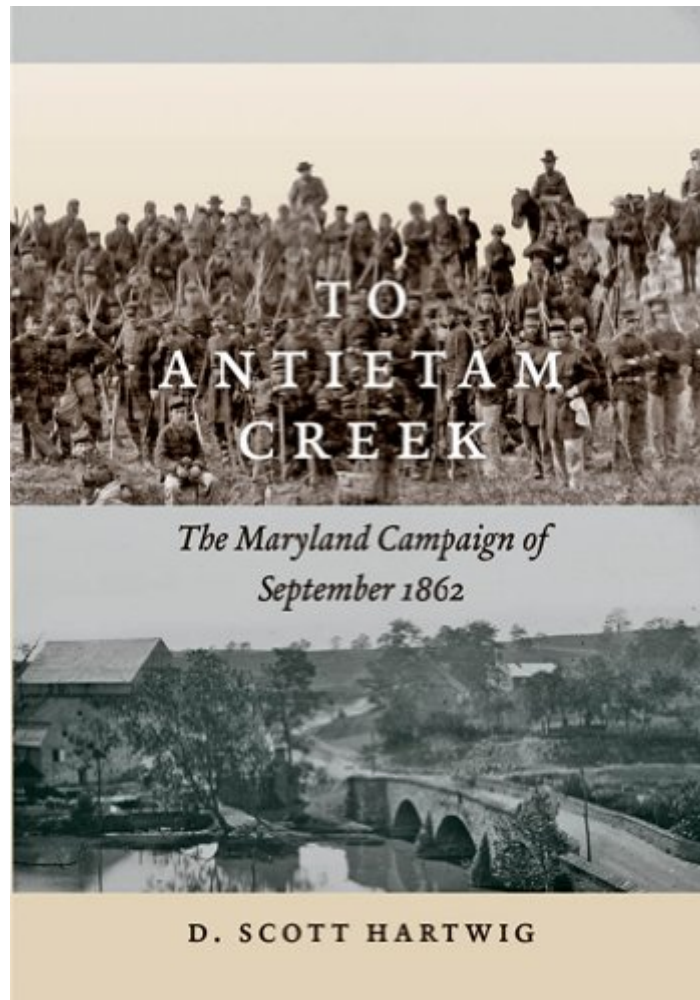




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# To Antietam Creek: The Maryland Campaign Of September 1862



## Synopsis

In early September 1862 thousands of Union soldiers huddled within the defenses of Washington, disorganized and discouraged from their recent defeat at Second Manassas. Confederate General Robert E. Lee then led his tough and confident Army of Northern Virginia into Maryland in a bold gamble to force a showdown that would win Southern independence. The future of the Union hung in the balance. The campaign that followed lasted only two weeks, but it changed the course of the Civil War. For the sesquicentennial of Antietam and the Maryland Campaign, D. Scott Hartwig delivers a riveting first installment of a two-volume study of the campaign and climactic battle. It takes the reader from the controversial return of George B. McClellan as commander of the Army of the Potomac through the Confederate invasion, the siege and capture of Harpers Ferry, the day-long Battle of South Mountain, and, ultimately, to the eve of the great and terrible Battle of Antietam.

## Book Information

File Size: 8619 KB

Print Length: 807 pages

Publisher: Johns Hopkins University Press (September 10, 2012)

Publication Date: September 10, 2012

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B0099SMY1W

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #473,355 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #38

in Books > History > Americas > United States > Civil War > Campaigns & Battlefields > Antietam

