

That Field of Blood Bibliographic Essay

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Because of Antietam's profound significance for the nation, it is no surprise that numerous historians have focused their attention on the events of September 17, 1862. From veterans of the battle writing their own personal accounts to modern historians continually shaping how we view the battle, Antietam has seen its share of changing and evolving scholarship. In order to understand how we understand Antietam today, it is useful to also understand some of that scholarship and how it has set forth various narratives on how Antietam was fought, as well as its meaning. I consulted and drew from the sources mentioned below, as well as those listed in the accompanying bibliography, in writing *That Field of Blood*.

Any research on the military history of the Civil War and its many battles must begin with the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*. A compilation of official reports, casualty listings, correspondence, and much more, the *OR*, as it is commonly referred to, was published by the War Department toward the end of the 19th Century. In its entirety, the *OR* is 128 volumes; Volume 19, parts 1 and 2, deal specifically with Antietam, and provide a wealth of primary source material. This source is vital for any serious student of Antietam.

For additional primary source material, Antietam National Battlefield's park library is full of important documents relating to the battle, ranging from soldier letters and diaries to maps and photographs on the history of the park. A great many of the soldier quotes in this book are drawn from sources in the park library, which are organized by regimental units for each army. Regimental histories and published accounts such as memoirs also provide a treasure trove of first-hand accounts of Antietam.

For the history of the park itself, Park Superintendent Dr. Susan Trail's doctoral thesis "Remembering Antietam" is a tremendous resource, as is Timothy Smith's *The Golden Age of Battlefield Preservation*. For monument dedication speeches, books such as *Pennsylvania at Antietam*, *Antietam: Report of the Ohio Battlefield Commission*, and similar volumes published by state commemorative committees provide a window into how veterans felt upon returning to the fields where they had fought decades earlier. In looking for additional source material on Antietam, D. Scott Hartwig published a compilation bibliography on Antietam in the early 1990s that is most useful for any student or researcher of the battle.

Of all the veterans who wrote about the battle, none was more important or influential than Ezra Carman, who was the colonel of the 13th New Jersey at Antietam. Several decades after the war, Carman became the first historian of the Antietam Battlefield. Tasked with writing a history of the campaign and battle, Carman corresponded with hundreds of veterans, compiling their recollections and accounts into the first true history of Antietam. Carman's work still stands as the definitive tactical account of Antietam and the Maryland Campaign. It has received new prominence in the past decade as historian Thomas Clemens revised and edited Carman's manuscript, publishing it in a three-volume collection with detailed footnotes outlining Carman's sources, providing even more depth for Antietam's most thorough study. Carman's manuscript, with Clemens's fine editorial work, remains the single most important source for any research or writing on the Maryland Campaign. Indeed, this work provided the backbone for my own understanding of Antietam.

While Carman's history of the campaign is still the most important, numerous others have offered their own interpretations of the pivotal events that played out in Maryland in September 1862. In the second half of the 20th Century, several monographs appeared, bringing

Antietam's story to a wider audience. In 1965, James Murfin published *The Gleam of Bayonets*, a richly detailed account of the fighting that helped to shape our modern understanding of Antietam. In 1983, Stephen Sears published *Landscape Turned Red*, which is still the most widely read book on Antietam today. Sears's work is a highly readable narrative of the battle and campaign, replete with tremendous quotes by soldiers, officers, and civilians on what Antietam was like for those who lived it. Almost two decades after Sears, the noted James McPherson added his own voice to Antietam historiography, publishing *Crossroads of Freedom*. While McPherson focused more on the context of Antietam—exploring the battle's significance through its links to the Emancipation Proclamation, the possibility of European intervention, and the broader scope of the war—he also provides a concise account of the battle and campaign itself.

The works of Murfin, Sears, and McPherson are well suited for those attempting to gain a deeper understanding of the battle. However, these accounts all rely on similar judgments and interpretations, some of which are rather dated. For example, each work is very critical of Union general George McClellan, suggesting he dramatically outnumbered Confederates at Antietam by the count of two or three to one. They each suggest that Antietam was something of a tactical stalemate, with McClellan squandering away a greater victory. Despite these arguments, *Gleam of Bayonets*, *Landscape Turned Red*, and *Crossroads of Freedom* are important sources for any student of Antietam.

