bulk of Lee's army and allow the other corps of the Army of the Potomac south of the Chickahominy to attack Richmond. His organization and leadership on the battlefield at Malvern Hill four days later thwarted Lee's final effort to destroy McClellan's army in front of Richmond. Afterward, Porter advocated an advance on the rebel capital, but McClellan was determined to first re-establish his base on the James River before attempting any new offensive operations.

Porter's inclination to criticize John Pope in correspondence with others who he assumed would keep these communications private was a grave mistake. A letter to census chief Joseph Kennedy and dispatches to Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside, all highly critical of Pope, made their way into the hands of Secretary of State William Seward and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, who showed them to President Lincoln and eventually to Pope himself. Porter was his own worst enemy in these cases and these letters were the seeds of his ultimate destruction.

Marvel clearly recounts the hour-by-hour events of the last four days of August 1862 and Porter's interactions with Pope, McDowell, his division commanders and staff, and a motley array of couriers, many whose testimony would help destroy his career. Perhaps the most fateful was Porter's brief meeting on the afternoon of August 28 with Pope's aide, Lt. Col. Thomas C.H. Smith. The discussion was on ammunition but with no evidence other than his intuition, Smith emerged from the conversation certain that Porter was a traitor. His dubious assertion of Porter's supposed treachery in testimony at Porter's court-martial was a basis for his conviction.

On September 2, Porter learned to his embarrassment that Pope had seen his letter to Joseph Kennedy. The duplicitous Pope assured Porter that his explanations for writing the letter "were satisfactory." In fact, Pope already viewed Porter as a scapegoat for the debacle at Second Manassas. Edwin Stanton saw a bigger prize, the downfall of George McClellan. Lee's advance into Maryland and Lincoln's reappointment of McClellan to army command put a temporary halt to their machinations.

Marvel's chapter "My Maryland" is an excellent synthesis of Porter and his corps' participation in the Maryland Campaign. Porter by now was aware that his unedited dispatches to Burnside had found their way to Pope. Marvel writes that "fractures were developing in the once convivial triumvirate of Burnside, McClellan, and Porter and in the end, the rupture would bring varying degrees of harm to them all."

The author dismisses the myth of a large reserve in the Fifth Corps at Antietam on September 17, 1862. These contentions had their roots in a melodramatic conversation between Porter and McClellan supposedly overheard and reported by *New York Tribune* correspondent George Smalley. Smalley's report was later amplified and repackaged by Capt. Thomas



Anderson in 1886. These stories unfortunately still form the basis of some modern interpretation of the Maryland campaign. By the afternoon of the battle, Porter had in fact just two brigades, some three to four thousand men available.<sup>217</sup> As A.P. Hill battered the Ninth Corps at the end of the day, McClellan denied Burnside's urgent appeal for infantry reinforcements. Burnside may have believed that the refusal originated with Porter.

If Porter thought the United States victory at Antietam would mollify his enemies in Washington, he was wrong. On November 10, 1862, just one day after McClellan's departure from the Army of the Potomac, Porter received orders to report to Washington where he was informed that he was to be court-martialed.

Joseph Holt, Stanton's newly hand-picked Judge Advocate General and willing fixer, drew up two main charges and assorted specifications charging Porter with disobeying a lawful order in the presence of an enemy and misbehavior in the face of the enemy. Stanton proceeded to pack the court presided over by Maj. Gen. David Hunter, with officers prejudicial to Porter who would benefit professionally by a guilty verdict. One of the most vitriolic was future United States President James Garfield, a protégé of Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase and close friend of Jacob Cox.<sup>218</sup>

Holt's case was anchored on Pope's stubborn contention that most of Longstreet's corps had not reached the battlefield. Defense evidence to the contrary was not allowed.<sup>219</sup> Every defense objection was decided in favor of the prosecution. Testimony calling for an opinion was upheld for prosecution witnesses but denied for defense witnesses. Pope was coached by Holt but in heated cross-examination by Porter's lead defense attorney, Reverdy Johnson, he contradicted himself continually. McDowell's memory also became conveniently faulty when it served the prosecution's purposes. Holt's star witness was Pope's military aide Thomas Smith, whose purported

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<sup>217</sup> Warren's small brigade was sent south to support Burnside. Most of Buchanan's brigade went forward to support Pleasonton's horse artillery. Though the order dispatching two of Morell's brigades to Sumner was eventually countermanded, Porter lost their services until dark.

