

Eastern Illinois University

The Keep

Plan B Papers

Student Theses & Publications

1-1-1966

Battle of Antietam

James Edward Martin

Follow this and additional works at: https://thekeep.eiu.edu/plan_b

Recommended Citation

Martin, James Edward, "Battle of Antietam" (1966). *Plan B Papers*. 484.
https://thekeep.eiu.edu/plan_b/484

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Plan B Papers by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.

BATTLE OF ANTIETAM

(TITLE)

BY

James Edward Martin

B. S. in Ed., Eastern Illinois University, 1963

PLAN B PAPER

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE MASTER OF SCIENCE IN EDUCATION
AND PREPARED IN COURSE

Civil War Seminar

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY,
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1966

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS PLAN B PAPER BE ACCEPTED AS
FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE DEGREE, M.S. IN ED.

9/28/66

DATE

ADVISER

DATE

DEPARTMENT HEAD

Battle of Antietam

Never before or since in American History was so much blood shed on a single day as on September 17, 1862, at the battle of Antietam. For the clarification of the reader, the battle of Antietam bears a double name--the troops of the North referred to the battle as Antietam while their counterparts referred to the engagement as Sharpsburg. Regardless as to its name, this historic battle was the turning point of the Civil War and the high tide of the Confederacy. The purpose of this paper is to tell the story of General Lee's march into Maryland which culminated in the battle of Antietam. It is not within the scope of this paper to give a detailed account of every military engagement but rather an overall picture of the Maryland campaign.

Following the battle of Second Bull Run on August 29th and 30th (in which John Pope was badly defeated), General George McClellan was placed in command of the defense of Washington.¹ At the time of McClellan's appointment, President Lincoln and General Halleck regarded Washington as lost, but General Halleck boosted the men's morale and Washington was made safe from attack.²

General Lee did not attack Washington but instead crossed the Potomac into Maryland. Lee had many reasons

¹Robert Johnson, Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, New York: Devine Press, 1888, p. 549.

²Ibid., pp. 551-552.

for crossing into Maryland, the major one being the hope that a successful invasion would lead to recognition of the Confederacy by the British. Once the South was recognized, overt aid might be obtained from England and France. The second reason for crossing the Potomac was to relieve the war-torn state of Virginia from the ravages of contending armies. It was felt that the losses of men and material might be replenished from the North. A final reason for sending the Army of Northern Virginia northward was to capitalize on recent Southern victories and to woo the important border state of Maryland into joining the Confederacy.³

Despite the many sound arguments for taking the war to the North, General Lee showed concern for the Maryland campaign in the following letter to President Davis:

The army is not properly supplied for an invasion of an enemy territory. It lacks much of the material of war, is feeble in transportation, the animals being much reduced, and the men are poorly provided with clothes, and in thousands of instances are destitute of shoes.⁴

There were many reasons to worry about the success of the Maryland campaign, but straggling was the biggest concern. Straggling was caused by wornout shoes and improper diet. The men's feet were not calloused and, since General Lee did not permit plundering, the army

³L. VanLoan Naisawald, "Why Confederates Crossed Potomac," Civil War Times Illustrated, Vol. I, No. 5 (August, 1962), pp. 20-21.

⁴Ibid., p. 21.

lived on green corn and fruit. Many of the men had bad cases of diarrhea which weakened them physically and caused much absence without leave from the ranks. The march into Maryland is often referred to as the "green corn campaign."⁵ A young recruit from Georgia, when questioned about his absence from the ranks during the battle of Antietam explained:

I had no shoes, I tried it barefoot, but somehow my feet wouldn't callous. They just kept bleeding. I found it hard to keep up though I had the heart of a patriot I began to feel that I didn't have patriotic feet. Of course, I could have crawled on my hands and knees, but then my hands would have got so sore I couldn't fire my rifle.⁶

Despite the discomfort of his men Lee crossed the Potomac and entered Maryland. His objective was to destroy federal communications with the West and then turn his attention to Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington.⁷

Lee's Army crossed the Potomac on September 4th. Curiosity seekers were disheartened when they failed to get a glimpse of Lee and Jackson. Both men had been injured in separate riding accidents and were forced to enter Maryland in ambulances. On September 6th, the Confederate army pitched camp near Fredrick. Many visitors came out to the camp to greet the Confederates,

⁵Douglass Southall Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, Vol.,II; New York: Charles L. Webster Co., 1943, pp. 146-52.

⁶B. A. Botkin, A Civil War Treasury of Tales, Legends, and Folklore, New York: Random House, 1960, p. 112.

⁷Johnson, II, p. 605.

with Longstreet and Stuart serving as the official greeters. Longstreet was suffering with a badly rubbed heel, but it was said that Stuart (being at his usual self) was ready to see and talk with every good looking woman in sight.⁸

If failing to get a glimpse of the Confederate generals was disheartening then it is doubtful if the author can express in words the disappointment the Marylanders must have felt when they saw the typical Confederate soldier. Here is a description of "Johnny Reb" in Maryland.

None had any under-clothing. My costume consisted of a ragged pair of trousers, a stained dirty jacket, and old slouch hat, the brim pinned up with a thorn; a begrimed blanket over my shoulder, a grease smeared cotton haversack full of apples and corn, a cartridge box full and a musket. I was barefooted and had a stone bruise on each foot. . . There was no one there who would not have been "run in" by the police had he appeared on the street of any populous city.⁹

As the Confederate army moved northward, McClellan and Secretary Seward saw the need for the evacuation of Harper's Ferry. This Federal garrison would be in direct line of Lee's invasion of Maryland and would probably be captured. In trying to convince General Halleck of the need for the evacuation, Seward and McClellan called

⁸Freeman, II, pp. 153-54.

⁹Bruce Catton, Terrible Swift Sword, Garden City, New York: Doubleday Inc., 1963, pp. 449-50.

on the general one evening but were unable to persuade him.¹⁰

Without proper orders, McClellan started northward in pursuit of Lee's army. He had, to use his own words, started the campaign with a noose around his neck.¹¹ McClellan, acting with his usual slowness, moved his force, interposing it between Washington and Lee, in three movements northward (see Map I, p. 33). The advance from Washington was covered by the cavalry led by General Pleasanton, who was soon in constant contact with the enemy's cavalry. McClellan hoped first, to gain accurate information as to Lee's movements, and second, to push the work of supply and reorganization as rapidly as possible.

Maryland received Lee's army rather decently but the Army could not regard itself as welcome. One exception to the rule was the warm reception General J. E. B. Stuart received at Urbana, Maryland. In return for the hospitality he had received, he gave a ball with the army band furnishing the music. This charming occasion came to a sudden halt when McClellan's advance guard struck the outpost. Following a sharp skirmish, the Confederates hastened back "covered with glory" and the dancing was resumed. The final interruption of the dancing came

¹⁰Johnson, II, pp. 550-54.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 550-54.

when the wounded were brought in. After startled shrieks, the women started dressing the men's wounds. One wounded fellow remarked that he would get hit any day to have such a pretty surgeon dress his wounds. The dance over, the soldiers escorted their "lovely angels" home by the light of the moon and bid them an affectionate farewell.¹²

Many stories, some of them fictional, have been written about Lee's occupation of Maryland. The most prominent story of the Fredrick occupation was that of Barbara Frietchie. This grand old lady was supposed to have unfurled the Union banner in defiance to Jackson's troops. The entire story was written up on a poem by Whittier which was mere Union propaganda. However, Jackson was the subject of several true stories that date from the occupation of Fredrick. On September 6th, General Jackson was waylaid by two Baltimore girls who paralyzed him with smiles, embraces, and questions. Then, seemingly satisfied, they drove off. Jackson was so embarrassed that he stayed in his tent the rest of the day. The following day he attended church services at the German Reformed Church. In the midst of the services Jackson fell soundly asleep and the loyal Union preacher prayed for President Lincoln. "Stonewall" was finally awakened by the organ music, and when told of the prayers

¹²Botkin, pp. 218-19.

for Lincoln, was quite amused and stated, "I'm sure he needs it."¹³

Fullfilling McClellan's and Seward's fears, Lee sent six of his nine infantry divisions against Harper's Ferry. The orders called for a three pronged encirclement of and an attack on Harper's Ferry. McLaws' division was to go by way of Pleasant Valley and capture Maryland Heights. Jackson was to march sixty miles north and west and drive out the 2500 Federal forces at Martinsburg. Having completed this task, he would march southward and take Bolivar Heights. J. G. Walker's division was to follow the Monocacy River to the Potomac and destroy an aqueduct on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. On completion of this assignment, he was to cross the Potomac into Virginia and occupy Loudon Heights across the Shenandoah River looking down upon Harper's Ferry.¹⁴ By splitting the Confederate forces in enemy country, Lee showed contempt for the Union army. He expressed his faith in his plan when he wrote his thoughts about General McClellan to J. G. Walker:

He is an able general but a very cautious one. His enemies among his own people think him too much so. His army is in a very demoralized and chaotic condition, and will not be prepared for offensive operation--or he will not think it so--for three or four weeks.

