



Antietam: The Battle That Changed the Nation

FROM THE ARCHIVES



Just shortly before the battle of Antietam BG John Buford, Jr. was appointed as Chief of Cavalry by MG George B. McClellan. The sword that BG Buford carried at the battle is currently in the RIA museum.

MONTHLY TRIVIA

- 1 Who was identified as the “Angel of the Battlefield” during the battle of Antietam?
- 2 The battle was deadly for General Officers of both sides. How many died as a result of the battle?
- 3 How many times would Harpers Ferry change hands during the Civil War?

ANSWERS FOR AUGUST QUESTIONS

- 1 What did Roosevelt’s “Rough Riders” ride into combat?
➤ Sorry, trick question. Due to the rush to get to the war LTC Roosevelt elected to leave their horses in Florida so the unit could secure passage to Cuba.
- 2 What do we still pay \$4,000 for, as a result of the treaty ending the Span-Am War?
➤ The U.S. attempts to pays Cuba \$4,085 a year to lease Guantanamo Bay as part of the treaty. Cuba refuses to cash the payment. Well, except once when Cuba accidently cashed the payment.
- 3 How much did the three month long Span-Am war cost in 1898 dollars?
➤ It cost the U.S. about \$250 million in 1898 money. About \$10 billion in 2024 with inflation adjusted.

UNION SOLDIER: THAT’S COOL, I FOUND SOME CIGARS ON THE GROUND!

SEES SPECIAL ORDER 191 WRITTEN ON THE WRAPPING PAPER

UNION SOLDIER:



A Confederate courier of the Army of Northern Virginia lost GEN Robert E. Lee’s Special Order 191 which described, in detail, his plans for invading Maryland. Upon receiving Lee’s "Lost Order", MG George B. McClellan, leading the Union Army of the Potomac, would exclaim "Here is a paper with which, if I cannot whip Bobby Lee, I will be willing to go home."

This month, 162 years ago, on 17 SEP 1862 a battle would be fought in central Maryland that would change the scope and direction of the American Civil War as well as having a profound impact upon the Nation to this day. The battle fought along the Antietam Creek and surrounding the town of Sharpsburg, Maryland would involve more than 132,000 Federal and Confederate Soldiers and would result in the bloodiest single day in American history, with a tally of 22,717 combined dead, wounded, or missing.

The battle was unusual for a few different reasons. It was the first large scale invasion of the North by the Confederate Army. The invasion shook the Northern states of the possibility of bringing the war to their doorsteps. MG McClellan (commanding the Federal Army of the Potomac) had received a detailed copy of GEN Lee’s (commanding the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia) plan to invade Maryland and was slow to take advantage of the acquired intelligence. The Federal Army of the Potomac claimed the battle as a victory as it was able to stop the Confederate invasion of the North. The Northern “victory” allowed a stage for President Lincoln to announce the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on 22 SEP. It stipulated that if the Southern states did not cease their rebellion by 1 JAN 1863, then the Proclamation would go into effect. When the Confederacy did not yield, Lincoln issued the final Emancipation Proclamation, declaring “that all persons held as slaves” within the rebellious state “are, and henceforward shall be free.” This proclamation changed the stated purpose of the war which additionally had the impact of driving Britain and France away from official recognition of the Confederate States government. The battle of Antietam would become one of the first in history where photographs of the carnage of battle were made public, forever destroying the remote and romantic nature of how the war was previously seen. The war had further political and military leadership implications where the battle resulted within weeks of the critical Northern midterm elections. The battle provided President Lincoln and his fellow Republicans with not just a military boost, but a badly needed political one as well. Democrats campaigning on the failure of the war had appeared poised to take over Congress, a rebuke of Lincoln that could ratchet pressure on him to end the war. In the 1862 election, however, Republicans gained seats in the Senate and maintained a majority in the House. Additionally, because of MG McClellan’s failure to follow up and destroy the Army of Northern Virginia it escaped back across the Potomac to fight again another day. An impatient Lincoln, whom McClellan once described as a “well-meaning baboon,” berated McClellan to chase and destroy Lee’s retreating Army. After McClellan repeatedly balked at pursuing the enemy, an exasperated Lincoln finally relieved the general of his command in early November 1862.

As a result of the battle of Antietam and inaction by the Federal Army of the Potomac to follow up GEN Lee’s withdrawal, the Confederates were allowed to regroup. This resulted in the battle of Fredericksburg, VA where MG Ambrose Burnside would command the Federal Army after replacing MG McClellan. MG Burnside would lead the Army of the Potomac into the battle that is commonly seen as its most decisive loss during the war and allowed the Confederacy to rebuild its army for future campaigns. The morale of Federal Soldiers hit a new low as President Lincoln would change the commander again following this disaster. The next commander MG Joesph Hooker would do his part to attempt to raise the morale of the Federal Army.



President Lincoln meet MG George B. McClellan at his Headquarters on 4 OCT 1862. He was still encamped near the town of Sharpsburg.

Utilization of enemy equipment stocks.

On 12–15 SEP 1862 the Confederate forces under GEN “Stonewall” Jackson would besiege the 13,000-man garrison guarding the town and former Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry. The Federal Army had garrisoned the town with 14,000 Soldiers under the command of COL Dixon Miles. After being surrounded by more than 30,000 Confederates, bombarded for several days and believing the situation to be hopeless it was decided to surrender the Federal garrison. The surrender would become the largest surrender of American Soldiers until WWII. The Confederates would capture 73 pieces of artillery, 13,000 small arms and large quantities of wagons, supplies and uniforms. Confederate MG A.P. Hill’s Division was left behind to parole the Federal Soldiers and move the captured supplies to Sharpsburg, MD where GEN Lee was consolidating his forces. On 17 SEP MG A.P. Hill receives word of the battle taking place at Antietam and conducts a forced march of 17 miles arriving later that afternoon and halting MG Burnside’s (Federal) breakthrough. In part the Federal breakthrough was stopped due to MG Hill’s arriving Soldiers wearing captured Federal uniforms, causing confusion. This was not done to deceive the Federal Army but instead as a practical way to equip and clothe the poorly supplied Confederates.



H i s t o r y i s m a d e e v e r y d a y i n t h i s C o m m a n d

Cover Image: Ninth Corps troops surge onto Burnside Bridge in the final attack on the span. (Troiani, Don /Bridgeman Images)

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