



2014-121

D. Scott Hartwig, *To Antietam Creek: The Maryland Campaign of September 1862*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2012. Pp. ix, 794. ISBN 978-1-4214-0631-4.

Review by Vince Armstrong, Middle Tennessee State University (mmvarm@aol.com).

The Maryland Campaign of September 1862, Gen. Robert E. Lee's first invasion of the North, has never received the attention given his Gettysburg Campaign in summer 1863.<sup>1</sup> D. Scott Hartwig now seeks to correct this deficiency with a projected two-volume study of the campaign. The first volume, *To Antietam Creek*, covers the campaign up to the eve of the culminating Battle of Antietam. The author is a recognized authority on the Civil War and recently retired Supervisory Park Historian at Gettysburg National Military Park; he has written several previous books (mostly reference works)<sup>2</sup> and many articles on the war, and has served as a frequent commentator on Civil War topics for C-Span and other media networks.

In the book's introduction, Hartwig stresses the pivotal importance of the Maryland Campaign in the progression of the war and the anti-slavery movement.

The American Civil War had taken an abrupt turn during the summer of 1862; it now seemed a real possibility that the Union would not be preserved and that the Confederate States of America would win their independence.... Lee sensed that opportunity lay north of the Potomac. Confederate victory on Maryland or Pennsylvania soil would strike a powerful blow at northern morale, which in turn might influence the upcoming fall elections.... Convinced that the policy of limited war had failed, President Abraham Lincoln was prepared to introduce a policy of emancipation of slaves in those states that were in rebellion, which would sound the death knell of slavery in America. But he needed a battlefield victory to issue his Emancipation Proclamation, lest it be seen as a pathetic gesture of a desperate administration and only embolden and empower his opposition. (2)

The introduction describes the book as "the first attempt to give appropriate attention to South Mountain, Harpers Ferry, and the campaign leading up to Antietam ... [and] a study of command in war, of Lee and George B. McClellan and their lieutenants" (2). Hartwig stresses, too, that "The collective experience of the men who made up the two armies that marched forth into Maryland is no less important to our understanding of these events than that of their commanders" (2-3).

The book's opening chapters provide sufficient background to understand the context of the campaign in the war as a whole without bogging down in a tedious rendition of the Peninsula and Second Manassas Campaigns. Two chapters outline the organization, strengths, and weaknesses of the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of the Potomac.

Four chapters concern the plight and capture of the Harpers Ferry garrison, while six treat the battles for Fox's, Turner's, and Crampton's gaps on 14 September. Intervening chapters fill in the context of these actions; others cover the withdrawal from South Mountain on the 15th and the positioning of the armies for battle on the 16th. Hartwig gives close attention to the division-, brigade-, and regiment-level officers who had to make critical tactical decisions, as well as to the soldiers who went into combat to carry them out.

Hartwig provides occasional new insights into, but no overall reinterpretations of, the leadership of McClellan and Lee. He emphasizes the Union general's preference for "a methodical style of warfare over

1. The first comprehensive history of the Maryland Campaign was Francis W. Palfrey's *The Antietam and Fredericksburg* (1882; rpt. NY: Da Capo Pr, 1996). Eighty years passed before a more modern study of the campaign appeared: James V. Murfin, *Gleam of Bayonets: The Battle of Antietam and the Maryland Campaign of 1862* (1965; rpt. Baton Rouge: LSU Pr, 2004). Two superb, more recent studies are Stephen W. Sears, *Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam* (New Haven: Ticknor & Fields, 1983), and, with a narrower focus, Joseph Harsh, *Taken at the Flood: Robert E. Lee and Confederate Strategy in the Maryland Campaign of 1862* (Kent, OH: Kent State U Pr, 1999).