¹³Johnson, II, p. 620.

¹⁴Robert D. Hoffsommer, "Jackson's Capture of Harper's Ferry," Civil War Times Illustrated, Vol. I, No. 5 (August, 1962), pp. 12-13.

Before that time I hope to be on the
Susquehanna.¹⁵

On September 10th, the plan was set into action as McLaws moved westward from Fredrick and the following day crossed South Mountain to Brownsville in Pleasant Valley. The plan called for the army to be at Harper's Ferry on the 12th. By nightfall of that date McLaws had reached the Potomac three miles from the objective. At 10:30 A.M. the following morning the 17th Mississippi fired on Federal sharpshooters and by 4:30 P.M. all Federals were cleared from Maryland Heights and Sandy Hook. Next morning a road was cut to the summit and guns were placed in position two days behind schedule.¹⁶

Jackson had left for Harper's Ferry by crossing South Mountain at Turner's Pass on September 10th. The night was spent encamped at Boobesboro where a minor engagement took place. Jackson traveled toward Martinsburg in a great curve via Williamsport. The 2500 Federal troops garrisoned at Martinsburg under Brigadier General Julius White promptly left to reinforce troops at Harper's Ferry. After a hard day's march, Jackson was persuaded by his host to drink a whisky toddy of which he said:

. . . he believed he liked the taste of whisky and brandy more than any soldier in the army; that they were more palatable to him than the most fragrant coffee, and

¹⁵Johnson, II, p. 606.

¹⁶Freeman, II, p. 187.

for that reason with others, he rarely tasted them.¹⁷

(It was at Martinsburg that Jackson's local feminine fan club stripped him of the buttons on his uniform in quest of souvenirs.)

By the 13th, Jackson's divisions were in position west of Bolivar Heights and by the 14th, the encirclement was complete (see Map II, p. 34).

The third attack column under Walker attempted to destroy an aqueduct on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal but failed. Receiving Special Orders 191, Walker moved toward Harper's Ferry via Hillsboro. He arrived at Loudon Heights on the 13th. No resistance was given, and batteries were mounted two days behind schedule.

September 14th found seventy guns pointing towards Harper's Ferry. This was to be an artilleryman's paradise or like "shooting fish in a barrel." On the same day Jackson signalled McLaws and Walker the following message:

Harper's Ferry is completely invested. I shall summon its commander to surrender. Should he refuse I shall give him twenty-four hours to remove the non-combatants and then carry the place by assault.¹⁸

With Harper's Ferry near capitulation, ill fortune struck the Army of Northern Virginia. The 27th Indiana had arrived near Fredrick on September 13th, a warm

¹⁷Johnson, II, p. 623.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 607-609.

autumn day. Two Federal soldiers, Private Barton W. Mitchell and Sergeant M. Bloss, in search of a shade tree noticed a paper on the ground. Within the paper were wrapped several fresh cigars which were promptly divided and then the importance of the document was noticed. The paper passed up the echelons of command until Colonel S. E. Pittman recognized the handwriting and the signature as Assistant Adjutant General R. H. Chilton's.¹⁹ Pittman took the document to McClellan who was in conference but due to its importance he read the following order:

Headquarters Army of Northern Va.
Sept. 9, 1862

Special Orders, No. 191

The army will resume its march tomorrow, taking the Hagerstown road. Gen. Jackson's command will form the advance and after passing Middletown, with such portion as he may select, will take the route towards Sharpsburg, cross the Potomac at the most convenient point, and by Friday night take possession of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, capture such of the enemy as may be at Martinsburg, and intercept such as may attempt to escape from Harper's Ferry.

Gen. Longstreet's command will pursue the same road as far as Boonsborough, where it will halt with reserve, supply and baggage trains of the army.

Gen. McLaws, with his own division and that of Gen. R. H. Anderson, will follow Gen. Longstreet; and reaching Middletown he will take the route to Harper's Ferry and by Friday morning possess himself of the Maryland Heights and endeavor to capture the enemy at Harper's Ferry and vicinity.

¹⁹James V. Marfin, "The Lost Orders," Civil War Times Illustrated, Vol. I, No. 5 (August, 1962), pp. 28-29.

Gen. Walker with his division after accomplishing the object in which he is now engaged, will cross the Potomac at Cheek's ford ascend its right bank to Lovettsville, take possession of Loudon's Heights, if practical, by Friday morning; Key's ford on his left, and the road between the end of the mountain and the Potomac on his right. He will, as far as practical, co-operate with Gen. McLaws and Gen. Jackson in intercepting the retreat of the enemy.

Gen. D. H. Hill's division will form the rear guard of the army pursuing the road taken by the main body. The reserve artillery ordnance and supply trains, etc., will precede Gen. Hill.

Gen. Stuart will detach a squadron of cavalry to accompany the commands of Gen. Longstreet, Jackson, and McLaws and with the main body of the cavalry will cover the route of the army and bring up all stragglers that may have been left behind.

The commands of Gens. Jackson, McLaws, and Walker, after accomplishing the objects for which they have been detached, will join the main body of the army at Boonsborough or Hagerstown.

Each regiment on the march will habitually carry its axes in the regimental ordnance-wagon for use of the men at their encampments, to procure wood, etc.

By command of Gen. R. E. Lee.

R. H. Chilton
Assist. Adj. Gen.

Maj.-Gen. D. H. Hill
Commanding Division²⁰

Waving the paper around McClellan said to one general, "Here is a paper with which if I cannot whip 'Bobbie Lee,' I will be willing to go home." To Lincoln McClellan wrote that he had the plans of the enemy and was confident of success. He also gave the President the

²⁰George B. McClellan, McClellan's Own Story, New York: Charles L. Webster Co., 1887, p. 573.

important military information that he had been received enthusiastically by the ladies of Maryland.²¹

The lost Orders No. 191 were issued September 9th, and on the 13th McClellan held the same orders. Six copies of the ill fated order had been issued to (1) Longstreet, (2) Jackson, (3) D. H. Hill, (4) McLaws, (5) Walker, and (6) Lee's official record book. However, Jackson had made a copy of Order 191 from his own orders for his brother-in-law, D. H. Hill. Lee's copy to Hill never arrived and thus must have been the Lost Order. Quite apart from the question of who was responsible for the loss of the document, it should be pointed out that according to one report the orders were found on D. H. Hill's old campsite wrapped around cigars. For what it is worth, D. H. Hill did smoke cigars.²²

Upon receiving Order 191, General McClellan conceived the idea to cut the enemy in two and beat him in detail. He moved with caution because of a Pinkerton report which numbered Lee's army at 120,000 and Order 191 referred to Longstreet as the "main body" of the army at Boonesboro. In reality D. H. Hill and Longstreet's command numbered 15,000 men of which 10,000 were twelve miles beyond Boonesboro at Hagerstown.²³

²¹T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and His Generals, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952, p. 166.

²²James V. Murfin, Civil War Times Illustrated, Vol. I, No. 5 (August, 1962), pp. 28-29.

²³Dwight E. Stinson, "The Battle of South Mountain," Civil War Times Illustrated, Vol. I, No. 5, (August, 1962), pp. 14-15.

By night fall on the 13th McClellan's cavalry, led by Pleasanton, had reached the base of South Mountain. McClellan ordered the bulk of his 87,000 man army toward Middletown to offer fight to Lee's "main body" at Turner's Gap or Boonesboro. Franklin's corps was ordered to relieve Harper's Ferry and destroy McLaws in Pleasant Valley. General Franklin was to attack Crampton's Gap at daybreak, the 14th, and use all "intellect and the utmost activity that a general can exercise."²⁴

General Lee at Hagerstown was quite uneasy owing to reports from Stuart that enemy infantry was approaching Turner's Gap and reports were lagging from Harper's Ferry. General Longstreet and General D. H. Hill suggested to Lee that he concentrate at Sharpsburg rather than Turner's Pass. Lee quickly overruled this idea and sent Stuart and Hill to hold the Gap. Longstreet's command was ordered to join Hill the next morning.(14th).

At daybreak of the 14th, as Hill rode out to study the situation, he heard the rumbling of wheels of the Federals coming up the mountain. Looking for Stuart, he soon learned that J. E. B. had gone to Crampton's Gap to aid McLaws. Hill hurriedly deployed his troops, putting Garland's brigade on his right to hold Fox's Gap (known as the old Sharpsburg Road). Colquit's brigade was to hold the ground dominating Turner's Gap

²⁴Ibid., pp. 14-15.

