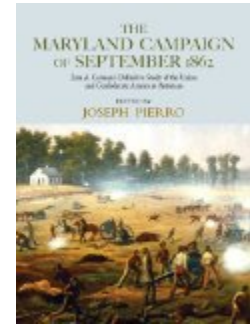


Ezra A. Carman. *The Maryland Campaign of September 1862: Ezra A. Carman's Definitive Study of the Union and Confederate Armies at Antietam*. Edited by Joseph Pierro. New York: Routledge, 2007. xii + 516 pp. \$95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-95628-4.

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The Resurrection of Ezra A. Carman's History of the Antietam Campaign

For nearly a century, Ezra A. Carman's *The Maryland Campaign of September 1862* lay dormant within the Library of Congress, but editor Joseph Pierro's efforts have made it widely available for the first time. Pierro clearly states that his objective is not to offer Carman's work "as a springboard for engaging the totality of primary sources pertaining to the Maryland campaign ... [nor] to deconstruct Carman's entire manuscript in the context of a comprehensive critical study" (p. xii). Instead, he wishes to "make Carman's text readily available for scholars and enthusiasts alike to engage on its own terms: as the definitive account of how the campaign was understood by the man who literally cast its official history in iron" (p. xii).

Carman dedicated his life to the Civil War. He served as colonel of the 13th New Jersey at the battle of Antietam. By the time Carman was mustered out of the Union Army in 1865, he had participated in twenty-three battles. Approximately one year after the war, the governor of New Jersey appointed him to serve as the state's trustee on the Antietam National Cemetery Association. In 1894, he was hired as a historical expert at the Antietam National Battlefield.

According to Pierro, "little is known about the editorial history of *The Maryland Campaign of September 1862*" (p. xi). The editor assumes that Carman conducted the majority of his research after his appointment to the Antietam Board in 1894. Although he does not provide

any evidence to support this claim, Pierro writes that "internal evidence demonstrates that the manuscript passed through a number of drafts, and it may not even be the case that Carman considered the book to be in its final form at the time of his death" (p. xi). The manuscript that currently resides in the Library of Congress may, in fact, be an unfinished draft, but Pierro has decided to treat it as a final copy intended for publication.

Readers must take note of Carman's sources. These are a hybrid of his wartime experiences, oral interviews, and a plethora of manuscript sources. Carman also relied heavily on the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* (1880). Throughout the book, Pierro meticulously verifies Carman's citations and provides clear footnotes. Unfortunately, Carman neglected to cite certain sources making this information irretrievable, and the editor makes note of these instances.

Carman began by studying Maryland—the scene of the battle—at the beginning of the war. After discussing the state of affairs in Maryland, he proceeded to write about the Confederate invasion of this border state. More specifically, he examined the Confederate decision for a Northern incursion as well as describing the Army of Northern Virginia's movements throughout the campaign. The narrative proceeds by describing the state of the Army of the Potomac before the Antietam campaign.

After John Pope's defeat at Second Bull Run, Abraham Lincoln and Henry Wager Halleck called on Union

General George B. McClellan to restore order to the Union armies in the east. Rallied, Union forces marched out of Washington DC to thwart the Army of Northern Virginia's invasion of Maryland. Carman's description of the Union march is full of excellent detail. For example, he reported the problems associated with stragglers and the disorganization of the quartermaster department. Carman complemented descriptions of military movements with depictions of civilian reactions. According to Carman, "Lee's entrance into Maryland was the signal for intense excitement in Pennsylvania.... [T]he farmers ... trembled for their safety, and every effort was made to remove everything as far as possible from the grasp of the invader" (p. 98).

The battle of Antietam constitutes the climax of Carman's book, and he sought to bring order to this chaotic event. Before providing a bullet-by-bullet account of the engagement, Carman cited Francis Winthrop Palfrey to the effect that battle history is exceedingly difficult to produce: "Participants in real fighting know how limited and fragmentary and confused are their recollections of work after it became hot. The larger the force engaged, the more impossible it is to give an accurate presentation of its experiences" (p. 214). Having fought at the battle himself, Carman understood the confusion that occurred at Antietam.

