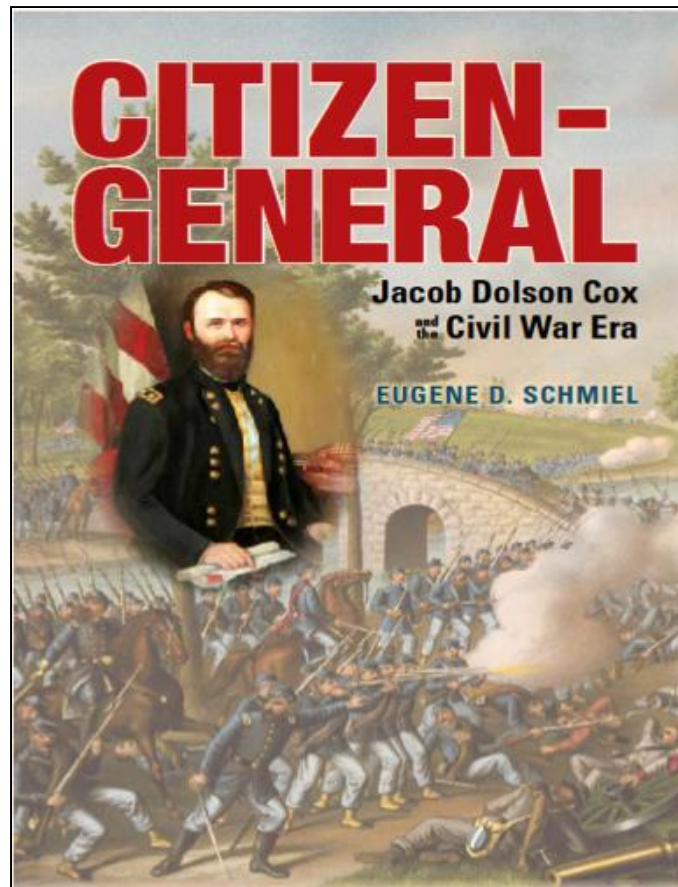
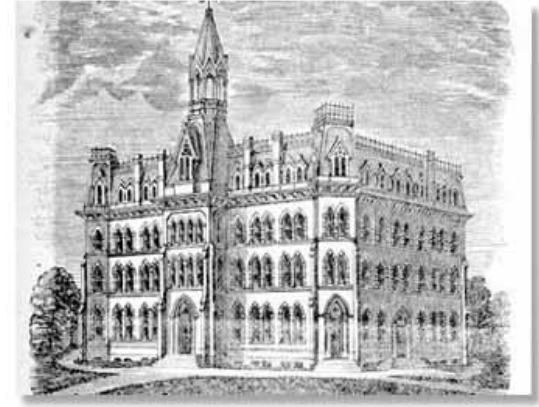


The Controversy over the Union Command in the Maryland Campaign: McClellan, Burnside, Porter, and the Role(s) of Jacob D. Cox

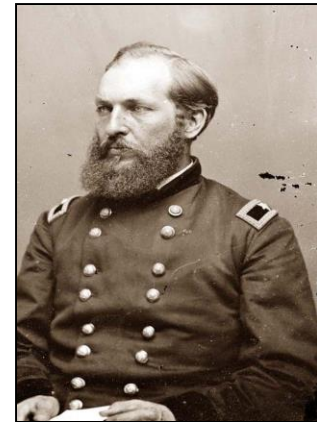


WHO WAS JACOB COX?

- Born in Montreal, Canada, 1828; grew up in NYC
- Ministerial student at the “radical” Oberlin College of Ohio
- Helped found Republican Party of Ohio; elected to Ohio Senate in 1859, along with lifelong friend James Garfield

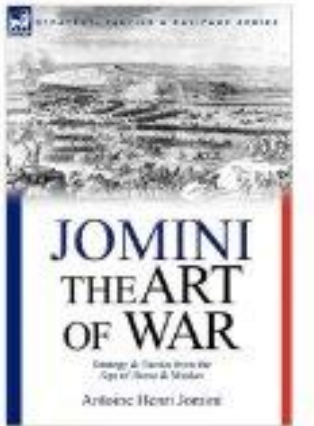
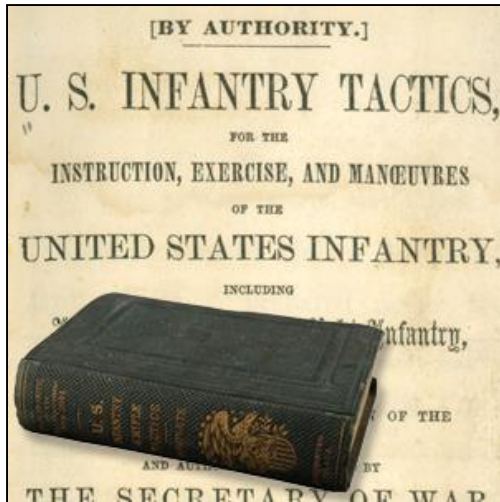


Oberlin College



Garfield as Union General

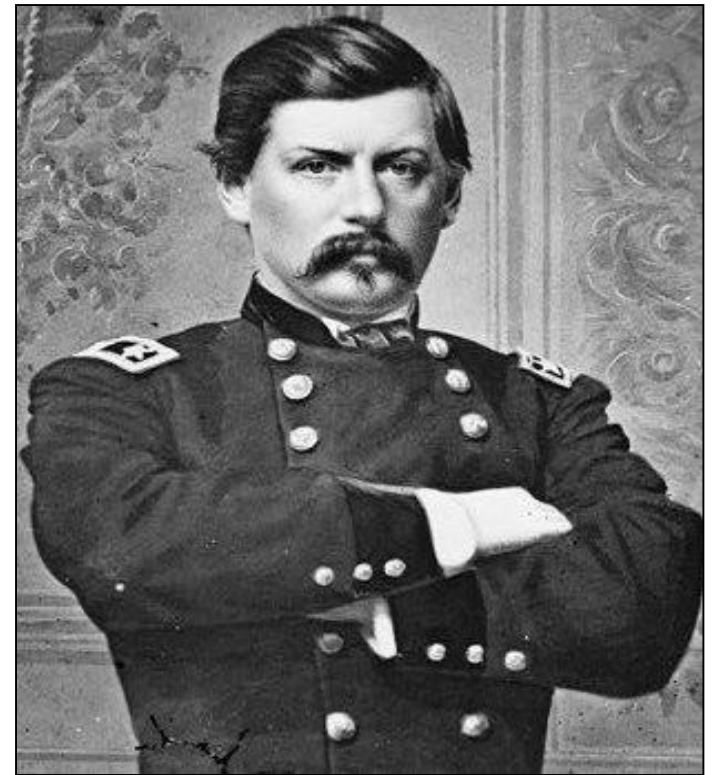
SELF-TRAINED MILITARY MAN



- During Sectional Crisis, Cox read military history and tactical manuals
- ***Was named a Brigadier General of Volunteers in 1861; one of the best "political generals."***
- Was Ohio Governor Dennison's military chief of staff; met George B. McClellan, Ohio commander, and they became good friends.
- Was the best "participant-historian" of the war. His books and articles still cited by modern historians as objective and scholarly.