(see Map III, p. 34). Contact with the Federal army was established at 9:00 A.M. with Cox's division charging vigorously on Fox's Gap. Under a fierce fire General Garland fell with a mortal wound and his brigade broke and was driven from the field. Cox's attack was stopped at Mountain House by G. B. Anderson's brigade and Cox retired to the crest of Fox's Gap. Thus, all action stopped; the first phase of the battle of South Mountain was over.²⁵

McClellan was not surprised that Cox had been repulsed because he felt that he was fighting the "main body" of Lee's army. As the reader will recall, this misconception was gained from "Lost Order 191." D. H. Hill said later that this order was worth 10,000 men to him because it gave him time to strengthen his position. McClellan was also strengthening his position by sending Hooker's corps to the right and Reno's corps to the left. The Confederates were further strengthened when Longstreet's division arrived at 3:30 P. M., although confusion reigned supreme for a time while his troops were deployed.²⁶

The second phase of the Battle of South Mountain began at 5:00 P.M. with the advance of Reno and Hooker. The Confederates fought gallantly, but slowly they were losing ground. Rhodes, on the Confederate extreme left,

²⁵Freeman, II, p. 174.

²⁶McClellan, p. 576.

lost a strategic hill to Seymour, and Drayton's brigade was driven back only to be saved by John B. Hood. Colquitt had turned back a charge by Gibbon's brigade on the National Road (see Map III, p. 34). The fighting lasted until ten o'clock that evening with the casualties numbering 2300 for the Confederates. Federal losses were put at 1831 plus the loss of Federal General Jesse Reno who was killed while inspecting his skirmish lines.²⁷

September 14th found Lee withdrawing to Sharpsburg and ready to retreat from Maryland. The general posted his forces on the Sharpsburg Heights, his line running north and south and lying to the east of Hagerstown--Harper's Ferry Pike (see Map V, p. 36).²⁸ He then sent the following message to McLaws at Harper's Ferry:

General: The day has gone against us and this army will go by Sharpsburg and across the river it is necessary for you to abandon your position (on Maryland Hts.). . . ascertain the best crossing of the Potomac, and if you can find any between you and Shepherdstown, leave the Shepherdstown Ford for this command.²⁹

Lee's fighting spirit was restored when he received a message from Jackson stating: Harper's Ferry will probably fall tomorrow (15th) and his men would rejoin

²⁷Freeman, II, p. 183.

²⁸Warren H. Hassler, General George B. McClellan, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, p. 266.

²⁹Freeman, II, p. 192.

him later.³⁰

General McClellan, jubilant following the Battle of South Mountain, wired General Halleck the following message:

After a very severe engagement the corps of Hooker and Reno have carried the heights commanding the Hagerstown road. The troops behaved magnificently. They never fought better. . . The action continued until after dark and terminated leaving us in possession of the entire crest. It has been a glorious victory.³¹

While the Battle of South Mountain was being fought, Franklin's corps moving on Harper's Ferry was engaged with McLaws at Crampton's Gap (five miles south of Turner's Gap). Franklin deployed his troops after three hours of meticulous preparation, placing Slossum's division on the right and Smith's division on the left (see Map IV, p. 35). The Federal advance was made over open ground and under Confederate artillery fire. The advance sent the Confederates scurrying from the hill and Franklin had won a smashing victory. However, darkness prevented Franklin from following up this victory until the next day. On the 15th, Franklin learned that McLaws had stretched his defense across Pleasant Valley and an attack would be fatal.³²

As the Battle of Crampton's Gap was in full progress

³⁰Ibid., p. 192.

³¹H. J. Eckenrode, George B. McClellan, New York: Van Rees Press, p. 186.

³²Johnson, II, pp. 591-97.

Walker (at Harper's Ferry) heard the gunfire and signalled Jackson that McClellan must be advancing in force. Jackson's reply was that it was probably a cavalry engagement between Stuart and Pleasanton. Walker was not satisfied with that answer and feared if the Federals were given twenty-four hours to surrender at Harper's Ferry, Lee might be in grave danger. Walker then asked Jackson's permission to fire on the fort, but Jackson gave no reply. Seizing the opportunity, Walker placed troops in full Federal view and the "Yanks" opened their fire. This was exactly what General Walker had wanted and all the Confederate guns opened fire. The firing continued until five o'clock that evening and only one or two of the Federal guns were left.³³

On the night of September 14th, the only bright spot of the entire Harper's Ferry affair took place as Colonel B. F. (Grimes) Davis and 1300 Union cavalry escaped Harper's Ferry. They crossed the pontoon bridge north to Sharpsburg and passed through that city at daybreak of the 15th. While crossing the Hagerstown and Williamsport road, Longstreet's ammunition train was captured. The train consisted of 97 wagons and 600 men.³⁴

September 15th dawned foggy at Harper's Ferry and the bombardment continued until 8:00 A. M., at which time

³³Ibid., pp. 609-610.

³⁴Ibid., p. 611.

the fortress surrendered. General A. P. Hill was put in charge of the surrender which netted 12,520 prisoners, 13,000 arms, 73 pieces of artillery, and several hundred wagons. Many of the Union soldiers were curious to see Jackson as he rode in, many saluted him and he returned their salutes. One Union soldier said, "Boys, he's not much for looks, but if we'd had him we wouldn't been caught in this trap!"³⁵

Jackson's troops then prepared two days rations and started for Sharpsburg. The march by Jackson's own admission was "severe." As the regiments, on the morning of the 16th, one after another reached Sharpsburg, the men dropped to the ground and Jackson rode on to report to Lee. Lee was glad to see Jackson for it seemed that the Federals in vast numbers were preparing for a battle and Jackson could help reinforce the thin Confederate line drawn up behind Antietam Creek. Jackson and Lee surveyed the situation and decided McClellan must know their situation owing to the boldness of this usually cautious man. General Longstreet advised Lee against fighting here but was overruled and Jackson relied on Lee's judgement.³⁶

McClellan was organizing his forces for the on-

³⁵Freeman, II, p. 199.

³⁶Ibid., p. 201.

coming battle by reconnoitering, clearing approaches, and massing his cannon on the east side of Antietam creek. The artillery position favored the Federals and they were able to do here what McClellan had done at Malvern Hill. The Union guns could sweep the Confederate positions with a hail of iron. As a result, Sharpsburg was known as "Artillery Hell" for the southern cannoneers.

McClellan's activities are shown by a wire telegraphed to Halleck on the 16th:

The enemy yesterday held a position just in front of Sharpsburg. When our troops arrived in sufficient force it was too late in the day to attack.³⁷

Had McClellan attacked Lee, the Confederate leader would have had fourteen brigades (18,000 men) of infantry compared to McClellan's six corps (75,000 men).³⁸

This morning (16th) a heavy fog has thus far prevented us doing more than to ascertain that some of the enemy are still there. Do not know in what force. Will attack as soon as situation of enemy is developed. . . . The time lost on account of the fog is being occupied in getting up supplies, for the want of which many of our men are suffering.³⁹

From the Pry house where McClellan had established his headquarters came the Union battle plans.

My plans for the impending general engagement

³⁷Freeman, II, p. 202.

³⁸Fredrick Tilberg, Antietam, United States Department of Interior Handbook Series No. 31, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), pp. 15-16.

³⁹Eckenrode, p. 189.

was to attack the enemy's left with the corps of Hooker and Mansfield, supported by Sumner's and if necessary by Franklin's, and as soon as matters looked favorable there to move the corps of Burnside against the enemy's extreme right, upon the ridge running to the south and rear of Sharpsburg, and having carried their position, to press along the crest toward our right, and whenever either of these flank movements should be successful, to advance our center with all the forces then disposable.⁴⁰

The first movement of Federal troops came at 2 P.M. on the 16th, as Hooker marched his troops across the Antietam Creek at the Keedysville Road bridge (upper bridge). Hooker moved in a northwesterly direction until he reached the Hagerstown Pike where he turned southward towards Sharpsburg (see Map V, p. 36). Union soldiers marched down the pike unmolested until about sunset when they ran into Hood's division of Confederates pickets. A short skirmish ensued and Lee was alerted as to the direction from which the main attack would probably come. At midnight more Federal troops crossed the creek under the command of General Mansfield. This XII Corps consisted of two divisions under Williams and Greene. They bivouacked one mile behind Hooker's corps on the J. Poffenberger farm at 2 A. M. on the 17th.⁴¹

It will be helpful in understanding the battle of Antietam to view the engagement in three phases. The

⁴⁰Johnson, II, p. 633.

