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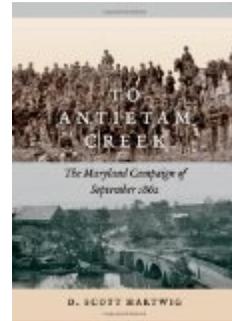
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

D. Scott Hartwig. *To Antietam Creek: The Maryland Campaign of September 1862*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012. 794 pages. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4214-0631-2.

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Bloody Prelude to the Bloodiest Day

Of the many famous and terrible episodes of the American Civil War, the Maryland Campaign of September 1862 has simultaneously been one of the most well known and misunderstood. In *To Antietam Creek: The Maryland Campaign of 1862*, the first of a two-volume series, D. Scott Hartwig provides a thoroughly detailed narrative of the campaign during the days before the Battle of Antietam. He examines the major personalities who planned and executed operations, surveys the results of their efforts, and evaluates the effects of their decisions on the outcome. His work also reveals the terrible human cost of battle as well as the blunders committed by generals on both sides and at all levels of command.

Hartwig's well-researched work has many strengths. He provides excellent, fair analyses of the personalities and major decisions on both sides of the campaign. In his work, Robert E. Lee does not emerge as a flawless "Marble Model" who seemingly read McClellan's mind, but neither is he a reckless, possibly bloodthirsty commander who callously disregarded the condition of his men when he decided to invade and then remain in Maryland. Similarly, Hartwig repeatedly demonstrates that George B. McClellan was not the same incredibly timid commander he had been on the Virginia Peninsula, but was in fact slowly learning how to more aggressively manage an army on the march and commit it to an offensive against the invading enemy. Additionally, Hartwig does not neglect the less prominent figures of the campaign; he examines the perspectives and mistakes of both Lee's and McClellan's subordinates, showing how Lee's

command structure worked more smoothly than McClellan's even while the Army of Northern Virginia lacked a formal corps organizational structure. Lee, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, James Longstreet, and J. E. B. Stuart did not work perfectly together, but they usually trusted each other and their relationship was free of the political backbiting that characterized McClellan's relationship with many of his subordinates and with the U.S. government.

These excellent descriptions and insights are evident in Hartwig's narratives of the Harper's Ferry and South Mountain operations. Unlike many others, Hartwig never dismisses Harper's Ferry commandant Colonel Dixon Miles as merely an incompetent drunk whose blundering resulted in the largest surrender of U.S. troops until World War II. While Hartwig provides abundant examples of Miles's unfitness for command, he also makes clear that the post commandant was placed in a very difficult situation by Union general-in-chief Henry Halleck and was saddled with subordinate commanders and green troops nearly as inept as himself. Hartwig's work also explicitly shows that the sudden Union surrender on September 15 was not the result of treason, but of the terrifying effect of the Confederate artillery surrounding and enfilading the Federal position there. On the Confederate side, Hartwig convincingly debunks many long-held assumptions that Major General Lafayette McLaws was somehow negligent in either seizing Maryland Heights from the Harper's Ferry defenders or in marching his two divisions to the Sharps-

burg battlefield after the Union garrison at Harper's Ferry had surrendered. To the contrary, Hartwick shows that McLaws not only received the toughest assignment of any under Special Orders No. 191, but also carried it out with as much promptness and efficiency as possible under the very difficult circumstances he faced.

Hartwick thoroughly describes and analyzes the Battle of South Mountain, one of the most confusing engagements of the entire war. He raises many interesting questions concerning the traditional narrative that Confederate major general Daniel Harvey Hill held out heroically and mostly flawlessly against overwhelming hordes of Union attackers. Although Hill certainly faced far superior enemy forces, he had made his own situation worse by neglecting to call up his whole division as rapidly as he probably should have. Moreover, both he and cavalry commander J. E. B. Stuart utterly failed to keep in contact with each other. Hartwick's narrative reveals mistakes at nearly every level of the Confederate high command during the battle. Brigade commanders like Roswell Ripley and Thomas Drayton committed errors that cost many lives. Lee himself overtaxed Longstreet's men by not commencing their march back to South Mountain from Hagerstown as soon as he might have. Similarly, although Union generals like Jesse Reno, Jacob Cox, and George Meade performed well at South Mountain, the Union victory was incomplete thanks to the hesitancy of Federal generals like William Franklin and, to a lesser extent, McClellan himself.