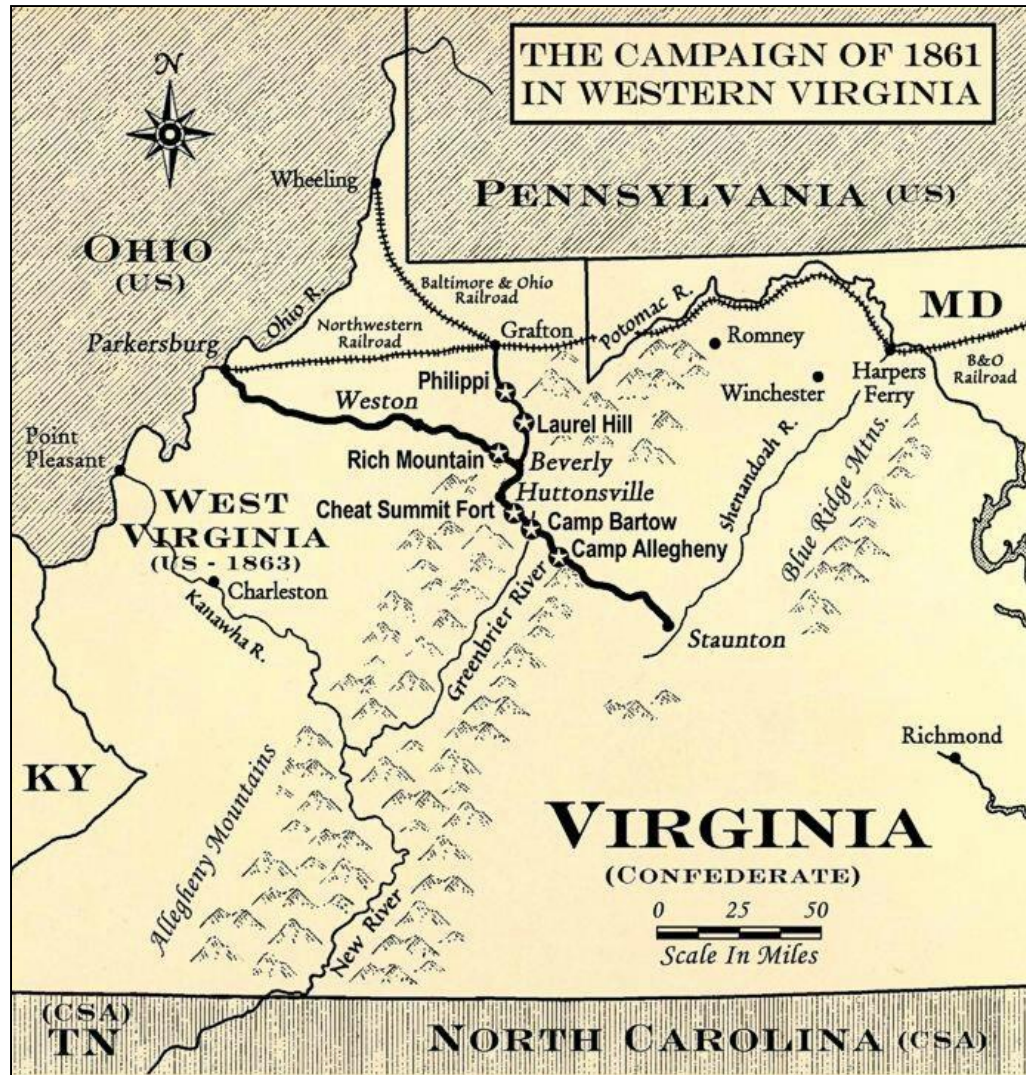
AUTONOMOUS MILITARY RESPONSIBILITIES: A HERO OF WEST VIRGINIA'S STATEHOOD

- Early in 1861, McClellan told Cox: *"I had more confidence in you than any of my Brig. Generals."*
- McC gave Cox autonomous command of some 2500 men to move down the Kanawha River Valley (West Virginia) to take Charleston and Gauley Bridge, key routes to the south
- Cox and Mac both used success in WV as springboards to greater commands



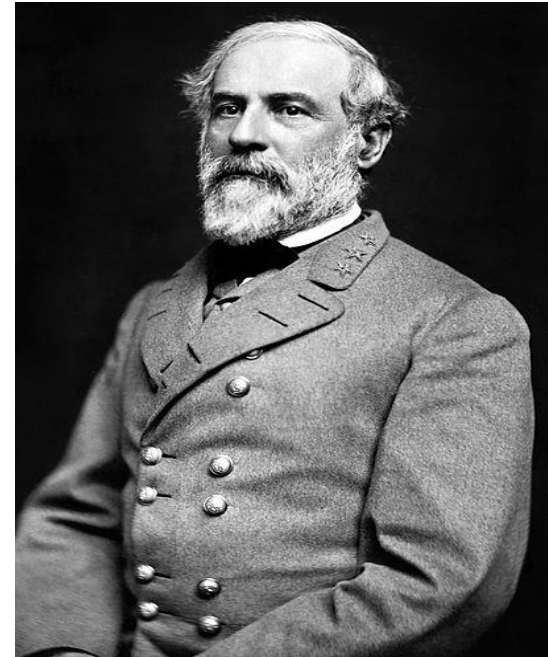
McClellan

WHY WEST VIRGINIA?



THE “KANAWHA DIVISION” AND GENERAL LEE

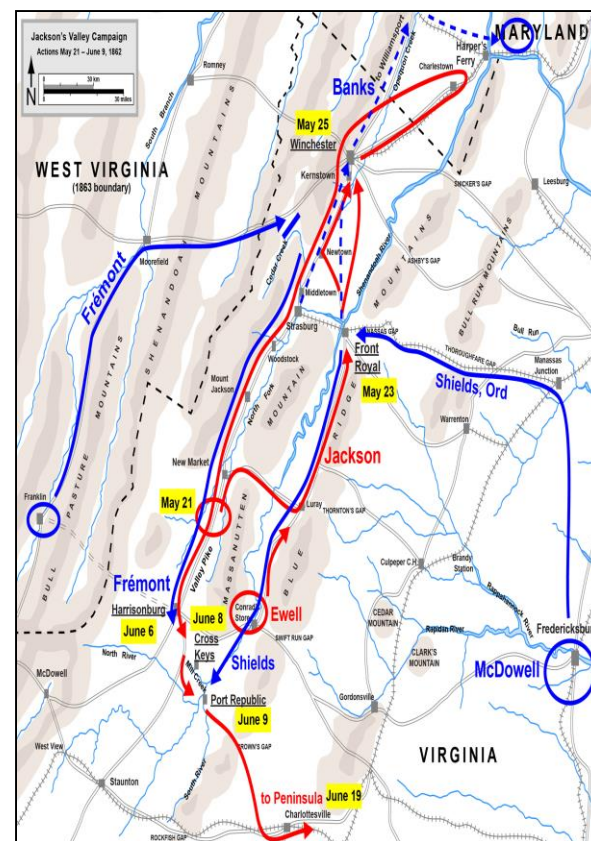
- In late July, 1861, Cox told his wife, “The whole of western Va. is now free from secessionists. it will soon quiet down into a permanent and willing recognition of the U.S. government.”
- Lee said “Cox is making himself very acceptable to the inhabitants of the Kanawha valley by his considerate conduct.”



Robert E. Lee

1862 SHENANDOAH CAMPAIGN

- Cox again had autonomy for a parallel campaign to Fremont's. He tried to advance and was pushed back at Princeton – but solidified control of the region at Flat Top Mountain as Fremont was defeated by mid-June



Fremont vs. Jackson

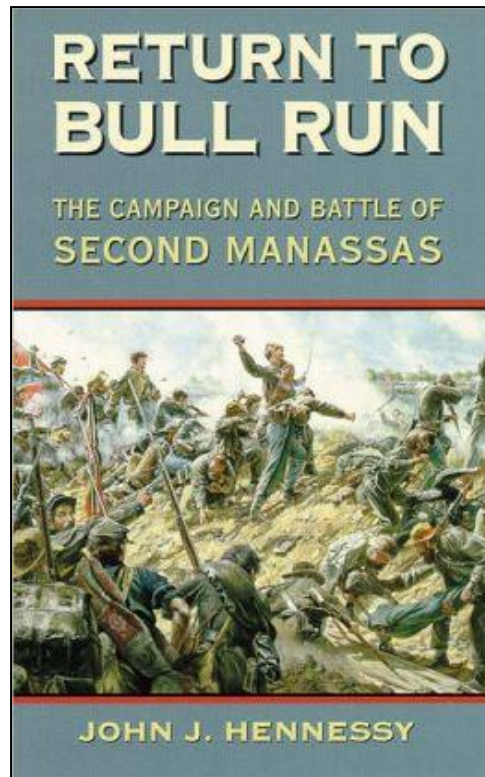
THE MARYLAND CAMPAIGN - 1862

- Pope replaced Fremont in late June, and he ordered Cox and his “Kanawha Division” to the front, via Washington, in mid-August.
- In late Aug in Alexandria, VA, Mac “unbosomed” to Cox his frustrations with Lincoln, Stanton, and Halleck for being called back from Richmond.