⁴¹McClellan, pp. 590-91.

battle was actually fought in a piecemeal fashion rather than as an all out attack. It should also be pointed out that the numerical strength of the two opposing armies on the eve of the battle differed greatly. McClellan stated that he had 87,164 men available for duty, this was a careless and misleading figure. The actual combat effectives numbered 70,000 to 75,000. On the Confederate side, Lee contended that his troops numbered less than 40,000 which seems to be a considerate underestimate. Livermore thinks that 51,844 southern effectives were engaged against McClellan at Antietam, but adds the figure might well be 58,844.⁴²

The 17th dawned gray and drizzly, but soon turned into a perfect Indian Summer day. The first phase of the battle began as Hooker's 1st Corps moved southward at 5:30 A.M., on the Hagerstown Pike. Meade's division was in the center with Ricketts and Doubleday forming the flanks. Hooker's objective was to take the high ground around the white Dunker Church where the Smoketown and Hagerstown roads meet. To take this church, Hooker had to pass through a thirty acre cornfield belonging to D. R. Miller and through woods parallel to the cornfield known as East and West Woods. Confederate artillery fire from the East started as soon as it was light. Hooker's answer was to open a frontal artillery fire of grape and canister on the

⁴²Hassler, p. 271.

grayclad infantry concealed amid the high stalks of the cornfield. The Federals then charged toward Miller's barn and cornfield. After running through the cornfield the Union soldiers leaped the fence at the south end of the field only to be cut down by the hundreds. The Northern lines fell and the "Yanks" ran back into the cornfield seeking shelter. On the Union right, Confederates swarmed out of the West Woods to charge Gibbon's exposed guns. Gibbon's gunners double charged their cannon with cannister and forced the Confederates to flee for shelter. On the left, Rickett's division held the edge of East Woods. The fierceness of this battle is shown in Hooker's report of the cornfield fighting.

Every stalk of corn in the northern and greater part of the field was cut as closely as could have been with a knife, and the slain lay in rows precisely as they had stood in their ranks a few moments before, . . .⁴³

The first clash had sent Lawton's staff running to the rear in search of Hood for reinforcements. All Confederate brigades from Early's right had been swept away (see Map V, p.36), and Hood deployed his troops in the southern edge of the cornfield. Hood expresses his fear:

As his veterans doggedly loaded and fired, they had to pass over dead men who lay in rows where the Federal fire had swept them in the first blast of the battle.

⁴³Official Records of the War of Rebellion, Vol. XIX, Part One, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880.

"Never before," said Hood, "was I so continuously troubled with fear that my horse would further injure some wounded fellow soldier, lying helpless on the ground."⁴⁴

General Mansfield's XII Corps entered the field at 7:00 A.M. "to support and relieve Hooker" but before the general could deploy his troops he fell mortally wounded in the East Woods (see Map VI, p. 37). General Williams took over command and tried to gather information from Hooker who had been wounded. Hooker commented about his wound:

My command followed the fugitives closely until we had passed the cornfield a quarter of a mile or more, when I was removed from my saddle in the act of falling out of it from loss of blood, having previously been struck without my knowledge.⁴⁵

Hooker was replaced by Meade who promptly withdrew to regroup; the corps had suffered seriously (2470 killed and wounded) but it was not utterly dispersed as Sumner had falsely told in his reports.

Williams' attack advanced toward the East and West Woods diverging as they moved forth. Greene's division met light resistance as they cleared the East Woods and flanked Hood out of the Miller cornfield. For a time Greene gained a foothold in the West Woods near Dunker Church which he held until 1:30 P.M. On the right or

⁴⁴Freeman, II, p. 208.

⁴⁵Johnson, II, p. 640.

West Woods, Williams met heavy resistance and the Confederates held their line. During this sharp engagement, the Twelfth Corps lost approximately 1,700 men out of about 7,000 engaged. It was now 9:00 A.M., and the second of successive Federal corps attacks had ground to a halt.⁴⁶

Following the Mansfield (Williams) attack, Hood's division fell back to Dunker Church for rest and ammunition. Hood describes the fierceness of the battle in this plea:

For God's sakes, more troops cried Hood. When a brother-officer rode over and asked, "Where is your Division?" Hood answered grimly, "Dead on the Field."⁴⁷

The battle line had changed directions from north to east as a result of the first Union advance. At 9:30 A.M. General Sumner's II Corps of 10,000 men went into action east of Dunker Church. Sumner deployed his men into three battle lines sixty to seventy yards apart without a single regiment as flankers on the right or left (see Map VII, p. 38). The corps moved forward with French's division on the far left, Greene of William's corps holding near the church, and Sedgwick's division to the right. Sedgwick failed to connect his line with Greene and thus his division charged into the West Woods by itself. The effects of that charge were disastrous.

⁴⁶Edward J. Stackpole, "Showdown at Sharpsburg," Civil War Times Illustrated, Vol. I, No. 5 (August, 1962), p. 43.

⁴⁷Freeman, II, p. 209.

Jackson had just placed McLaws and Walker in the West Woods and they hit Sedgwick from three sides. Twenty-two hundred of his five thousand men died or were wounded in fifteen minutes. Sedgwick received his third wound of the day as the troops fell back in disordered retreat. Union artillery stopped McLaws' counterattack but not before the entire Federal line had been pushed back to a line west of the conflict.⁴⁸

For all practical purposes the battle on the extreme right was over by ten o'clock. The results of five hours of fierce fighting on Jackson's front netted 6,000 Confederates killed or wounded, while the Federals lost 7,000 killed or wounded. One-third of McClellan's army (six divisions) had failed to break the Confederate line.⁴⁹ The significance of the battle was shown by McClellan's telegraph to Halleck.

We are in the midst of the most terrible battle of the war--perhaps of history. Thus far it looks well, but I have great odds against me. Hurry up all the troops possible. Our loss has been terrific, but we have gained much ground. I have thrown the mass of the army on the left flank, Burnside is now attacking the right, and I hold my small reserve, consisting of Porter's Fifth Corps, ready to attack the center as soon as the flank movements are developed. I hope that God will give us a glorious victory.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Johnson, II, pp. 643-44.

⁴⁹Edward J. Stackpole, Civil War Times Illustrated, Vol. I, No. 5, p. 198.

⁵⁰Eckenrode, p. 198.

The second phase of the battle of Antietam centered around Sunken Road and the Roulette-Clipp farm buildings. French's division on Greene's left and Richardson's division combined assault drove the Confederates from the farm buildings and the Sunken Road. The Confederates fought fearlessly in defending the Sunken Road. The road was piled full of Confederate dead and came to be known as "Bloody Lane." The fighting was furious--no quarter was asked and none given. The battle raged from 10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. but the Confederates (after losing considerable ground) held their line. The Union army paid a high price for the victory at "Bloody Lane" with the loss of Division Commander Richardson and approximately 3,000 men. General Longstreet summed up the entire battle in referral to his troops:

They were "badly whipped" in Longstreet's words, but they wouldn't admit the fact, and since McClellan didn't seem to know when or where he was ahead of the game, it became evident that Lee was as yet far from licked.⁵¹

At 2:00 P.M. Franklin's VI Corps of 10,000 men crossed the creek and Franklin suggested another attack on Lee's left. Sumner (probably influenced by Sedgwick's defeat) decided against this move as shown by McClellan's writings:

Gen. Sumner expressed the most decided opinion against another attempt during that day to assault the enemy's position in front, as portions of our troops were so much scattered

⁵¹Edward J. Stackpole, Civil War Times Illustrated, Vol. I, No. 5, p. 46.

and demoralized. In view of these circumstances, after making changes of some of the troops, I directed the different commanders to hold their positions. . . .⁵²

Franklin's reserve corps was not committed and remained in support of the Federal right. In the center of the Union lines Fitz-John Porter's V Corps was also held in reserve as was Pleasanton's cavalry. The Union commander turned to defensive measures after realizing this was the only force that stood between the enemy and the Federal supply train on the Boonesboro Pike.⁵³

The final phase of the battle shifts to the Confederate right where D. R. Jones with 2000 men was defending a mile of front against Burnside's four divisions (13,000 men). McClellan sent a message to Burnside at 8:00 A.M. to take the bridge which bears his name. Two couriers and five hours later the bridge was finally taken. Burnside dallied all morning and failed to look for fords on the creek. It apparently never occurred to Burnside or Cox to test the depth of the water in the creek. Had they done so, they would have found that it could have been easily waded at almost any place.⁵⁴

Burnside's first attempt to cross the bridge was given to Colonel George Crook and his three regiments of Ohioans. They formed their battle-lines in a valley

⁵²McClellan, p. 601.

⁵³Tilberg, p. 39.

⁵⁴Edward J. Stackpole, Civil War Times Illustrated, Vol. I, No. 5, p. 47.

one-eighth mile from the bridge, charged over the hills boldly, lost their way, and missed the bridge completely! The Federals came out on a low plateau in the bend of the creek with several rebel guns trained on them. Crook got his Ohioans to the bank and fired at the Confederates but Burnside's first assault was hardly more than a fizzle.⁵⁵

General Burnside's next assault was given to the 51st Pennsylvania and 51st New York.