Carman next addressed the particulars of the battle. The first chapter on this topic, "The Field of Antietam," describes the battlefield and will prove invaluable to military historians. Although the National Park Service impeccably preserved the Antietam battlefield, time has undoubtedly altered the landscape. Carman's descriptions provide insight into the topography and how it affected the armies, "the turnpike, country roads, and farm lanes gave ready access to all parts of the field upon which, save along the banks of the Antietam itself, there were no obstacles to the movement of troops and but few to the passage of artillery. The undulating character of the ground, rolling into eminences of all dimensions ... then sinking in places to broad and deep ravines or basins in which a corps could be hidden, made it possible to move large bodies of troops from one point to another with secrecy and comparative safety. The Confederates took full advantage of this peculiarity of topography before and during the battle" (p. 196). Carman's description, penned during the nineteenth century, will aid those interested in the terrain at the time of the engagement.

Carman's depiction of the woods surrounding Antietam is interesting. Woodlands on many Civil War battle-

fields have changed dramatically. Once traversable eastern forests have become plagued by dense undergrowth. Previously barren land now contains trees. Conversely, wooded areas have been felled. Carman's descriptions will help historians capture a glimpse of the Civil War that nature has obscured. With regard to the famous West Woods, he wrote, "this woodland is full of outcropping ledges of limestone, affording excellent cover for infantry.... [T]he West Woods [was] remarkably free from undergrowth ... offering but slight impediment to the movement of troops" (p. 198). Illuminating battlefield descriptions from an Antietam veteran will be valuable to historians seeking knowledge of the terrain.

After explaining how the armies arrived at Sharpsburg and describing the terrain on which the battle evolved, Carman produced a comprehensive narrative of the engagement. He divided the battle into its three principle phases. He wrote that "the battle of Antietam (or Sharpsburg) was really three engagements at different hours of the day, on entirely different parts of the field" (p. 215). As one of the first writers to describe the battle in this fashion, Carman created what has become a convention among historians. The old soldier proceeded to examine the engagement beginning with the Union right flank. He divided this section into consecutive hours. The more famous locations on the battlefield, such as the West Woods, Dunkard Church, Sunken Road, and Burnside's Bridge, receive their own chapters. Carman ended his section devoted to the battle by criticizing McClellan. With regard to McClellan's performance, he wrote that "more errors were committed by the Union commander than in any other battle of the war" (p. 363). Ultimately, Carman's respect and admiration rested with the men who fought and died at Antietam. "Every state from the Great Lakes on the North to the Gulf of Mexico on the South, from the Atlantic to the Mississippi, and (with the exception of Iowa and Missouri) every state watered by the Mississippi contributed to this carnival of death and suffering" (p. 363).

Carman concluded with Lincoln's removal of McClellan. Most Union soldiers loved Little Mac. Carman, however, sporadically displayed contempt for this Union general: "It was a saying of Napoleon that the general who is ignorant of his enemy's strength and disposition is ignorant of his trade. Judged by this standard, McClellan was not a great general" (p. 85). Later, he stated that, "if history should censure the president for anything in his relations with McClellan it would not be for refusing him active service, but for retaining him in command for as long as he did" (p. 394). Although Carman criticized

McClellan, he also praised the general's ability to convert the Army of the Potomac into a professional force.

Unfortunately, Carman was not a trained historian, and he did not develop a clear thesis throughout this work. The book does revolve, however, around the theme of lost opportunities. With regard to the Confederacy, Carman wrote that "there were reasons beyond those of purely a military character that impelled the Confederate government to pass from the defensive and assume the offensive.... For more than a year the Confederate leaders had been anxiously awaiting the recognition of the Confederacy by foreign powers and their intervention to raise the blockade and give its cause moral and physical support; for more than a year they had been told that recognition would follow their decided success in the field" (p. 34). If the Confederacy lost the campaign, Southern leaders realized, they would not obtain foreign recognition. Carman believed that the Confederacy lost this opportunity once a soldier from the Army of the Potomac inadvertently found Robert E. Lee's Special Order No. 191—the Confederate order outlining their troop movements for the entire campaign. Carman wrote that the Union interception of Special Order No. 191 "culminated in the entire failure of Lee's campaign and its expected results: the liberation of Maryland and its alliance with the South, English and French intervention, and the recognition of the independence of the Southern Confederacy" (p. 129).