John Pope

MCCLELLAN, POPE, PORTER AND SECOND MANASSAS



- Before Second Manassas, 5th Corps Commander Fitz-John Porter, a close friend of McC's serving under Pope, complained about Pope in messages which Burnside forwarded to Lincoln and Halleck.
- **While Pope's incompetence was the most important reason for Union defeat, the late arrival of McClellan's troops and the actions/inaction of Porter played a role. Post-battle, Pope had Porter court-martialed.**
- That event, subsequent legal cases, and Cox's books and articles are key elements of the controversy over Union command in Maryland campaign.

Porter's First Complaints

FJ Porter's thoughts about Pope and McClellan would be central to the controversy about Union command at Antietam.

Here is an example:

Messenger that left Pope's army this morning about 6 o'clock reports our forces within 2 miles of Manassas Junction. He says when about 1½ miles from our forces heavy cannonading—commenced by the rebels he thinks. He left railroad at Catlett's Station, coming direct here by short road. He was informed by a contraband that there were some 1,000 or 1,500 rebel cavalry between Warrenton and the Junction.

CHERRY,
Telegraph Operator.

A. E. BURNSIDE.

Please say to General Halleck or officially that the enemy is in some force 5 miles off.

A. E. B.

FALMOUTH, VA., August 29, 1862—1 p. m.

Maj. Gen. H. W. HALLECK, *General-in-Chief*, and
Maj. Gen. GEORGE B. MCCLELLAN, *Alexandria* :

The following just received from Porter, 4 miles from Manassas, the 28th, 2 p. m. :

All that talk of bagging Jackson, &c., was bosh. That enormous Gap (Manassas) was left open and the enemy jumped through, and the story of McDowell having cut off Longstreet had no good foundation. The enemy have destroyed all our bridges, burned trains, &c., and made this army rush back to look after its line of communication and find our base of subsistence. We are far from Alexandria, considering this moving of transportation. Your supply train of 40 wagons is here, but I can't find them. There is a report that Jackson is at Centreville, which you can believe or

A. E. BURNSIDE,
Major-General.

FALMOUTH, VA., August 29, 1862—5.15 p. m.

General H. W. HALLECK, *General-in-Chief*:

The following message has just been received [from General Porter]:

BRISTOE, August 29, 1862—6 a. m.

General BURNSIDE:

Shall be off in half an hour. The messenger who brought this says the enemy had been at Centreville, and pickets were found there last night. Sigel had severe fight last night; took many prisoners. Banks is at Warrenton Junction; McDowell near Gainesville; Heintzelman and Reno at Centreville, where they marched yesterday, and Pope went to Centreville with the last two as a body guard, at the time not knowing where was the enemy and when Sigel was fighting within 8 miles of him and in sight. Comment is unnecessary. The enormous trains are still rolling on, many animals not having been watered for fifty hours. I shall be out of provisions to-morrow night. Your train of 40 wagons cannot be found. I hope Mac is at work, and we will soon get ordered out of this. It would seem from proper statements of the enemy that he was wandering around loose; but I expect they know what they are doing, which is more than any one here or anywhere knows.

Just received the following order:

HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF VIRGINIA,
Near Bull Run, August 29, 1862.

Major-General PORTER:

General McDowell has anticipated [intercepted] the retreat of Jackson. Sigel is immediately on the right of McDowell. Kearny and Hooker march to attack the enemy's rear at early dawn. Major-General Pope directs you to move upon Centreville at the first dawn of day with your whole command, leaving your trains to follow. It is very important that you should be here at a very early hour in the morning. A severe engagement is likely to take place and your presence is necessary.

GEO. D. RUGGLES,
Colonel and Aide-de-Camp.

A large body of enemy reported opposite. I am preparing and will hold the place until the last. The only fear I have is a force coming from Manassas Junction.

A. E. BURNSIDE,
Major-General.

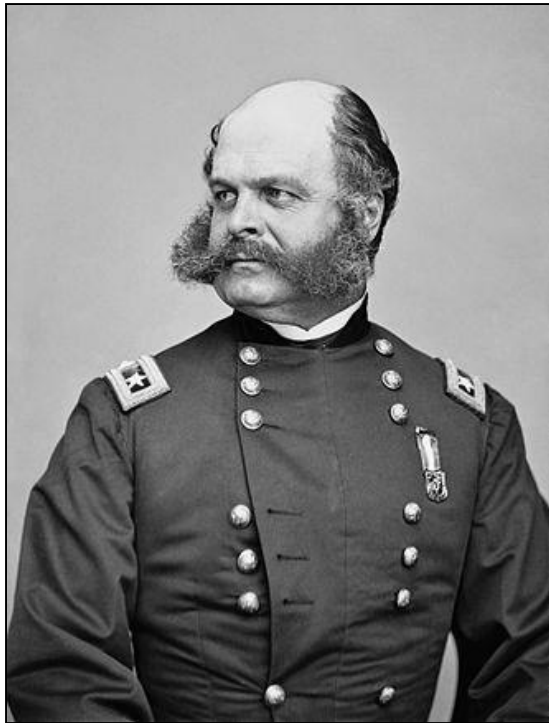
AUGUST 29, 1862—5.45 p. m.

General SYKES:

I received an order from Mr. Cutting to advance and support Morell. I faced about and did so. I soon met Griffin's brigade withdrawing, by order of General Morell, who was not pushed out, but retiring. I

THE MARYLAND CAMPAIGN: THE NINTH CORPS

- Cox was assigned to Burnside's 9th Corps, under Jesse Reno. Burnside commanded the "right wing," which also included Hooker's 1st Corps.