Colonel Edward Ferrero said, "as a personal request General Burnside wants you to take the bridge, will you do it?"

Some Corporal in the Pennsylvania regiment sang out, "Will you give us our whisky Colonel, if we make it?"

Ferrero blinked and laughed, "Yes, by God," he shouted!

Some days later, at a ceremony with Ferrero getting a brigadier's commission for valor, some Pennsylvanian called out, "How about that whisky?"

Ferrero heard it, grinned and turned his head long enough to say: "You'll get it"-- and next morning a keg of the stuff was sent over from the brigade headquarters and the long dry spell was over.⁵⁶

Needless to say the 51st did cross the bridge at 1:00 P.M. before the Confederate artillery could be trained on them. By 3:00 P.M. the entire II Corps had crossed Antietam Creek and was attacking Jones' brigade on the crest east of Sharpsburg (see Map VIII, p. 39). The attackers moved slowly and cautiously toward Sharpsburg carrying the Confederate brigades of Kemper, Drayton, and

⁵⁵Bruce Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army, Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, pp. 307-08.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 310-311.

Garnett. Jenkin's brigade which was on higher ground held on but by 4:00 P.M. the battle on the Confederate right was nearly lost. Another 1200 yards farther west and the Federals would have cut the Confederates left line of retreat (Sharpsburg-Shepherdstown Road).⁵⁷

Disaster was in the making and at the Confederacy's darkest hour A. P. Hill in his red battle shirt appeared with 3,000 men from Harper's Ferry. When Hill met Lee, tradition has it that Lee embraced him in relief.⁵⁸ After a brief rest Hill's men were deployed on the extreme right and they marched into battle. Hill met Harland's brigade in the cornfield. The new Union brigade allowed Hill's men, who were wearing the blue uniforms that they had captured at Harper's Ferry, to approach too close before being challenged. Suddenly, there was a crash of musketry at short range from the advancing "bluecoats" and the Federals broke in confusion.⁵⁹ In an attempt to bring the Union left into position, Rodman fell mortally wounded. Orders were sent to Willcox and Crook to retire their troops and the entire Union line retreated in good order to the west bank of the Antietam. A. P. Hill fought with such vigor that Burnside's men probably felt that he was still carrying a grudge.

Before the war A. P. Hill and McClellan had been rivals for the hand of the

⁵⁷Freeman, II, pp. 220-21.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 222.

⁵⁹Hassler, p. 289.

beautiful Ellen Marcy daughter of an army officer. She chose McClellan at last, and (as the soldiers believed) Hill carried a great anger against the successful suitor, which accounted for the violence of his attacks, . . . when a rattle of firing aroused the army and told it that Lee's men were attacking, one veteran growled disgustedly: "God's sake, Nellie why didn't you marry him?"⁶⁰

As night fell the battle of Antietam came to a close. The Union soldiers entrenched near the Creek fell to their knees and slept on their rifles. The bloodiest day in American history had come to a close with the Union army losing approximately 12,400 men and the Confederates 13,700 men.⁶¹ This infamous carnage was described by Lieutenant Colonel William H. Powell, the Fifth Corps historian, as he passed over the battlefield.

The historian of this work rode over it. . . particularly that part where Generals Hooker and Sumner fought. He passed where now blighted stalks only indicated the field of waving corn when the battle commenced, and saw the dead lying all through its aisles; then cut into the barren field beyond where bodies attired mainly in Confederate uniforms were lying in ranks so regular that they must have been mowed down in swaths. Burying parties were already busily engaged, and had put away to rest many Union men. Still here, as everywhere, they were scattered over the fields. The ground was strewn with muskets, knapsaks, cartridge boxes, and articles of clothing, with the carcasses of horses, and with thousands of shot and shell. Glancing at each corpse, he passed on the road by the Dunkard Church. Could it be that those were the faces of his late antagonist?

⁶⁰Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army, p. 318.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 293.

They were so absolutely black that they looked as if they might be negroes. Their eyes in many instances were protruding from their sockets: their heads, hands and limbs were swollen to twice their natural size. Their marred and bloated remains, emptied of all that made them manlike-human were simply repulsive.

And thus it was, with an almost sickening sensation he rode over this graveyard of unburied dead. No matter in what direction he turned, it was all the same shocking picture, awakening awe rather than pity, benumbing the senses rather than touching the heart, glazing the eye with horror rather than filling it with tears. And this was the war in all its hideousness.⁶²

The following day McClellan wired Halleck about the battle.

The battle of yesterday continued for fourteen hours and until after dark. We held all we had gained except a portion of the extreme left; that was obliged to abandon a part of what it had gained. Our losses were heavy, especially in general officers. The battle will probably be renewed today. Send all the troops that you can by the most expeditious route.⁶³

Neither army renewed the battle on the 18th but rather spent the day removing the wounded, burying the dead, and giving rest to the fatigued. The night of the 18th, Lee moved his army across the Potomac at Shepherdstown and back into Virginia. The retreat went unmolested by the Union army.

McClellan has been severely criticized for his inaction of Thursday, the 18th of September. The writer

⁶²Ibid., p. 290

⁶³Eckenrode, p. 205.

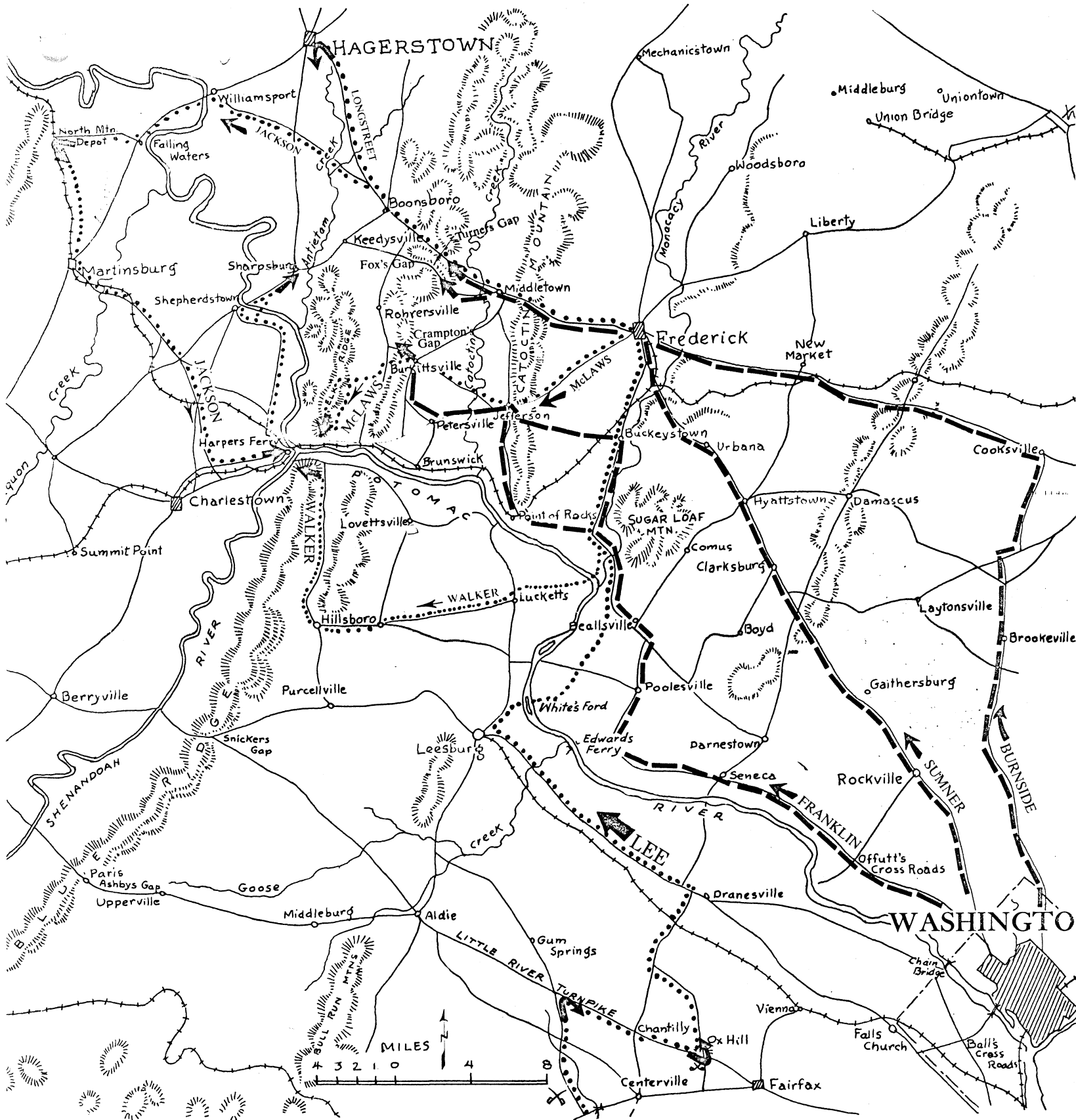
feels that there were several reasons for the Federal commander's inaction. First, McClellan knew the desperate condition of his men, but he did not know that Lee's brigades had suffered even worse. Secondly, most of McClellan's subordinates discouraged the resumption of the attack because of the belief of Lee's superiority in numbers. This belief was based on a mistaken report from the secret service and the error was accepted by officers and men.⁶⁴ Finally, there was no cause for the Union army to risk a serious reverse. Lee's Maryland campaign was ruined and there was nothing left for him to do but recross the Potomac. A renewal of the battle would have given the Confederates a chance to snatch victory out of failure.⁶⁵

The results of the battle of Antietam compelled Lee to alter his strategy and abandon his first invasion of enemy territory. President Lincoln seized this opportunity to issue his Emancipation Proclamation. Lee's repulse in Maryland possibly kept the British government from recognizing Southern independence. Overall, the battle of Antietam was a strategic defeat for the South, a moral victory for the North, and a source of renewed determination on both sides to fight on to ultimate victory.

