

### Reckoning With Antietam: Leading Historians Revisit The Bloodiest Day In American History'

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## Review

### RECKONING WITH ANTIETAM

#### Leading historians revisit the bloodiest day in American History'

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**Gallagher, Gary W.** *The Antietam Campaign: Military Campaigns of the Civil War*. University of North Carolina Press, ISBN 080782481X

This is the sixth in editor Gary Gallagher's series *Military Campaigns of the Civil War*, and once again he has overseen an eclectic mix of essays that explore the topic from various angles. Some among these ten essays bore in closely on that terrible Antietam battlefield on September 17, 1862. Others scan the campaign from a loftier perspective to analyze intentions, results, and implications.

Gallagher starts off the proceedings by pointing out that historical hindsight has invested Antietam with a turning-point-of-the-war status, yet at the time Southerners concluded that their army had done pretty well in Maryland. It captured 12,000 Yankees and vast munitions at Harper's Ferry, fought the Federals to a standstill at Sharpsburg, and then leisurely returned to Virginia after repelling an attempt at pursuit at Shepherdstown. The Maryland expedition did not seem to signal an end to Confederate hopes.

McClellan's lieutenants supported caution

In a parallel situation, historians may condemn McClellan for not renewing the battle on September 18, yet Brooks D. Simpson finds evidence that McClellan's lieutenants largely supported their cautious commander in seeing off the enemy without a fight. Nothing better demonstrates Little Mac's grip on his lieutenants than their parroting of his chimerical insistence that Lee had the larger army and they best leave him alone that fateful September 18.

Confederates were disappointed that Marylanders did not rise up to join the secession movement the moment Lee's army appeared in their midst. William A.

Blair notes that the Lincoln administration's iron-fisted hold on this border state convinced many in Confederate states of the rightness of their course in seceding from such Yankee tyranny.

Two essays examine a major handicap each army carried with it into Maryland. Keith S. Bohannon forcefully demonstrates the shambles Confederate logistics had become by September 1862 and thus one reason why Lee had so few men with him at Sharpsburg. Numbers present was not McClellan's problem, but D. Scott Hartwig points up how utterly ill-trained and ill-led were the rookie regiments that made up almost a quarter of his force. By way of example, Lesley J. Gordon follows the raw 16th Connecticut to its disastrous appointment on the Antietam battlefield. The poor 16th never had the chance to renew its tarnished reputation.

For battle buffs, the Kricks, father and son, give us incisive microhistories of two key phases of the Antietam struggle. Robert K. Krick explains in engrossing detail the Confederates' bloody fight in Bloody Lane. Robert E.L. Krick performs a similar feat with the Confederate artillery under Jeb Stuart that masterfully defended Nicodemus Heights and Hauser's Ridge. The Confederate near disaster at Shepherdstown, orchestrated by artillery chief William Nelson Pendleton, is elucidated by Peter S. CharMichl, who goes on to explain how the inept Pendleton managed to hold his place until Appomattox.

Finally, Carol Reardon describes how officers training at the U.S. Army War College pondered the lessons of Antietam after staff rides there on the eve of World War I. It was generally agreed that Lee was an example of how to, and McClellan an example of how not to. "My God," observed Captain Matthew F. Steele in 1908, "what a poor general McClellan was." Gary Gallagher's informative volume has many lessons for us, and that is certainly one of them.

*Stephen W. Sears is author of Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam, George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon, and other noted books.*