#367 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics &

Government > Specific Topics > National & International Security #597 in Kindle Store > Kindle

eBooks > History > Americas > United States > State & Local > Mid-Atlantic

## Customer Reviews

I knew from day one that I wanted to write a review of this book. I probably have not said anything different from many other reviewers. But I think my experience as a long time Antietam Battlefield volunteer and guide who has walked the battlefields of the Maryland Campaign, give me a different and useful perspective from the usual rank and file book reviewer. My battlefield tours wont fundamentally change as a result of reading TAC. Like this book, I attempt to interpret the Maryland Campaign and Battle of Antietam objectively and factually. But the book's completeness, numerous insights, deep analysis and great stories will add a new richness and depth to my tours and programs that I would not otherwise have had I not read the book. Mine was not a cursory skimming of the book but a thorough note-taking margin scribbling underlining and highlighting expedition. Over the past three months, I have read it thoroughly, looked at virtually all the footnotes and scoured the bibliography. I can now say unequivocally that this is the best book I have ever read on the Maryland Campaign. And I have read many books. My small 400-volume library contains primarily studies of the Maryland campaign and the leaders and soldiers who fought there. What Scott Hartwig has done is to put it all together. He incorporates first person, primary source material not typically seen. He acknowledges and uses the foundational work of Carmen. He refers to events in the Antietam Studies at the National Archives that I have not seen elsewhere. He acknowledges and integrates the scholarship of Harsh, Rafuse and Sears in a fair and meaningful way. He disabuses many myths. The result is a balanced, readable, evocative, and thoroughly enjoyable work. For the first time, there is a complete telling of the Battle of Harpers Ferry. All the gap battles of South Mountain are covered. I was very pleased to see that the fighting at the Frosttown Gap that sometimes seems to take a back seat in some studies was prominently treated. While serious civil war students will learn much, general readers will benefit from the fact that Hartwig takes the time to explain many of the technical terms that would otherwise be lost to them. He explains what a column of divisions is, and thoroughly describes artillery organization, just to name two examples. What is particularly important for a margin scribbler like me is the immense detail. One is never left in any doubt how many infantry, cavalry or guns are in a particular fighting organization. We experience every fight from the first cavalry skirmishes around Poolesville through Solomon's Gap, and Quebec Schoolhouse to South Mountain and Harpers Ferry. One of Scott's talents is to clearly depict fighting at the tactical level. We visualize every bend in the road, clump of trees, or row of fences on the field. We smell the gunpowder and hear the cries of the men. It is great battlefield story telling no doubt polished by years as Gettysburg's Chief Historian. Essential to the book are its seventeen well-crafted maps. Hartwig takes on many of the interpretive myths. The size of McClellan's army is smaller than many think. The Federals suffered just as much as the Rebels

from straggling and disorganized logistics. Union staff officers were outstanding. The ANV with several major exceptions was markedly inferior in this category. Sumner and Burnside may not have been the greatest wing commanders but they receive their dues here. We understand the superior organization of the Confederate artillery at the time of the battle. And we learn that there were several very good Union cavalry regiments that fought well in the Campaign and they are not the ones who fought their way out of Harpers Ferry. Jackson, Stuart and Longstreet were arguably among the greatest battlefield leaders of the war but we also see them for the human beings who they are. McClellan, the perennial whipping boy of the Civil War at long last gets the treatment that he deserves. Hartwig is unforgiving in many ways but he is was objective and balanced. No one on either side of the McClellan debate (myself included) should argue with this. The analysis is excellent. You have to read it yourself. Hartwig beautifully describes the overall condition of the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of the Potomac in two stand-alone chapters. These are so good that I use them as a primary reference source for training of potential Antietam Battlefield Guides. There has never been as good a description of the movement to contact of the armies on September 15th and 16th as I see here. And the final hours before the armies begin their death struggle, on a pitch-black rainy night have never been told so well. The narrative hearkens back at some level to Bruce Catton's own masterful description of the moments before the Battle of Antietam begins. There are some great extras. Appendix B Strength of Union and Confederate Forces is the best one-stop resource available to the general reader on the numbers. Don't overlook the notes. There is a veritable Sounding the Shallows here in the 84-page collection of 1,422 notes. You will miss out if you skip them. To some who would dismiss this book as just a story of the events up to Antietam, I would answer that this book is a necessarily foundation to understanding the tactical battle that Hartwig will treat us to when the second volume comes out. If you want to learn more about the Maryland Campaign than you can from any other book, you must move this one to the top of your reading list. If you have hesitated to get this book because of its massiveness, get over it and buy the book. From the first to the last, *To Antietam Creek* will reward you with the best-told story of the Maryland Campaign ever produced. Now we wait for Volume Two.