⁶⁴Freeman, p. 658.

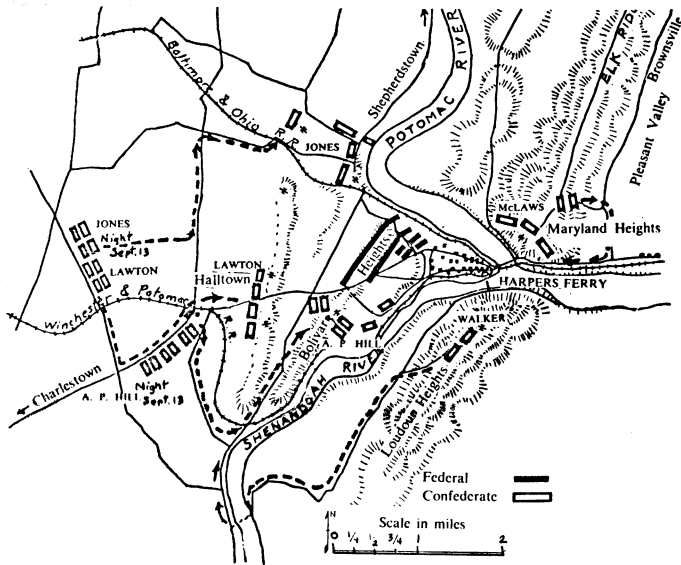
⁶⁵Eckenrode, p. 206.

General Strategy of Maryland Campaign



GENERAL OR STRATEGIC MAP—Lee's route (indicated by a line of heavy dots) is shown from the Manassas battlefield to Frederick, at which point his command divides for the Harpers Ferry operation. The routes of Longstreet to Hagerstown, and Jackson, McLaws, and Walker

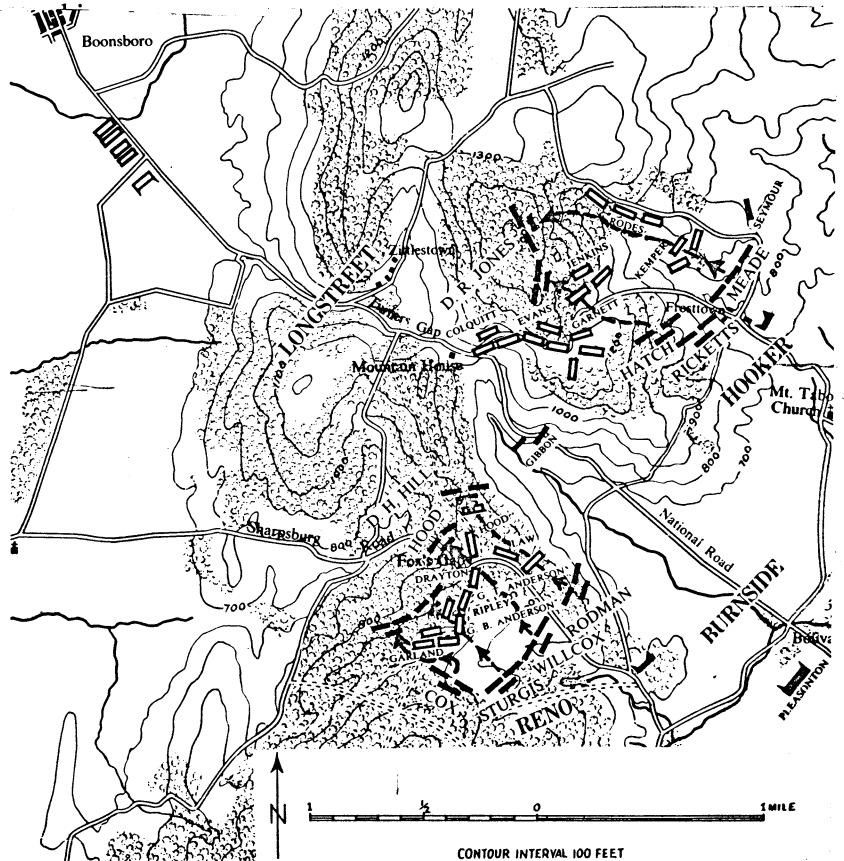
to Harpers Ferry are shown also. McClellan's advance in three columns to Frederick is indicated by heavy broken lines. This advance is then continued as far as South Mountain. The Federal routes from that point are omitted, for clarity, but may be derived from the text.



Map II
Harpers Ferry

CAPTURE OF HARPERS FERRY—The positions of Jackson's divisions—Hill, Lawton, and Jones—on the night of September 13, and their routes from there to their attack positions are shown here. The initial positions of Walker's and McLaws' divisions on Loudoun Heights and Elk Ridge are also shown, together with Walker's route on to Harpers Ferry, and McLaws' route to Maryland Heights, which he captured on the 14th. The Federal lines at the north end of Bolivar Heights are shown as solid lines. The artillery symbols, shown for the Confederates only, represent batteries and battalions, not single guns.

Map III
Turners Gap

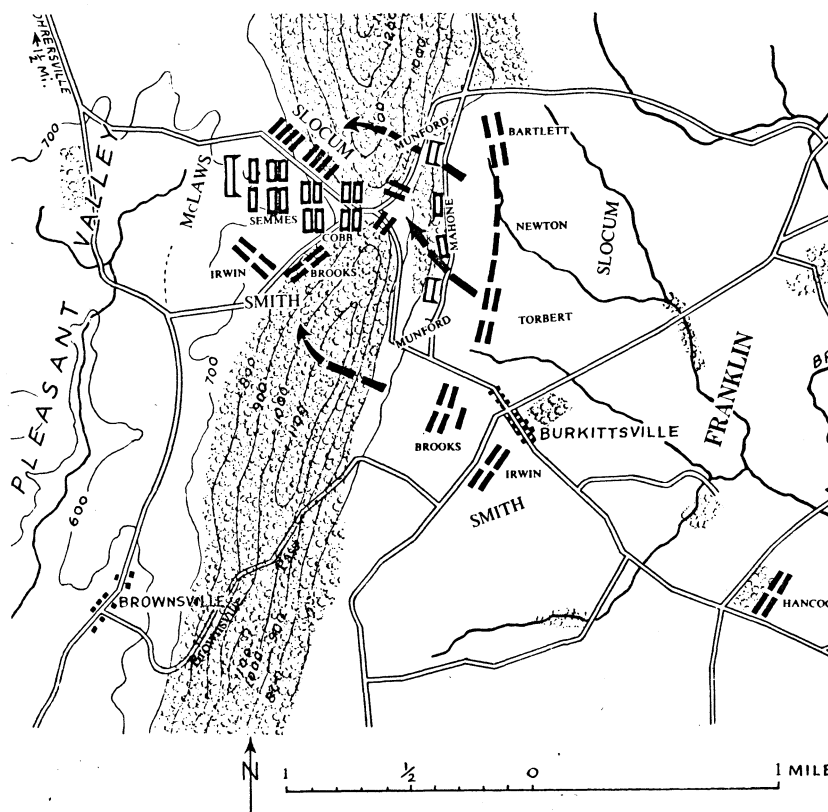


BATTLE OF SOUTH MOUNTAIN—For the Federals the initial and final positions are shown; for the Confederates, only their first positions. The Federal units were committed successively, not simultaneously, but this could not have been portrayed except by using several maps. General Reno fell in Wise's field, which is the small clearing just to the left of the symbol marked "Hood."