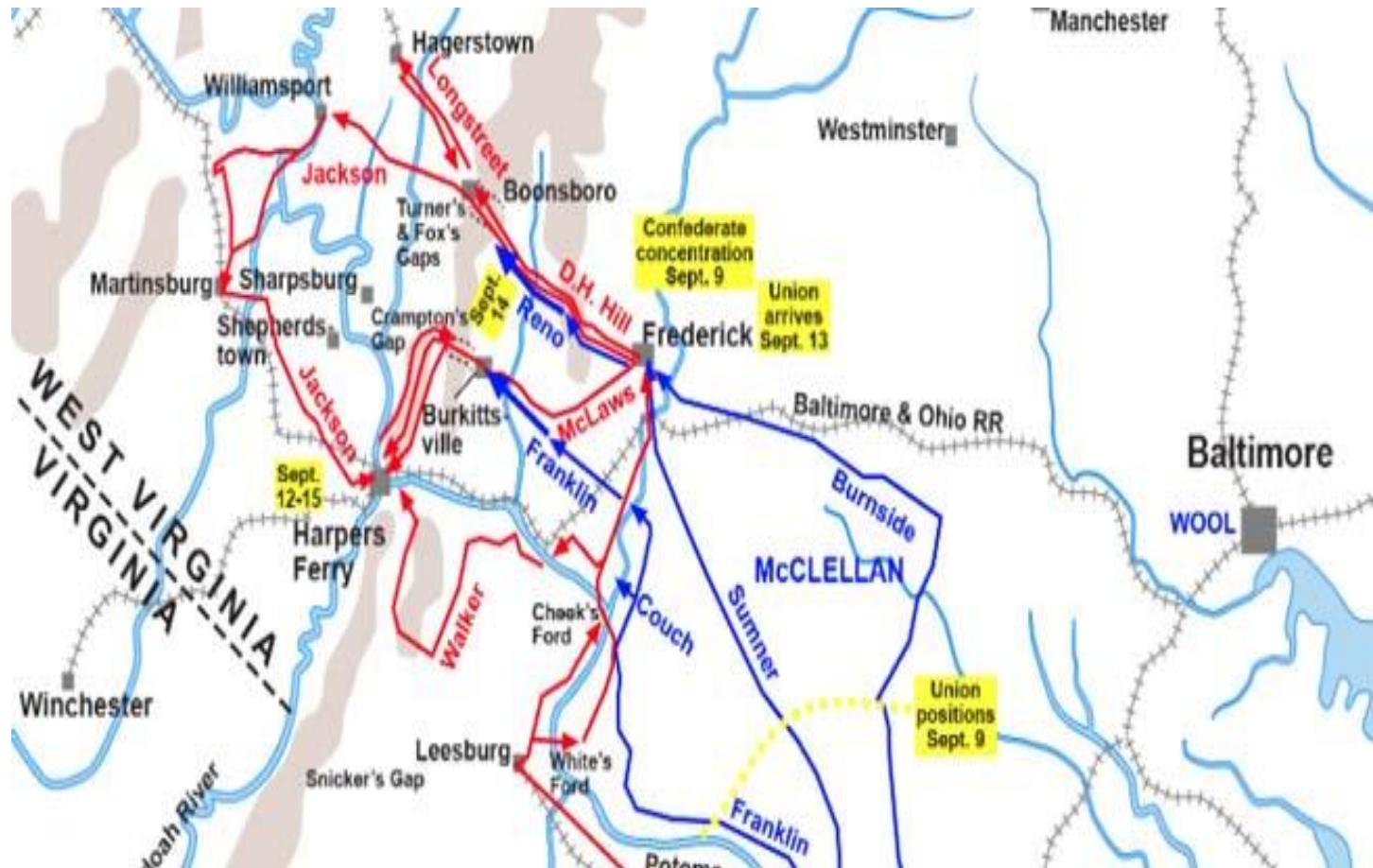


Ambrose Burnside



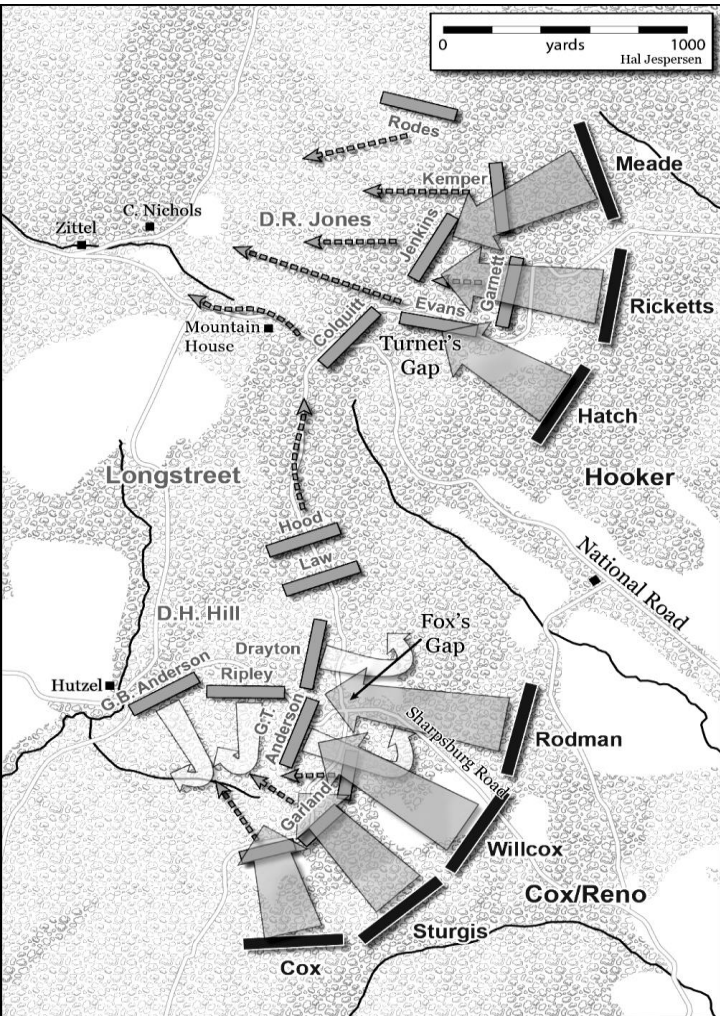
Jesse Reno

The Maryland Campaign



BATTLE OF SOUTH MOUNTAIN

Sep 14, 1862



Scott Hartwig, Gettysburg historian, wrote, “*Thanks to Jacob Cox’s early initiative and aggressive generalship, McClellan had nearly won Fox’s Gap and Turner’s Gap cheaply and early in the day.*”

“KANAWHA DIVISION” IN THE LEAD

- Cox's volunteers, hardened by 18 months of West Virginia mountain warfare, took the initiative to begin the attack in the Battle of South Mountain. Reno killed there – Cox became 9th Corps commander after only two weeks of knowing his commander, Burnside.

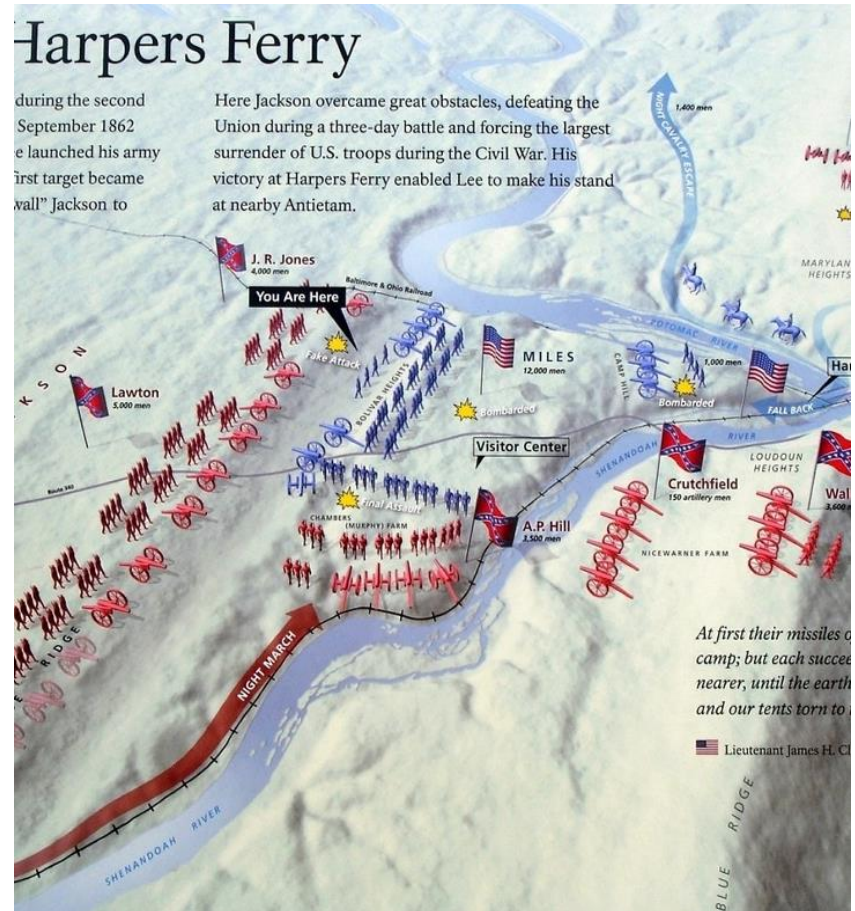


Reno Monument at South Mountain

The Fall of Harpers Ferry and the Campaign

McClellan had wisely asked that the facility there be abandoned and the troops sent to help him.

Halleck would not do so – and that, plus Dixon Miles's leadership, led to the Confederates taking the city on September 15

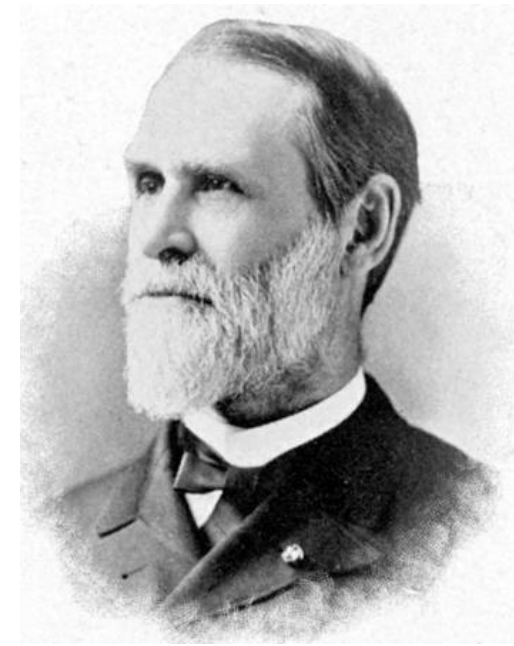


Cox after Antietam

(We'll get back to the topic at hand in just a minute)