Over the last twenty years, a new generation of scholarship has emerged on the Antietam Campaign that has proved most useful for helping historians revise their understanding of the battle. Indeed, these works have proved indispensable to my own research and writing of *That*

Field of Blood. Among these more recent works, the most notable is the trilogy by Joseph Harsh on Confederate strategy leading up to, and including, Antietam.

The most important of these three books is *Taken at the Flood*, in which Harsh closely follows Robert E. Lee during the Maryland Campaign, highlighting Lee's strategic calculations that led to his decision to fight at Sharpsburg on September 17. Harsh's study of Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia at Antietam stands alongside Clemens's recent edition of Ezra Carman's manuscript as essential reading on for students of the Maryland Campaign.

Ever since Antietam was fought, historians have struggled with how to analyze George McClellan and his actions there. McClellan has mostly been a piñata of sorts, receiving blame for allegedly failing to properly defeat Lee at Antietam and end the war on September 17, 1862. While Warren Hassler's *Shield of the Union* provided a glowing account of the general in the 1950s (perhaps too glowing), Stephen Sears published *George McClellan: The Young Napoleon* in 1983, a much harsher critique—and a more traditional interpretation of the general. Though published thirty-five years ago, *The Young Napoleon* is, as of this writing, the most recent major cradle-to-grave biography to appear on McClellan.

In 2005, historian Ethan Rafuse contributed a new interpretation of McClellan with *McClellan's War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for the Union*. Focusing on McClellan's life up to his removal as commander of the Army of the Potomac in November 1862, Rafuse focuses on McClellan's strategic calculations, his political and social philosophies, and his rational reasons for acting as he did in battles such as Antietam. This work, alongside that of Joseph Harsh, has helped modern historians to have a much more balanced picture of

Antietam's commanding generals, greatly benefitting the larger field of scholarship in the process.

There are many other volumes which proved helpful in my writing of *That Field of Blood* in addition to those named thus far. In understanding the role photography played in Antietam's aftermath, and how Alexander Gardner and James Gibson documented the horrific battlefield scenes during their visit, William Frassanito's *Antietam: The Photographic Legacy of America's Bloodiest Day* is indispensable. Carol Reardon and Tom Vossler's recently published *A Field Guide to Antietam* (2016) is well sourced and helpful to devoted students of the battle, as is Ethan Rafuse's own battlefield guide (2008). Marion V. Armstrong's *Unfurl Those Colors* is an essential tactical study of the fighting involving the Federal II Corps at Antietam.

For the campaign, D. Scott Hartwig's *To Antietam Creek* is an exhaustive study of the events leading up to, and including, September 16. John Hoptak's *The Battle of South Mountain* is the best book on the crucial fighting of September 14, 1862, and Kevin Pawlak's *Shepherdstown in the Civil War* is extremely useful in following the Confederate army back across the Potomac and understanding the aftermath of the battle.

For the Emancipation Proclamation, the single most important consequence of Antietam, Allen Guelzo's *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation* is a fine history of the statesmanship, politics, and calculations that went into the document which Lincoln himself thought was "the great event of the 19th Century." *The Fiery Trial* by Eric Foner and *Freedom National* by James Oakes are also excellent works covering Lincoln's dealings with slavery, as well as the larger abolition movement.

In writing *This Field of Blood*, my approach was to utilize as many of these works as possible to craft a fresh narrative of Antietam. While the work of Sears, McPherson, and Murfin played an important role in my own journey as a student of Antietam, in this book I tried to incorporate more recent scholarship on the campaign as well. No history of Antietam can be written today without giving due credit to the work of Harsh, Rafuse, Clemens, Hartwig, and many others whose work has updated long standing interpretations of Antietam. My goal with this book was to combine this recent scholarship with primary source material and write the best introduction to Antietam I could, telling the story of Lee, McClellan, Burnside and the rest of those who fought and struggled over the future of the nation at Antietam on September 17, 1862.

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