Carman believed that General McClellan squandered the North's opportunity to achieve decisive victory. According to Carman, there was a critical window of opportunity between the time when the Army of the Potomac intercepted Special Order No. 191 and when Lee realized the North had obtained this crucial intelligence. Had McClellan acted swiftly, he could have overwhelmed Lee's scattered forces. Carman stated that "McClellan did not rise to the occasion. He did not take full advantage of the long afternoon, he did not order the night march—and thereby missed the opportunity of his life.... McClellan did not rise to the situation.... The failure to be 'equal to the emergency' was on the part of the commander of the army and not on the part of the men" (p. 134). Subsequently, Carman emphasized McClellan's failure to strike Lee on either September 15 or September 16 before Lee consolidated his forces along the Antietam. Carman cited Francis A. Walker to the effect that "it is difficult to see what excuse can be offered for the failure to fight the impending battle on the 16th.... [A]dvantage of concentration would have been on the side of McClellan" (p. 202). Carman wrote that, at the close of the battle,

"the change that came over the army in two days was very marked. On the morning of the seventeenth, it had great confidence in McClellan, but that confidence began to wane before the close of the day. The inaction of the eighteenth increased the feeling that he was not the man for the occasion ... there was very pronounced dissatisfaction . . . but the fact remains that confidence in him as a commander on the field was greatly shaken" (p. 369).

According to Carman, then, "the result of the Maryland campaign was satisfactory neither to the North nor the South. In the North there was great dissatisfaction at the loss of Harper's Ferry.... [T]his dissatisfaction was intensified by the indecisive result at Antietam and Lee's escape, when his army should have been destroyed. In the South there was criticism of Lee and disgust at the apathy of the people of Maryland.... It was freely admitted that the campaign was both a political and military blunder" (p. 378). Although the campaign proved limited in terms of strategic value, Carman did recognize that it prompted the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation, and sealed the fate of Union General McClellan.

Carman's attention to detail is impressive. The retired colonel discussed both famous units, such as John Bell Hood's Texas Brigade, and lesser-known regiments with equal attention. Carman concentrated on regimental deployment, the number of men engaged, and the number of casualties respective units received. Details exist in harmony alongside entertaining anecdotes. For example, one learns the fate of the first Texas flag, "the color was the Lone Star flag made from the wedding dress of Mrs. Louis T. Wigfall, whose husband—formerly Senator Wigfall—had been colonel of the 1st Texas. Its loss was not discovered until the regiment was moving out of the [cornfield]" (p. 232).

Pierro should be lauded for his appendixes. These contain such information as military orders of battle and casualty tables for various engagements throughout the campaign. Appendix J, "Strength of the Union and Confederate Armies at Antietam," is particularly interesting (p. 453). Problems arise when determining exactly how many soldiers were present on a Civil War battlefield. Disease, desertion, and straggling rapidly deteriorated ranks as armies campaigned. According to Carman, *present for duty* did not typically translate into *present for action*. In this appendix, Carman attempted to calculate "a reasonably correct conclusion as to the number of men in action at Antietam and shall depend upon the official reports of the division, brigade, and regimental histories, and other authentic sources of information" (p. 453). Mil-

itary historians interested in the number of men actually present on America's bloodiest day will find this section particularly useful.

This book is recommended to historians researching the battle of Antietam. It will be essential for establishing the historiography of the engagement. In addition, the

treasure trove of campaign details will enlighten serious military historians. Those just embarking on their study of this famous battle might want to consult a simpler and shorter narrative before tackling this highly detailed account. Although the details are illuminating, novices may find the text daunting.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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