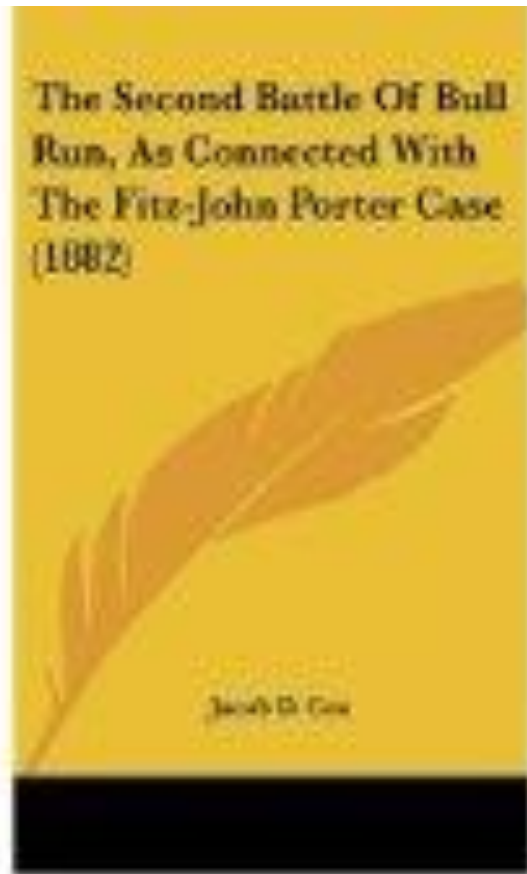
COX AFTER ANTIETAM

- Returned to WV to Push Back Confederates
- Atlanta campaign – Deputy, Army of the Ohio
- Franklin-Nashville campaign
- Governor of Ohio, 1865-8
- Secretary of the Interior, 1869-70
- Congressman
- President of the University of Cincinnati
- President of the Wabash Railway



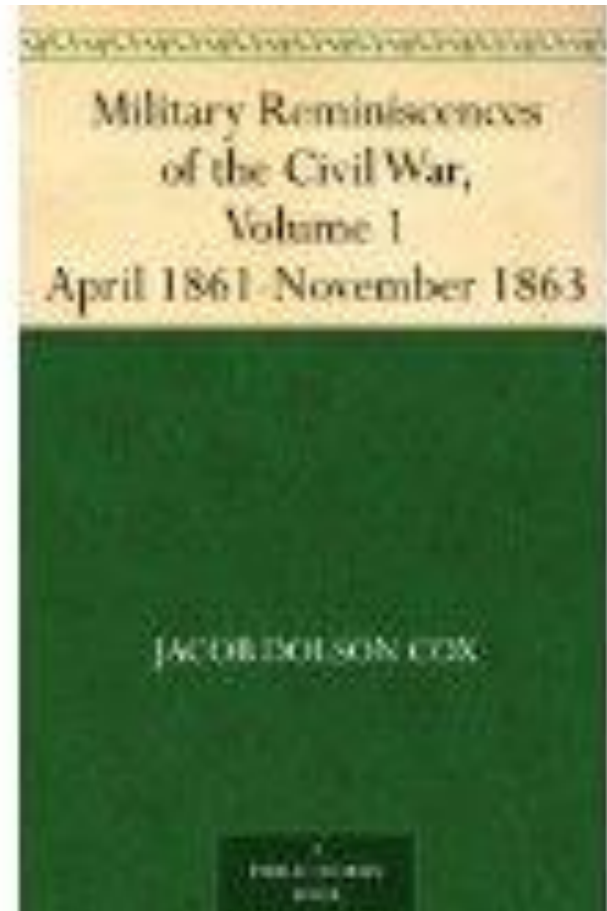
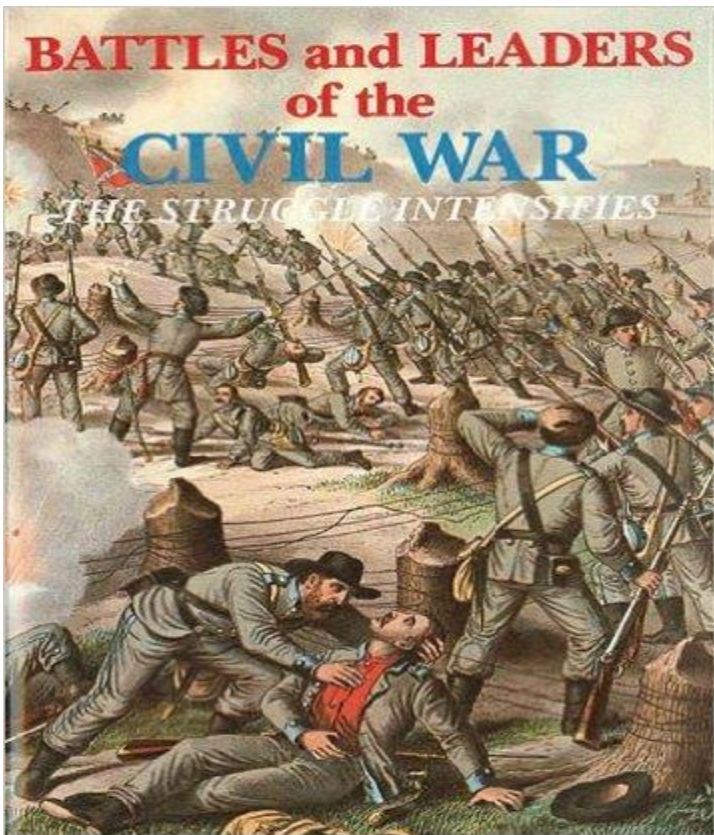
Civil War Historian – Considered the best participant-historian of the war, and his books are still today used as both sources and examples of objective, well-researched history.

The Historical Controversy Begins: Cox's Book on the Fitz-John Porter Case



Written in 1882, in part as a tribute to his friend, slain President Garfield, this book was very negative about Porter and his role at Second Manassas

Cox's Influential Writings about Antietam



The McClellan/Porter “Conspiracy”

- Cox’s article “Battle of Antietam” in “B and L” (1887) and his extended version of that article in his “Military Reminiscences,” (1900) were a basis of history’s view of the battle, including the problems within Union leadership
- His “Military Reminiscences” included a chapter in which he made the first reference to the possibility that Porter poisoned McClellan’s mind against Burnside in revenge for forwarding his messages to Lincoln.
- Most historians since gave credence to Cox’s views.



Fitz-John Porter

The Controversy Begins and the Union Command's Efficiency is Affected

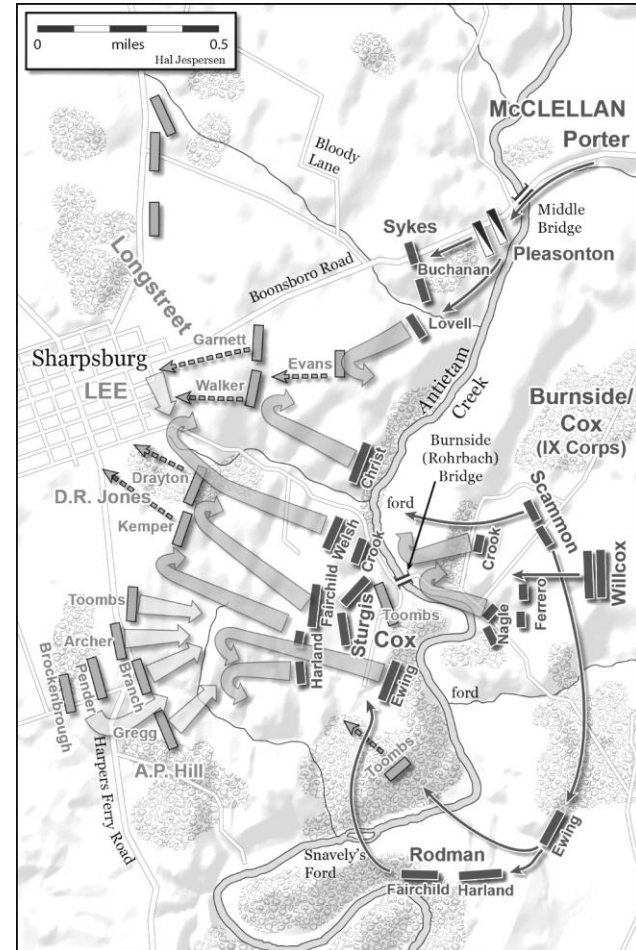
1. In early September, Mac requested that Porter's court-martial be suspended; Porter's 5th Corps arrived at South Mountain late Sept. 14. Cox believed this was when Porter began poisoning Mac's relations w/ Burn.
2. Despite Burnside's success at S. Mountain, on Sep 15, Mac removed Hooker's 1st Corps from Burn's wing commander authority and put Hooker under his own authority. He also gave Hooker the ability to get troops from Sumner without reference to headquarters.
3. Cox wrote that there was no good reason to separate Burnside's divisions, and attributed it to Porter's hostility. The separations also confused Union command authority at a time when it was clear that a major battle was likely.