2. *The Battle of Antietam and the Maryland Campaign of 1862: A Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Mecklar, 1990), *A Killer Angels Companion* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publ., 1996), and, with Ann Marie Hartwig, *Gettysburg: The Complete Pictorial of Battlefield Monuments* (Gettysburg: Granite Publ., 1988).

closing with the enemy and slugging it out” (21). This assertion in the book’s first chapter firmly sets the tone for the author’s analysis of McClellan’s actions, rather than allowing the analysis to determine the ultimate evaluation. For example, of McClellan’s decisions on 16 September, Hartwig writes, “Why was Franklin not ordered to march at once, instead of at daylight, particularly in view of the fact that McClellan believed Lee had been reinforced, so that his Confederate army equaled or exceeded the strength of the Army of the Potomac? The answer might be that it was simply McClellan following his systematic method of making war” (641). But Hartwig is often fairer to McClellan than most other historians. Regarding the advance of the Army of the Potomac from Washington to Frederick, Hartwig writes that

The speed of this movement gave McClellan’s critics an opportunity to claim that it was the Peninsula all over again, with the army creeping forward at a glacial pace. But this ignores the circumstances under which the advance was made and fails to give McClellan credit where credit is due. He reorganized two defeated armies in five days and put them in the field in a serviceable condition, although not in the condition that McClellan would have liked. Some historians have treated this as a trivial event, but it was no simple accomplishment. (201)

Hartwig’s judgment of Lee is based on his rationale for the campaign: “Lee held the initiative, and the question he now pondered was how best to exploit it” (49). Like Joseph Harsh,<sup>3</sup> he sees Lee as concerned to maintain the initiative and his decision to reassemble his army and make a stand at Sharpsburg after South Mountain as the key to the campaign: “Lee was an opportunist, and this characteristic offers some plausible insight into his decision. Only by remaining in Maryland could Lee regain the initiative. If McClellan attacked and was defeated, or if he withdrew into a defensive position, then the Confederate campaign of maneuver into Pennsylvania might be continued” (519).

Hartwig does, however, astutely criticize Lee’s generalship where others have not, pointing out that “since September 2, when the Army of Northern Virginia numbered 75,000 men of all arms, 48 percent—*nearly one-half* of the army Lee had on the eve of his Maryland campaign—were absent from the ranks, with the overwhelming majority of those missing being non-battle losses.... [Yet Lee] considered the risks, great as they were, worth the potential gain. But would there truly be a gain? Even if McClellan were repulsed, Lee’s army was in no shape to renew a campaign of maneuver” (637). For Hartwig’s final judgment of Lee’s leadership, we must await the second volume of his study.

*To Antietam Creek* is, to be sure, a major accomplishment, but it has some deficiencies. It has not been well edited<sup>4</sup> and its map program is inadequate. For example, there is no map of the route of the Army of Northern Virginia from Manassas to the fords of the upper Potomac northeast of Leesburg. The maps of the marches of the opposing armies to Frederick (100, 180) show only their general lines of advance over several days rather than their relative positions at any given time. Much better are the maps of the Harpers Ferry operations and the engagements at Fox’s and Crampton’s Gaps. But Old Hagerstown Road is misidentified on the area map for Turner’s Gap and Fox’s Gap (307), and Mount Tabor Church is mislocated on the maps of the fighting at Turner’s Gap (378, 400). Worse yet, no maps at all illustrate the actions and maneuvers at, for example, Big Spring, Berlin Ferry, Lamb’s Knoll, Frosttown, J. Ripp’s farm, Mentzer’s sawmill, and Hills 700 and 1100.

There is as well at least one questionable interpretation of facts. Hartwig correctly states that McClellan sent an order at 5:50 p.m. on the 16th to Maj. Gen. Edwin V. Sumner, then in command of both his own 2nd Army Corps and Maj. Gen. Joseph Mansfield’s 12th Army Corps. The order directed Sumner to move 12th Corps across Antietam Creek to support Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker’s 1st Army Corps, which had crossed earlier that afternoon to engage the Confederate left.