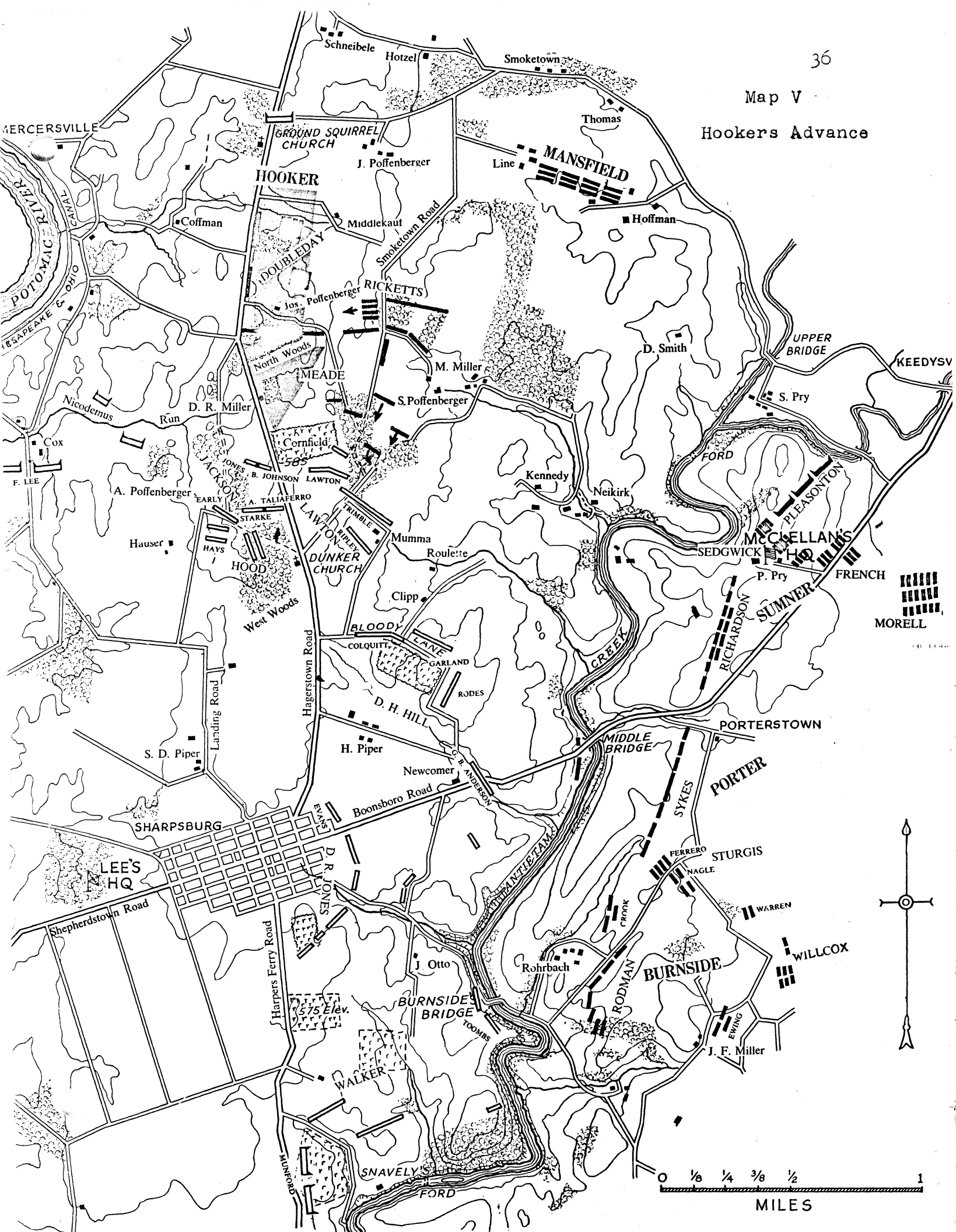
Map IV

Cramptons Gap

BATTLE OF CRAMPTON'S GAP—This portrays the situation at 3 p. m. on Sunday, Sept. 14, 1862, when Franklin launched his attack; and the positions reached by his troops two hours later. The Federal units are indicated by solid rectangles, the Confederates by open symbols.