In addition to his narrative, Hartwick provides highly interesting comparative evaluations of both armies at the commencement of the campaign and demonstrates what effect these attributes had on its outcome, thus overturning many long-held beliefs regarding the relative state of the antagonists in September 1862. As he shows, while the Army of Northern Virginia lacked the theoretically clear command structure of the Army of the Potomac, McClellan's repeated tampering with his corps and wing command organizations largely nullified his ostensible advantage in organization, and the Confederate army reacted far more swiftly and efficiently to Lee's commands than the Union army responded to McClellan's wishes. Hartwick reveals that the oft-repeated claim that Lee faced overwhelming Union numbers in Maryland is false; McClellan's army was not much larger than Lee's when the campaign began, and much of it was composed of very green units who had never learned how to march or use their weapons properly. In the midst of this analysis, Hartwick makes the startling observation that Union infantrymen and cavalymen were actually

armed with weapons inferior to those of their opponents, and in one instance even salvaged Confederate weapons from the South Mountain battlefield. While the Federals did possess vastly superior artillery, the Confederate cavalry retained a large advantage in its training, morale, command organization, and leadership. Thus, Hartwick argues, the opposing armies in the Maryland Campaign were actually somewhat evenly matched before General Lee's acute supply crisis and the hard marching he put his army through resulted in extremely high rates of straggling.

In his analysis of the opposing armies in Maryland, Hartwick goes beyond traditional approaches and examines the general and personal staffs of McClellan and Lee. He argues that McClellan's staff was far superior to Lee's, both in military professionalism and in enforcing the general's will on his subordinates. Many previous writers have used the chronic supply problems of the Confederate army, for which the general staff was responsible, to heap criticism on Lee's personal staff of aides and secretaries. Hartwick, however, directly declares that Lee's personal staff, which was not directly involved in logistical matters, was lacking in its own right and that it compared poorly with McClellan's. This assertion stands in sharp contrast to many who have criticized the Union commander for having an unnecessary and wastefully ostentatious large staff entourage. Interestingly, Hartwick does not examine the loss of Special Orders No. 191 in detail, as this was probably the best-known failure of Confederate staff work throughout the war, but he gives examples of other mistakes committed by Lee's staff officers and emphasizes the fervent activity of McClellan's staff.

Herein lies one of the few problems in Hartwick's work; he claims that Lee's staff was inferior to McClellan's, yet provides multiple examples of the latter's failing to overcome the stubbornness or timidity of generals like Franklin and Ambrose Burnside. He also does not consider the fact that Lee's best-known and most capable staff member, Walter Taylor, was absent during most of the campaign rounding up Confederate stragglers and trying to prevent President Davis from crossing the Potomac to join the army. In Taylor's absence, Colonel Robert Chilton, who is usually cited as the prime example of Lee's headquarters' incompetence, played an even larger role than he usually did, and in fact was responsible for losing Special Orders No. 191. Additionally, the book details McClellan's actions throughout the Battle of South Mountain, yet never points out that Lee could not be present to see any of this particular battlefield, as his

injured hands had not yet healed and he was still forced to travel by ambulance. In such circumstances, Lee did not attempt to direct any of his subordinates, either in person or through his staff officers. Since his personal staff officers could thus do little constructive work to assist him in maintaining control over his army, Lee still sent them all away to observe the action and keep him personally informed. Hartwick's book also contains a number of typographical errors, mostly inconsequential in nature.

Overall, though, *To Antietam Creek* is a masterfully detailed and exceptionally well-written narrative of the

Union and Confederate perspectives on the Maryland Campaign leading up to the bloodiest day in the history of the Western Hemisphere. It skilfully examines the armies and the men who both commanded and served in them. It disentangles complicated battle narratives and provides balanced coverage of the personalities and major decisions of the campaign. Finally, it deconstructs many persistent myths about the campaign and uses abundant evidence to support its conclusions. It should serve as a definitive work on the buildup to Antietam, and its companion volume should be eagerly awaited.

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