For no good reason that Sumner could see, McClellan was breaking up his wing command and placing half of it subject to the orders of the upstart Hooker.... Sumner may also have sensed that McClellan was working to demote him, which indeed was the case.... Sumner rode to headquarters and asked McClellan for permission to

---

3. See note 1 above.

4. Misprints are common—e.g., “Confederated” for “Confederates” (255), “in” for “is” (519), and “Charleston” for “Charlestown” (535)—and quotations are superfluously repeated (55/90, 329/338 and 557/559).

move the 2nd Corps across the Antietam as well, so that he might keep his entire command intact. McClellan refused, without further comment, and he reminded the wing commander—now essentially a corps commander again—that Sumner could not move the 2nd Corps until ordered, and that he would not receive those orders until the morning of the 17th. On the eve of the biggest battle he had yet fought in the war, McClellan had dismantled his command structure and sent a clear signal to both of his senior commanders, Sumner and Burnside, that he lacked confidence in them. (639)

But this reading of events is not supported by the sources Hartwig cites.<sup>5</sup> Sumner acknowledged receipt of the order directing him to send Mansfield to “support General Hooker.” The order, which Hartwig quotes in its entirety, refers to Sumner’s 2nd Corps as “the *other* corps of your command” (my emphasis), clearly reaffirming the command relationship between Sumner and Mansfield. Sumner’s report gives no indication that he thought the order was intended to change that command arrangement. Furthermore, the sources do not establish that Sumner visited McClellan’s headquarters on the evening of the 16th. Rather, Carman’s manuscript discusses a visit to McClellan’s headquarters by Hooker, who states in his own official report that, after starting his corps across Antietam Creek, he rode to army headquarters for further instructions. Hartwig makes no mention of this visit.

The book contains three appendices. The first, “Opposing Forces in the Maryland Campaign,” delineates the organization of the two armies—evidently on 16 September—down to the level of infantry regiment and artillery battery, including the names of unit commanders.

In the second appendix, “Strength of Union and Confederate Forces,” Hartwig admits that “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” (675). His chief sources are a master’s degree thesis by John O. Allen (George Mason Univ., 1993) and Ezra Carman’s Maryland Campaign manuscript. A three-column table for the Army of the Potomac shows Hartwig’s calculation of its present-for-duty strength on 2 September (col. 1) and 17 September (col. 3), after the intervening South Mountain/Crampton’s Gap Casualties (col. 2), which do not entirely account for the differences between 2 and 17 September. The table for the Army of Northern Virginia is more complex, showing figures for “September 2, Estimated Present for Duty at South Mountain and Harpers Ferry,” “Estimated Present for Duty on September 16–17,” and “Estimated Stragglers/Sick/Deserters since September 2.” These reinforce Hartwig’s repeated claim that Lee’s army of ca. 75,000 at the start of the campaign had shrunk to ca. 38,000 by 17 September, owing to “poor discipline, hard marching, exhaustion, and the failure of the Confederacy to keep its soldiers minimally supplied with food and adequate clothing” (674).

The third appendix tallies “Union and Confederate Casualties” (to regimental level for the Union and brigade level for the Confederacy) at South Mountain, Crampton’s Gap, and Harpers Ferry. But Hartwig does not indicate the source(s) of these figures<sup>6</sup> or how they were calculated. He does admit, however, that the “tables are not the last word on the army strengths, but rather a departure for further study” (675).

Despite these problems, *To Antietam Creek* makes a very substantial contribution to the scholarship on the Maryland Campaign. It is thoroughly researched and taps previously unused sources. As the most comprehensive work available on the campaign leading up to Antietam, it will inform both historians and casual readers; its gripping narrative forcefully conveys some the excitement that participants in the campaign must have felt. We should look forward to D. Scott Hartwig’s concluding volume on the Battle of Antietam itself.

---

5. Specifically, Sumner’s report of the Battle of Antietam and the Maryland Campaign manuscript of Ezra Carman, a member of the Antietam Battlefield Board from 1894 to 1898.

6. The Federal figures appear to come from the Official Records.