



“This advance was made in the face of the most tremendous fire of artillery I ever saw, and too much praise cannot be given my regiments for their steady, unwavering step. It was as if each man felt that the fate of the army was centered in himself... This was a wholesome lesson to the enemy, and taught them to know that it may be dangerous sometimes to press a retreating army.”

—Maj. Gen. A.P. Hill in his report to Lt. Col. C.J. Faulkner



FEDERAL
Fitz John
Porter

KILLED

73

WOUNDED

162

MISSING OR
CAPTURED

132

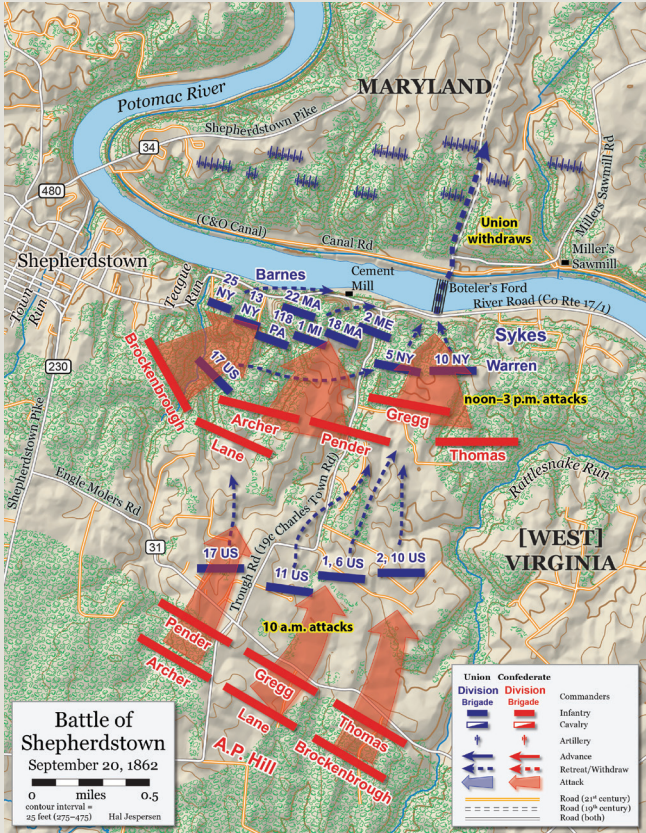


CONFEDERATE
Thomas J.
Jackson

49

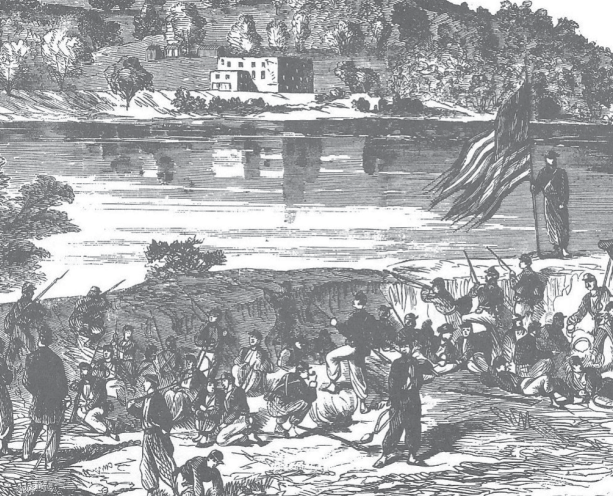
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Shepherdstown during the Civil War, seen from Ferry Hill in MD.
The bridge across the Potomac was burned in 1861.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.



Union soldiers in the dried bed of the C&O Canal on the Maryland side of the Potomac River, Harpers Weekly, October 11, 1862.

AFTERMATH

Artillery boomed across the Potomac for two days, and though it was said several shells missed their mark and hit Shepherdstown, no civilians were injured. The town overflowed with the wounded from South Mountain and Antietam. 114 Confederate soldiers who lost their lives during the Maryland Campaign, many unknown, are buried in Shepherdstown at Elmwood Cemetery.

Though it is overshadowed by the scale of the carnage at Antietam three days before, the Confederate victory at the Battle of Shepherdstown was both horrific and decisive. It was the bloodiest battle fought in what is now West Virginia and marked the end of the Maryland Campaign for both armies: Lee knew he was not in a position to invade the North again, and McClellan knew he was not in a position to follow Lee into Virginia. Both armies were badly battered. President Lincoln was waiting for a Union victory to issue his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Frustrated with what he saw as McClellan's failure to deliver the final blow to the Army of Northern Virginia and end the war, Lincoln relieved McClellan of his command following the mid-term election. He was replaced by Ambrose Burnside.