The Controversy between Mac and Burn, continued

4. Morning of September 15, Mac ordered 9th Corps to advance, but Cox got no orders from Burn and he stayed put.

5. So Porter's 5th Corps was blocked by the 9th Corps. The 5th went around them, but were delayed by 3 hours.

6. Porter immediately had a reprimand of Burnside put into the record, with an "Indorsement:"



Porter's Second Complaint

296

OPERATIONS IN N. VA., W. VA., MD., AND PA. [CHAP. XXXI.]

HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF THE POTOMAC,
September 15, 1862—12.30 p. m.

Major-General PORTER:

GENERAL: General McClellan desires me to say that Burnside's corps has not yet marched. Should the march of Sykes' division be obstructed by Burnside's troops, direct General Sykes to push by them and to put his division in front.

I am, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
R. B. MAROY,
Chief of Staff.

[Indorsement.]

Burnside's corps was not moving three hours after the hour designated for him, the day after South Mountain, and obstructed my movements. I, therefore, asked for this order, and moved by Burnside's corps.
F. J. P.

HEADQUARTERS NEAR BROWNSVILLE,
September 15, 1862—3 p. m.

Maj. Gen. GEORGE B. MCCLELLAN:

GENERAL: I made a demonstration on my left this morning at the gap, on the left of Burkittsville, with two regiments of infantry and a section of horse artillery. The enemy has begun to retreat, although I hardly consider that due to the demonstration. Smith is in pursuit, with a brigade and battery, and will do good service.

Under your last orders I do not feel justified in putting my whole

Cox's Reaction to Porter's Complaint

Cox, a professor of law, said in his memoirs that:

“To military men this would be conclusive proof of a settled hostility to him, formally calling his military character into question...the normal reply would have been a demand for a court of inquiry.”

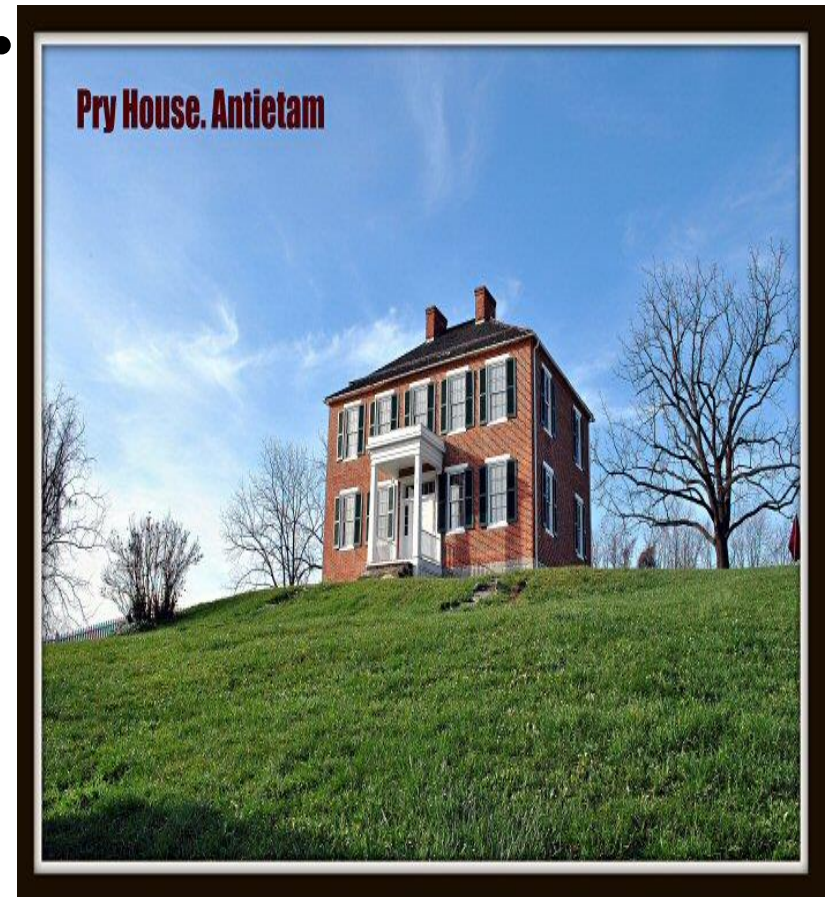
Meeting at Keedysville Sep. 15

That afternoon, Burnside and Cox met Mac, Porter, Sumner, Hooker.

Burn and Mac seemed on good terms despite the reprimand—Cox said this happened only when they were together.

Rebels start shooting; Mac sent off all but Porter – Lincoln had warned him that others saw Porter being given special treatment.

Mac did not advise his generals of his plans for battle – leading to inevitable misunderstanding. Porter stayed with Mac most of the next 2 days

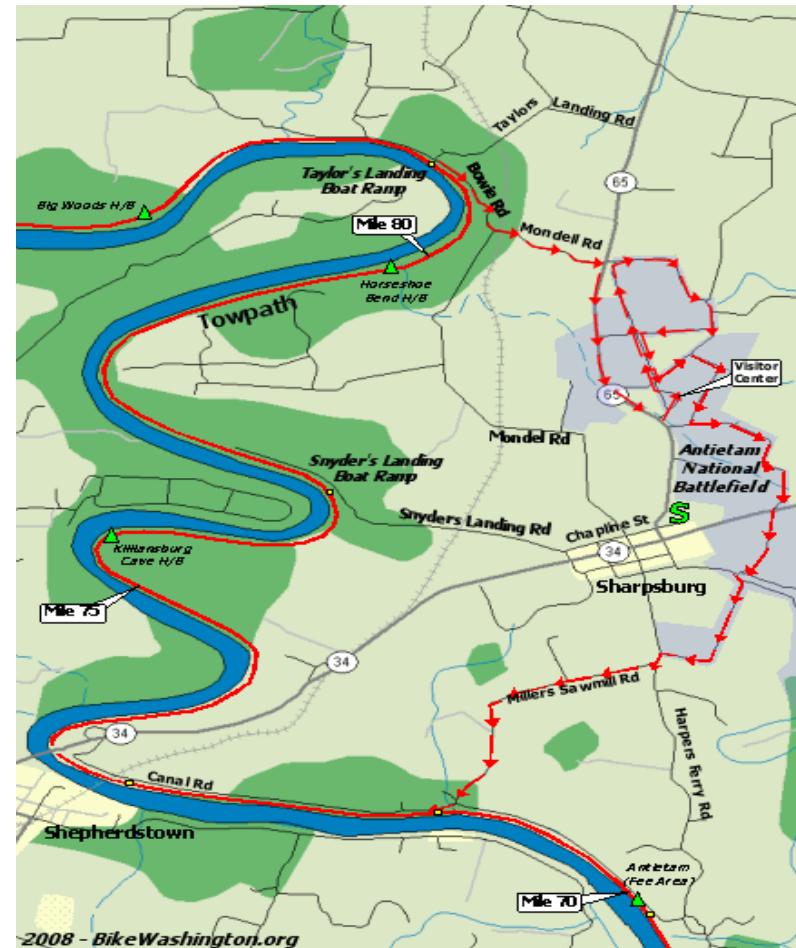


Lee's Situation/Problem

Lee had only about 45,000 men and was backed up to the Potomac with no bridges.

But he played a weak hand very well, though most historians agree that he was tempting fate.

McClellan thought Lee had over 100,000 men, but only McC had almost that many.



September 16, Micro-managing

Instead of attacking, Mac and his staff reconnoitered the battlefield and told Burnside where to station his forces and which fords to use over Antietam Creek. Cox wrote in his memoirs that this undercut any flexibility 9th Corps might have had.

In afternoon, Mac told his staff to tell Burn to wait for further instructions – which never came.

That evening, Mac's office issued another reprimand of Burnside, as follows:

Major-General BURNSIDE,
Commanding Ninth Corps, &c. :

GENERAL: The general commanding has learned that, although your corps was ordered to be in a designated position at 12 m. to-day, at or near sunset only one division and four batteries had reached the ground intended for your troops.