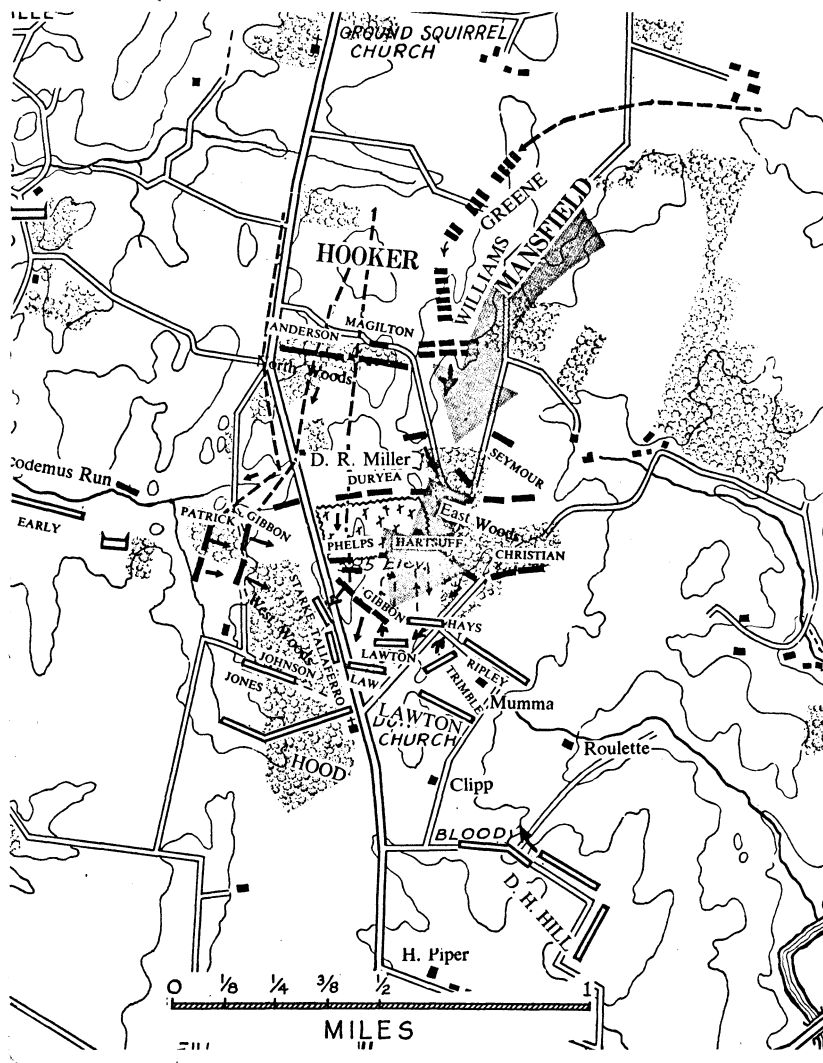
Map V
Hookers Advance



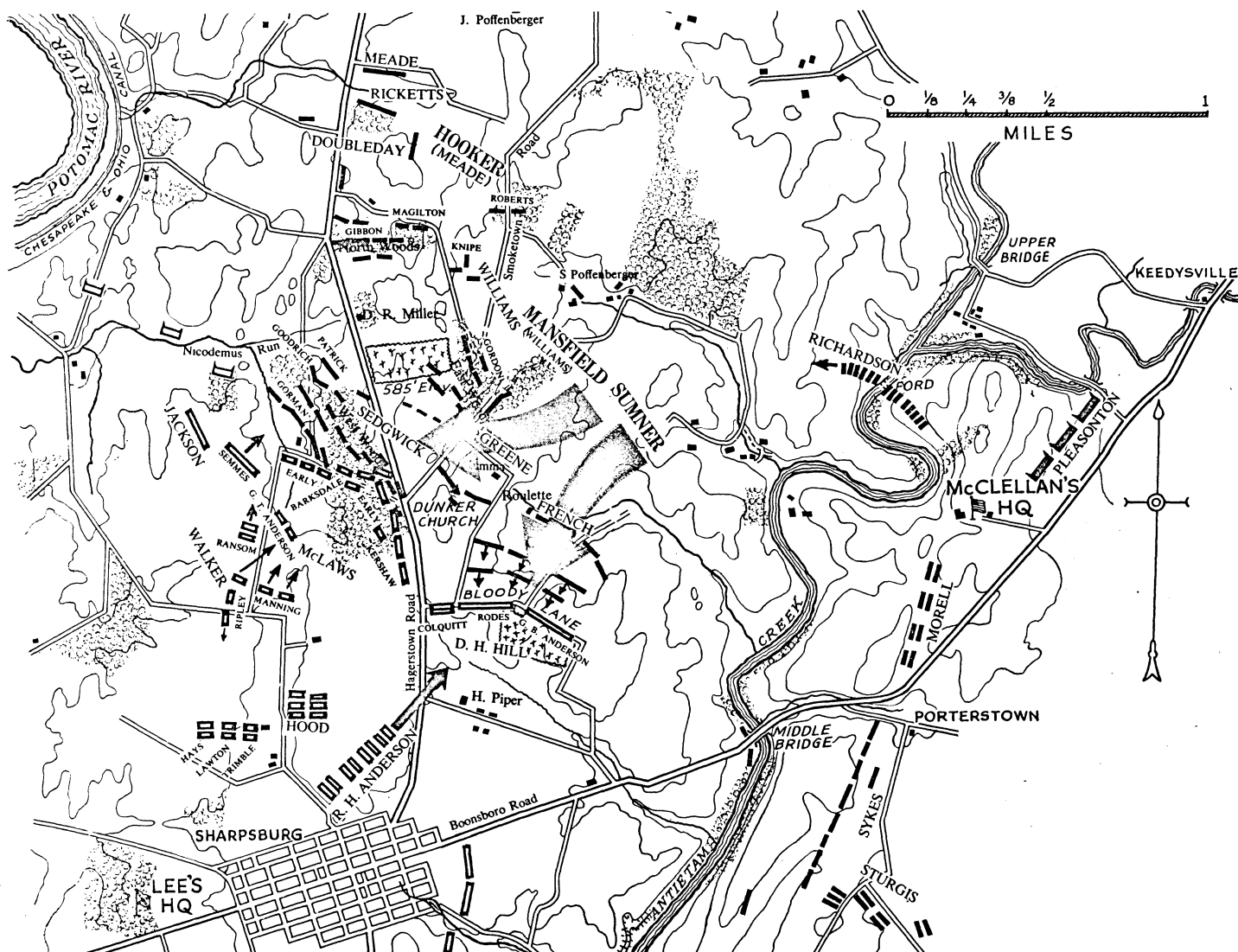
Map VI

Mansfields Attack

SLAUGHTER in the CORNFIELD—The situation about 7 a. m., when Hooker's attack had reached its height, is indicated here. The fighting is swirling around the West Woods and in D. R. Miller's cornfield. Mansfield's XII Corps is coming in to join Hooker. About this time Mansfield is fatally wounded, being succeeded by Brig. Gen. A. S. Williams. Hooker is also wounded, and is succeeded by Meade.



Map VII
Sumners Attack

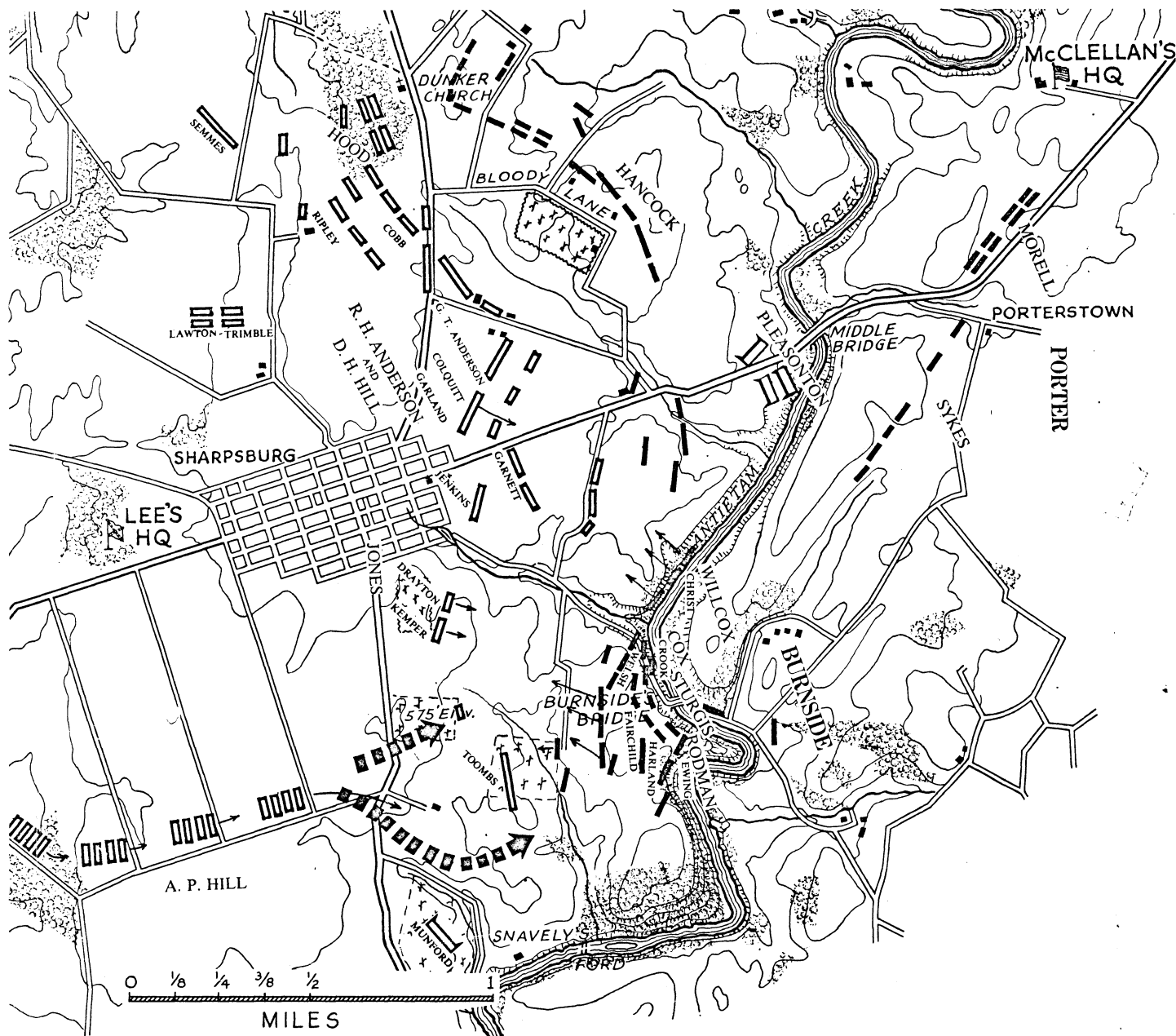


FEDERAL ARMY IS COMMITTED PIECEMEAL—The situation is shown from about 9 to 9:45 a. m. Sumner's corps has been thrown in, and with Mansfield's (Williams') is pressing the attack toward West Woods and also the sunken road (Bloody Lane). Lee's divisions are in

a critical condition, with heavy losses, and being assailed by successive heavy blows. But McLaws is deploying, having just arrived from Harpers Ferry, and Anderson has nearly reached the battle line. This is the moment when Burnside should have attacked on the south.

Map VIII

Burnsides Attack



A. P. HILL TO THE RESCUE—Burnside has finally forced a crossing at the stone bridge which now bears his name, and his divisions are slowly advancing toward Sharpsburg. At this juncture, so critical for

Lee, A. P. Hill's division arrives from Harpers Ferry, and shortly is launched in a counterattack against Burnside's flank. This stops Burnside, and soon McClellan gives up any further effort to attack.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Botkin, B. A. A Civil War Treasury of Tales and Legends. New York: Random House, 1960.
- Catton, Bruce. Mr. Lincoln's Army. Garden City: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1951.
- _____. Terrible Swift Sword. Garden City: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1963.
- Eckenrode, H. G. George B. McClellan. New York: Van Rees Press.
- Freeman, Douglass. Lee's Lieutenants. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943.
- Hassler, Warren W. General George B. McClellan. Shield of the Union. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957.
- Johnson, Robert (ed.). Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. New York: DeVine Press, 1888.
- McClellan, George. McClellan's Own Story. New York: Charles L. Webster Co., 1887.
- Official Records of the War of Rebellion. Washington: U. S. Govt. Printing Office, 1880.
- Sandburg, Carl. Storm over the Land. New York: Harcourt and Brace Co., 1942.
- Williams, T. Harry. Lincoln and His Generals. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Co., 1952.

Articles

- Hoffsommer, Robert. "Jackson's Capture of Harper's Ferry," Civil War Times Illustrated, I, No. 5 (August, 1962), 12.
- Murfin, James. "Lee's Lost Orders," Civil War Times Illustrated, I, No. 5 (August, 1962), 28.
- Naisawald, Vanloan. "Why Confederates Invaded Maryland," Civil War Times Illustrated, I, No. 5 (August, 1962), 19.

Stackpole, Edward. "Showdown at Sharpsburg," Civil War Times Illustrated, I, No. 5 (August, 1962), 6.

Stinson, Dwight. "The Battle of South Mountain," Civil War Times Illustrated, I, No. 5 (August, 1962), 14.

Public Documents

Tilberg, Fredrick. Antietam. U.S. Dept. of Interior Handbook Series No. 31. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961.