Lincoln was satisfied that Lee's hopes of a victory in the North had been dashed and that the Confederate threat had been expelled from Maryland. He called a meeting of his cabinet and issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862. The war was then not only focused on reunification, but also the abolition of slavery. For Lincoln it had the desired effect of alienating the Confederacy from the European support it hoped for and desperately needed, particularly from Britain, which would not support a nation fighting to maintain slavery. Though it did not have the effect of freeing many slaves, the proclamation established for the first time that a Union victory meant the end of slavery in America.

PRESERVATION

The Battle of Shepherdstown has been recognized by the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission as one of the 384 principal battles of the Civil War, one of five sites in Jefferson County, WV. A study conducted by the National Park Service determined that the core 510 acres of the battlefield could be included in Antietam National Battlefield due to their geographical and historical connection. The boundary adjustment requires congressional approval, and the legislation is underway.

Preservation efforts are ongoing, thanks to the support of a local friends group, The Shepherdstown Battlefield Preservation Association, which has raised over \$1 million in grants and donations since it was founded in 2001. As of 2017, 343 acres of the battlefield study area are preserved under conservation easements. Alexander Boteler's cement mill and the Potomac crossing at Pack Horse Ford are both listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



TO REACH THE BATTLEFIELD FROM DOWNTOWN SHEPHERDSTOWN, drive east on German Street until it turns north and becomes River Road, then continue on River Road about three quarters of a mile. The Pack Horse Ford Crossing is approximately at this point, just past the intersection of River and Trough Road.



This brochure was made possible in part by a grant from the West Virginia Humanities Council, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The BATTLE of SHEPHERDSTOWN

— AND THE END OF —

Lee's Maryland Campaign





Ambrose Burnside's division crossing Antietam Creek on September 17, 1862.
FRANK LESLIE'S ILLUSTRATED NEWSPAPER, OCTOBER 11, 1862.



The 4th Michigan crossing the river on the 19th.
AUBURN UNIVERSITY.



Federal artillery firing across the Potomac toward Boteler's Cement Mill.
FRANK LESLIE'S ILLUSTRATED NEWSPAPER, OCTOBER 25, 1862.



The 118th Pennsylvania crossing the Potomac on the 20th.
HARPER'S WEEKLY, OCTOBER 11, 1862.

THE MARYLAND CAMPAIGN

Robert E. Lee was made commander of the Army of Northern Virginia on June 1, 1862. That summer he successfully pushed back Union forces, which had nearly reached Richmond. Lee's next move was to invade the North. The rich farms of Maryland and Pennsylvania had not yet been ravaged, and Lee had 70,000 men to feed. He also incorrectly believed that Maryland, a slave state, was ready to revolt, given the opportunity. 1862 was also a mid-term election year, and if he could break Northern morale and turn the tide of public option against the war by moving it closer to home, Lee believed he could bring about a swifter and more peaceful end.

Lee crossed into Maryland on September 4. Union General George B. McClellan began his pursuit from Washington, DC with 80,000 men. In Frederick, MD he happened upon a copy of Lee's plan. Lee had riskily decided to split his army into four parts, sending James Longstreet to Boonsboro, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson to capture Harpers Ferry, and leaving J.E.B. Stuart and D.H. Hill to defend the rear at South Mountain.

SOUTH MOUNTAIN & ANTIETAM

McClellan attacked Lee's dispersed army on September 14 at three gaps at South Mountain. His victory allowed the Union's continued pursuit and forced Lee to abandon his plans of invasion. Lee gathered his forces in Sharpsburg and prepared to face McClellan. The armies clashed at Antietam on September 17, 1862, the bloodiest day in American history. Casualties are estimated at over 23,000, but the battle was tactically inconclusive. On the evening of September 18, Lee ordered a retreat into Virginia, though he was far from defeated. He hoped to cross back into Maryland at Williamsport and attack again from a stronger position.

THE BATTLE OF SHEPHERDSTOWN

By dawn on the 19th, and without interference, Lee's army had crossed into the comparative safety of Virginia at Pack Horse Ford (or Boteler's Ford), about a mile southeast of Shepherdstown. Lee left a rearguard under Brigadier General William Pendleton with two infantry brigades and 44 canons. The two units' numbers had been greatly depleted at Antietam and included only around 600 men.