<sup>218</sup> Panel members were generals David Hunter, James Garfield, Benjamin Prentiss, Napoleon Buford, John Slough, Ethan Allen Hitchcock, Rufus King, James Ricketts, and Silas Casey. Slough's appointment to brigadier general was sent to the Senate the day the prosecution closed its case. Appointments to major general were also submitted for Prentiss, Buford and Casey. David Hunter was restored to his command in the Department of the South. Garfield reported as Chief of Staff to William Rosecrans commanding the Army of the Cumberland. King and Ricketts received no promotions but neither was court-martialed for the "grave error" attributed to them in McDowell's court of inquiry for Second Manassas.

<sup>219</sup> In 1867, Robert E. Lee confirmed that Confederate forces would have been prepared for any attack from the Gainesville Road and that he had seen Porter's troops and that he outflanked Porter rather than Porter outflanking him. Lee speculated that Porter's court-martial was less interested in finding the truth than relieving Pope and Lincoln of a campaign that reflected badly on both.

“clairvoyance” as to Porter’s treason during their brief meeting was totally accepted by the panel. Despite enough compelling defense evidence to raise reasonable doubt on every accusation, the court hastily found Porter guilty of all the charges.

In sending the case to President Lincoln for approval, Holt forwarded only the closing prosecution arguments. With the backdrop of the dark days following the defeat at Fredericksburg and more backbiting and unrest among the Potomac generals, Lincoln seemingly ignored his own professional legal instincts and approved the judgment on January 21, 1863. Porter was cashiered and forever disqualified from holding any office of trust or confidence or profit under the government of the United States.

Porter’s fight for justice is an equally compelling story. After nearly 15 years, the War Department in April 1878 established a three-officer panel headed by Maj. Gen. John Schofield to reexamine the case. The Schofield Board was as fair and impartial as the Holt trial had not been. The board unanimously rejected the findings of the original court-martial but lacked the legal authority to overturn the original verdict. No final relief could come as long as Republicans led by James Garfield, John Logan, Ambrose Burnside, and Jacob Cox controlled the executive and legislative branches of government. It took the public support of Ulysses Grant who finally reviewed the case in 1881 and the election of Democrat Grover Cleveland to the presidency to finally right the decades-long wrong. On July 1, 1886, the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Malvern Hill, President Cleveland signed the bill into law reinstating Porter. Porter described himself as “overcome with joy.”

*Radical Sacrifice* fills an important gap in the history of the Civil War. Not only is it a richly detailed and engaging story of the life of Fitz John Porter, the book from the vantage point of military history also sheds light on the Fifth Corps’ important battles of 1862. On the political side, Marvel clearly draws a sharp comparison between the blatant abuse of the rule of law in Porter’s original trial and the fairness and impartiality of the Schofield Board. The book should be in the library of every serious student of Civil War history.

## Contributor Biographies

Daniel J. Vermilya is a park ranger at Eisenhower National Historic Site in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. He previously worked at Antietam National Battlefield. He is the author of three books about the American Civil War, including *That Field of Blood: The Battle of Antietam, September 17, 1862*.

Matt Borders is a park ranger at Monocacy National Battlefield and president of the Frederick County Civil War Roundtable. He is the author of two books about the American Civil War. Most recently, he coauthored *Faces of Union Soldiers at South Mountain & Harpers Ferry*.

Joseph Stahl retired from the Institute for Defense Analyses. He is active in the Civil War community and has authored more than two dozen articles. Most recently, he coauthored *Faces of Union Soldiers at South Mountain & Harpers Ferry*.

J.O. Smith has a master's degree in history from the University of Georgia and undergraduate and law degrees from Duke University. He is an attorney and lives with his family near Annapolis, Maryland.

Laura Marfut is a retired U.S. Army colonel with a master's degree in International Relations and Education, and a master's degree in Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College.

John Schildt is the author of many Civil War books, including *September Echoes*, *Drums Along the Antietam*, *Four Days in October*, and *Roads to Gettysburg*. He has been a pastor, hospital chaplain, and teacher, as well as the National Chaplain of the 29th Infantry Division Association.

James A. Rosebrock is a retired Army officer and Department of Justice employee. Jim has two Civil War-related blogs and is currently writing a book that will cover the Union and Confederate artillery during the Maryland Campaign.

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The Antietam Institute was established in 2021 as a member-based, educational, and philanthropic 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The Institute educates the public on the central role of the Maryland Campaign of 1862 and Battle of Antietam as a major turning point of the Civil War that directly resulted in the issuance of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Antietam Institute sponsored conferences, symposiums, publications, and leadership forums facilitate collaborative learning and knowledge exchange, create unique opportunities for discovery and inspire further historical research.

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