

Confederate Invasions – The Union In Peril
Part 1 – The Maryland Campaign: Antietam and Emancipation
Class Notes

Lecture 4 – Battle of Antietam: “The End of the Confederacy Was in Sight”

A. McClellan’s Plan Is Sound: Hit the Flanks; Then the Center

- Main attack on Confederate left flank – Hooker (I Corps) & Mansfield (XII), supported by Sumner (II).
- Burnside/Cox (IX Corps) held ready to attack Confederate right - when ordered
- Union Reserve V Corps (Porter) poised to attack weakened Confederate center

B. Morning Phase: Miller Cornfield - One Casualty Every Second

- About 6:00am Hooker’s I Corps launches piecemeal attacks into 20 acre Miller cornfield against Stonewall Jackson’s men
- Both sides feed in fresh units, make charge and counter-charge
- By 8:00am Union I Corps advance stalls – carnage is terrible.

C. Morning Phase: East Woods - Coordination Breakdown Dooms XII Corps

- XII Corps Commander Mansfield fails to coordinate with Hooker’s I Corps
- Mansfield is new to field command; and many XII Corps troops are untested.
- Belatedly, Mansfield orders attack through East Woods and Cornfield
- Mansfield is mortally wounded
- Lee sends reinforcements; stops XII Corps attack.

D. Morning Phase: West Woods - Union II Corps Launches Disjointed Attack

- II Corps Commander “Bull” Sumner is ordered to support Hooker & Mansfield with two of his three divisions. Richardson’s division is held in reserve.
- Another Union failure to communicate or coordinate.
- Sumner’s two divisions advance blindly; lose contact with each other.
- Confederates in West Woods attack Sedgwick’s Division from three sides. Union troops packed tightly; suffer 40% casualties in 20 minutes.
- By 9:00am, there is a lull in the fighting. Nearly 14,000 casualties in morning phase – **one every second** - for over 3 hours. Focus shifts to center.

E. Mid-Day Phase: Sunken Road/Bloody Lane – End of Confederacy in Sight

- French’s Division (II Corps) attacks D.H. Hill’s Confederates, who have taken up a defensive position in a sunken farm lane ready-made trench.
- Initial Union bayonet attacks fail; driven back with heavy casualties.

- Both sides receive reinforcements. Richardson (USA) & Anderson (CSA)
- **Key Moment:** About 1:00pm, Union forces flank the Confederate right. Enfilading fire breaks Rebel line. Confederates suffer 2,600 casualties in what becomes known to history as “**Bloody Lane.**”
- Lee’s center is undefended. McClellan declines to commit V, VI Corps reserves.
- McClellan’s overly cautious style again causes him to miss an opportunity.

F. Afternoon Phase: Burnside Attempts to Cross Antietam Creek

- Burnside’s IX Corps awaits McClellan’s orders to assault the lower bridge across Antietam Creek.
- Burnside makes no attempt to scout Confederate positions, find other crossings
- Bridge is defended by only 500 Georgians under Robert Toombs
- Between 9:00am and noon, Burnside makes four unsuccessful attempts to cross Antietam Creek.
- At 1:00pm, Ferrero’s Brigade seizes the bridge, losing 200 men in 10 minutes
- Georgians fall back to heights near Sharpsburg

G. Afternoon Phase: Burnside Sends Two Divisions Toward Sharpsburg Heights

- Burnside takes another 2 hours prepare two divisions to attack.
- At 3:00pm, the Union IX Corps begins its attack on Lee’s weak left flank.
- The Confederates have only 2,300 men to oppose 8,500 Union attackers

H. Battle Climax: Confederate A.P. Hill’s Light Division Attacks at 4:00PM

- Hills’ Light division marches 17 miles from Harpers Ferry in 8 hours.
- Although weakened by stragglers, Hill’s 3 brigades hit the left flank of the Union IX Corps attack at the crucial moment.
- Inexperienced Union troops break under the Confederate surprise attack.
- Union advance is halted. IX Corps retreats to the creek bridgehead.
- By 6:30pm, the fighting ends. Confederates lack strength to continue. McClellan lacks will and nerve to commit reserves.

I. Aftermath

- Bloodiest day in American history: **Cost:** 23,000 casualties. About 7,600 killed – all of them Americans. Every large building for miles becomes a hospital
- Tactical draw: Lee shifts units brilliantly; McClellan will not commit his reserves.
- Stalemate on 18 September: Armies remain in position all day. No fighting.
- Lee successfully withdraws across Potomac during the night.
- Strategic win for Union: Lee forced to end invasion and withdraw across Potomac, ending Confederate threat
- McClellan fails to exploit several opportunities to defeat Lee and end the war
- Lincoln visits battlefield in unsuccessful attempt to prod McClellan to pursue Lee

- Lincoln issues preliminary Emancipation Proclamation