The general has also been advised that there was a delay of some four hours in the movement of your command yesterday. I am instructed to call upon you for explanations of these failures on your part to comply with the orders given you, and to add, in view of the important military operations now at hand, the commanding general cannot lightly regard such marked departure from the tenor of his instructions.

I am, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

Lieutenant-Colonel, Aide-de-Camp, and Actg. Asst. Adj. Gen.

ADVANCE, THREE-QUARTERS OF A MILE
TOWARD SHARPSBURG FROM BOONSBOROUGH,
[September 16 [?], 1862]—11 a. m.

Captain DUANE or General MARCY,
Chief of Staff :

People of the country report the enemy in position just beyond Centreville [Keedysville], on a high ridge, above a small stream, where the valley is clear of wood. For a mile or two in advance of here the road is wooded on the right of the road and clear on the left, as they report. Pleasonton, with Tidball's battery, followed Fitzhugh Lee toward Hagerstown, and General Richardson, without cavalry, in advance, moves about 2 miles, or 1½, an hour. A man in Boonsborough said he counted their guns, and there were fifty; also there was a large baggage train.

C. B. COMSTOCK,
Lieutenant, Engineers.

P. S.—If you will send me two or three orderlies, I will report every hour.

SPECIAL ORDERS, } HDQRS. OF THE ARMY, ADJT. GEN.'s OFFICE,
No. 244. } Washington, September 16, 1862.

IV. Brig. Gen. W. F. Barry, in addition to his other duties, will report to Major-General Banks, as chief of artillery of the defenses of Wash-

Who Wrote the Reprimand; Its Repercussions

In his memoirs, Cox noted this reprimand was unsigned, and that it was illogical for Mac to criticize Burn for doing exactly what he had been ordered to do.

He conjectured that Mac didn't know about this reprimand and that it could only have been released by the CoS or someone in "decisive authority." He surmised that was Porter.

The message was dated Sep 16, but not delivered until Sept. 17, during the Battle of Antietam. The late delivery became another problem for the Union command.

Further Command Controversy

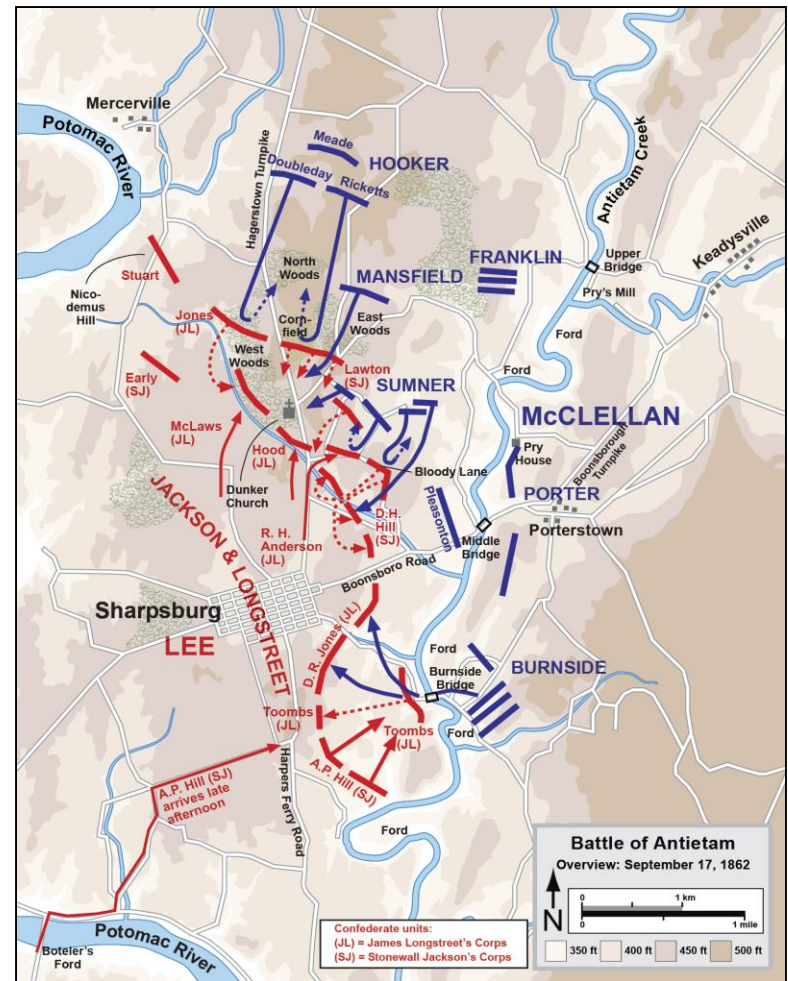
On Sep 16, Burnside advised Cox of his diminished authority. He said when he would get Mac's orders, he would hand them to Cox to carry out, underlining Burn's status as a wing commander – but also his petulance and poor judgment – yet another command problem.

This was a significant vote of confidence for a “political general,” but as Cox told his wife later, “It is nobody but me that [Burnside] is commanding, & through me, the corps.”

Mac's Battle Plan for Antietam: The Left Wing as a "Diversion"

Since Mac had no
"council of war," no
commander knew what
the others were to do.

Cox said Burnside was "of the opinion that the part of the Ninth Corps was...to create...a diversion...to prevent the enemy from stripping his right to reinforce his left."



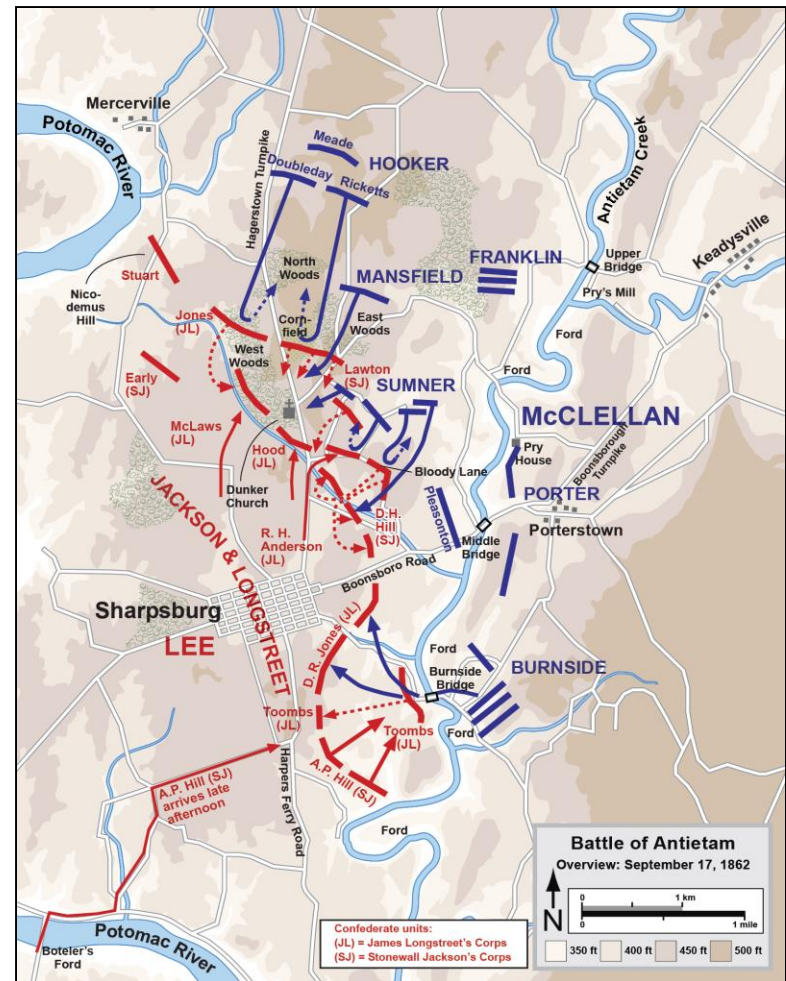
Mac's Battle Plan for Antietam: The Left Wing as a "Diversion"

Artillery began shelling at 3 AM and
Hooker began his attack on the
right at dawn, about 6

That is when the diversion should have
begun also.

Instead, Cox and Burnside only got
orders at 7 to position their men as
Mac's staff and engineers had told
them.

Lee spent the morning shifting men to
his left because he was not diverted
on his right. His army likely would
not have succeeded there without
these extra troops.



Confusion and Distraction

At some point on the morning of the 17th, before he got his attack order, Burnside received the second “reprimand.”