*To Antietam Creek: The Maryland Campaign of September 1862*, D. Scott Hartwig, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012, 8 black and white images, 17 maps, 3 appendices, bibliographic notes, essay on notes, index, 794pp., \$49.96. Release date: October 15, 2012. Both literally and figuratively, all other treatments of The Antietam Campaign may well stand in the shadow of Scott Hartwig's *To Antietam Creek: The Maryland Campaign of September 1862*. Having 800 pages and

weighting three pounds, nine ounces, *To Antietam Creek* will be larger than any other book on most bookshelves. And . . . this is only half the campaign. Chapter one begins on August 30 with George McClellan smoking a cigar and requesting by telegram to rejoin the elements of the Army of the Potomac that are under the command of John Pope. The final chapter concludes with infantrymen and artillerymen in a restless sleep on the Henry Piper farm, George Line farms and the German Lutheran Church in Sharpsburg during the hours before dawn of September 17. The narrative style is reminiscent of Bruce Catton's *Army of the Potomac* trilogy. The maps are clear, precise and well labeled. The September 14 Battle of South Mountain is described in seven chapters covering 221 pages. The capture of Harpers Ferry is covered in four chapters totaling 128 pages. Tom Clemens of the Save Historic Antietam Foundation states "By far the best work done on the Maryland Campaign . . . [it] will set the standard for many, many years to come." Yes, it looks that way.

The sesquicentennial of the Civil War had been pretty quiet for most of the year. It had even slipped up on me. I didn't realize it was upon us until last year when I read a review of a book in the NY Times book review and it mentioned it. But it seemed to be passing by pretty quietly, that is until the anniversary of the Antietam Campaign opened a floodgate of books upon us. Almost all these books comment in their introduction on the paucity of books on the subject considering its importance. No more though. The beauty of many of these books is that they complement each other. Leading the way was the publisher SAVAS BEATIE, who this year produced Brian Jordan's work on the battles of South Mountain "Unholy Sabbath". Then there was the latest entry in Brian Gottfried's Atlas series "The Maps of Antietam", followed by the second volume of Ezra Carman's indispensable book on the Maryland Campaign. From other publishers came Richard Slotkin's "Long Road to Antietam" that focuses on the politics and strategy of the campaign. And last but not least the subject of this review Scott Herwig's "To Antietam Creek" which promises to be the last word on this campaign. This is a massive 800 page book that is easily the biggest book on my Civil War bookshelf, and this is only volume one! Chapter one starts off with a concise overview of the war in the East from the time McClellan took over as Union commander. The second chapter looks at the Army of Northern Virginia at the time the campaign begins. One of the advantages of a long book is being able to deal with things that are often ignored in most books, and Herwig takes advantage of that with the type of look at the Army that you rarely see in most books. The next chapter deals with the actual Confederate invasion of Maryland up to the occupation of Frederick. Chapters 4&5 deal with the Army of the Potomac and its movements into Maryland. Chapter 6 deals with Harpers Ferry and so on. Herwig is fair in his dealings with Lee and McClellan in my opinion. He tells his

story well without getting bogged down in reminiscences and battle detail. One surprising aspect of the book is that it takes its story down to the eve of the battle rather than after the fall of Harpers Ferry as most two part books would do. The author gives an explanation for this in his introduction. The reason I give this book four stars rather than five are the maps. There are 17 maps in the book which is far too few for a book with 650 pages of text. The quality of the maps fall in the I've seen better and I've seen worse category. I recommend that you read this book with Gottfried's atlas book close at hand. I would also like to have seen photos of some of the leaders described in the book. All in all this is a must book for Antietam and Civil War buffs though maybe a little too dense for the casual reader. When it's finished this will be the standard work on the Antietam campaign for decades to come.

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