Major General Fitz John Porter's Fifth Corps arrived at the Potomac to see the last of the Confederate Army cross the river, then took their position in the dried bed of the C&O Canal, which formed a convenient breastwork for Union sharpshooters to pick off Rebel gunners across the river. Over 70 artillery pieces were placed in the hills behind them, as far north as Ferry Hill. Late that afternoon, after hours of artillery bombardment, Porter ordered two regiments across the river: the 4th Michigan Infantry and the 1st U.S. Sharpshooters.

"I made up my mind that that was the last time I should see the sunset, but it was the order, and duty said go. It needed no military knowledge to know that three hundred men were not going to cross a deep and wide ford, under the fire of infantry and battery without great slaughter. We all felt it, but you could see on every face a determination to do it or die."

—Henry Magee, 4th Michigan Infantry

They captured several prisoners and four canons before falling back across the river. The Confederate forces scattered and retreated from the bluffs, and Pendleton, unable to stop them and mistakenly believing that all 44 canons were taken, left for aid. Around midnight he found General Lee and told him that they lost not only all of their canons, but their position on the bluffs, and that Union troops were crossing the Potomac. Lee made no immediate action, but word reached Major General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, who took matters into his own hands. He had three divisions in Shepherdstown by morning.

SEPTEMBER 20, 1862

McClellan, encouraged by the successes of the 19th but still uncertain about the location of Lee's army, ordered a reconnaissance in force. At 7 a.m. on the 20th, Brigadier General George Sykes and 1,000 Union troops crossed the ford. Major Charles Lovell led them up Charlestown (Trough) Road. About a mile up the road, he encountered Confederate pickets and sent word back to Sykes. Lovell did not realize at the time that he was facing A.P. Hill's famous "Light Division" and portions of Fitz Lee's cavalry along with Stonewall himself. Sykes ordered the men to retreat slowly back to the river, and firing began as the Confederate force began marching against them.

At 8 a.m. another Union brigade under Colonel James Barnes started crossing the river with instructions from Porter to march toward Shepherdstown and report back. When they crossed they received new orders from Sykes: to occupy the bluffs and cover Lovell's right flank. As Barnes' men took their places in the ravines and cliffs behind Alexander Boteler's burned out cement mill, another Union brigade under Colonel Gouverneur Warren was sent across the river.

Federal canons began booming across the Potomac after the three Confederate brigades of Pender, Gregg, and Thomas marched out into the open fields of the Osbourn Farm in pursuit of Lovell. The fire was, by all accounts, uncommonly intense but did not deter the Confederate lines, and even began falling short and killing federal troops before it finally subsided.

"...the most terrible artillery fire I ever saw troops exposed to. They continued to shell us all day. It was as hot a place as I wish to get in. It is considered even by Jackson as the most brilliant thing of the war."

—Brig. Gen. William Dorsey Pender in a letter to his wife,
September 22, 1862

Fighting had reached the bluffs and engaged Barnes' brigade when Porter arrived at the river and assessed the situation. He ordered a withdrawal of his 3,000 men across the Potomac. Confederate troops on the bluffs fired at the men as they retreated across the river, kept in check by federal canons. Many of Barnes' men did not make it down to the ford and attempted crossing in the deeper waters upriver, anxious to get across. Once over, the men saw a group on the bluffs that had not retreated: the 118th Pennsylvania.

Most of the Union casualties from the Battle of Shepherdstown were from the 118th Pennsylvania, known as "The Corn Exchange Regiment," which had been in active duty for less than a month. Tragically, many of the men's weapons, new Enfield rifles, had faulty mainsprings. The regiment was held in reserve at Antietam, and so Shepherdstown was their first call to action and the first time many of them had to use their rifles. In addition, their commander, Colonel Charles Prevost, refused to retreat from the bluffs with the rest of the Union force until the order came through the proper chain of command. They were left on the cliffs to face Hill's veterans, one of the toughest units in the Confederate Army. Four Confederate brigades charged at them before they finally attempted a retreat, but it was too late. The 118th scrambled down the narrow ravines or fell to their deaths over the 60-foot drop behind them onto the jagged rocks below. They sought shelter in the brick kilns of the cement mill and watched as their men were picked off while trying to cross the river on the cribbing of the mill dam. Of the 737 men who crossed the Potomac, only 468 returned unwounded.

Amidst the chaos, federal canons missed their marks, not only hitting the battered 118th but falling close to the men in the canal as well. The artillery continued until nightfall while the Confederate lines held their positions across the river. It was a costly victory.