Burnside dictated a response immediately, even as the battle was ongoing around him – another example of bad judgment:

HEADQUARTERS, *September 17, 1862.*

Brig. Gen. S. WILLIAMS, *Assistant Adjutant-General:*

GENERAL: Your dispatch of yesterday this moment received. General Burnside directs me to say that immediately upon the receipt of the order of the general commanding, which was after 12 o'clock, he ordered his corps to be in readiness to march, and instead of having Captain Duane post the division in detail, and at the suggestion of Captain Duane, he sent three aides to ascertain the position of each of the three divisions, that they might post them. These aides returned shortly before 3 o'clock, and they immediately proceeded to post the three columns. The general then went on an eminence above these positions to get a good view of them, and whilst there, during the progress of the movement of his corps, an aide from General McClellan came to him and said that General McClellan was not sure that the proper position had been indicated, and advising him not to hasten the movement until the aide had communicated with the general commanding. He (General Burnside) at once went to General McClellan's headquarters to inform him that he had seen large bodies of the enemy moving off to the right. Not finding the general commanding, General Burnside returned to his command, and the movement was resumed and continued as rapidly as possible. General Burnside directs me to say that he is sorry to have received so severe a rebuke from the general commanding, and particularly sorry that the general commanding feels that his instructions have not been obeyed; but nothing can occur to prevent the general from continuing his hearty co-operation to the best of his ability in any movement the general commanding may direct.

I have the honor to be, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

LEWIS RICHMOND,
Assistant Adjutant-General.

The Diversion/Attack

When the orders to attack finally arrived, (some time between 9 and 10), Burnside handed them to Cox, and the attack on the bridge and the flank began.

The order promised reinforcements and noted that Franklin's 6th corps had arrived. This represented a potential of 10,000 additional forces.



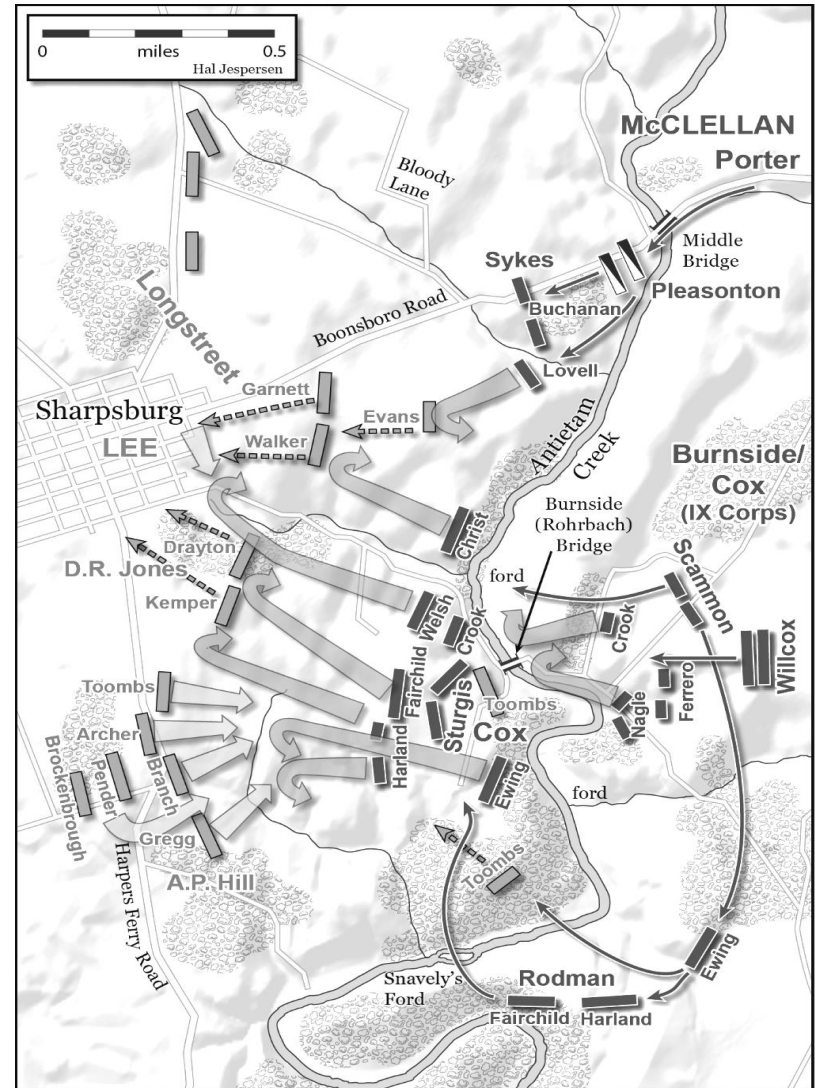
Burnside Bridge

Cleveland Soldiers and Sailors Monument – Cox Reminds McClellan about those orders!



Mac Hectors Burn

All morning and early afternoon, Mac sent messengers to Burn to urge him to cross the bridge, even considering replacing him in command.



Success on the Left

At 1 PM Cox's men pushed over the bridge and Rodman's men came over Snaveley's ford.

The Confederates regrouped around Sharpsburg, awaiting the Union advance



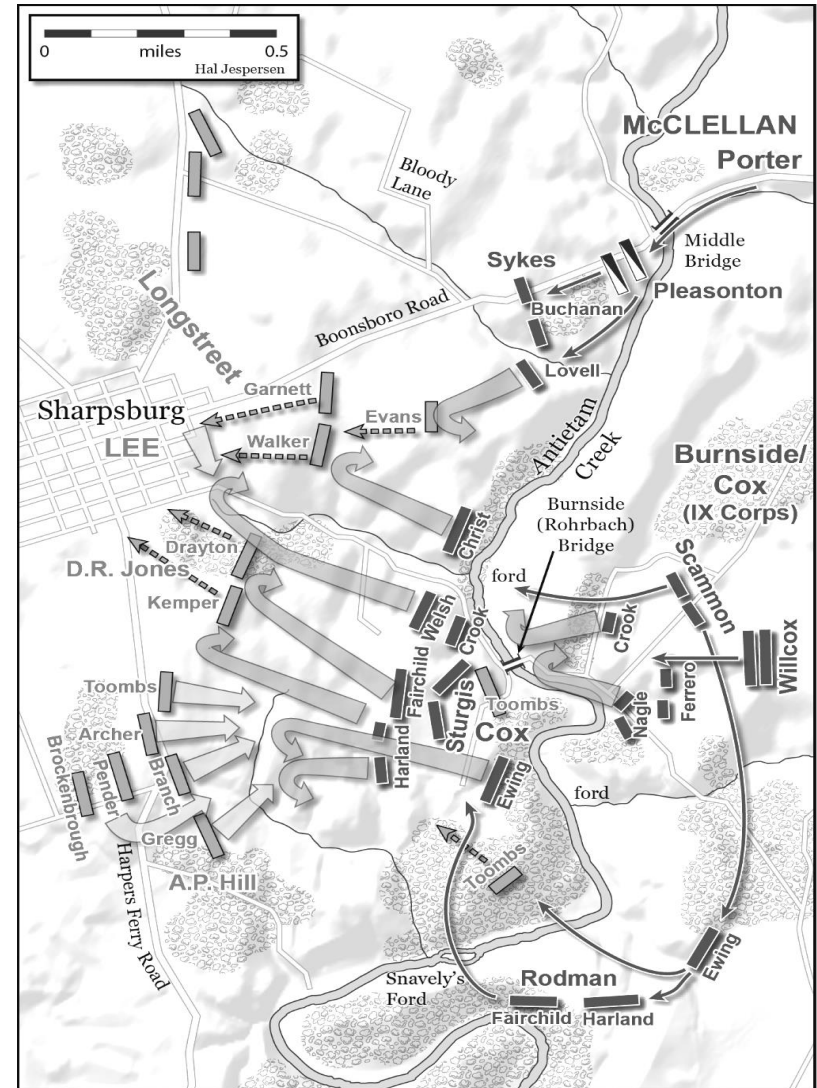
Snaveley's Ford

A Minor Delay, a Major Effect

Cox took until 3 PM to prepare his advance on Sharpsburg. Like Mac, he believed there were massive rebel reserves, so he was perhaps too careful getting ready.

Burnside was optimistic, Mac having promised reinforcements once he was over the bridge

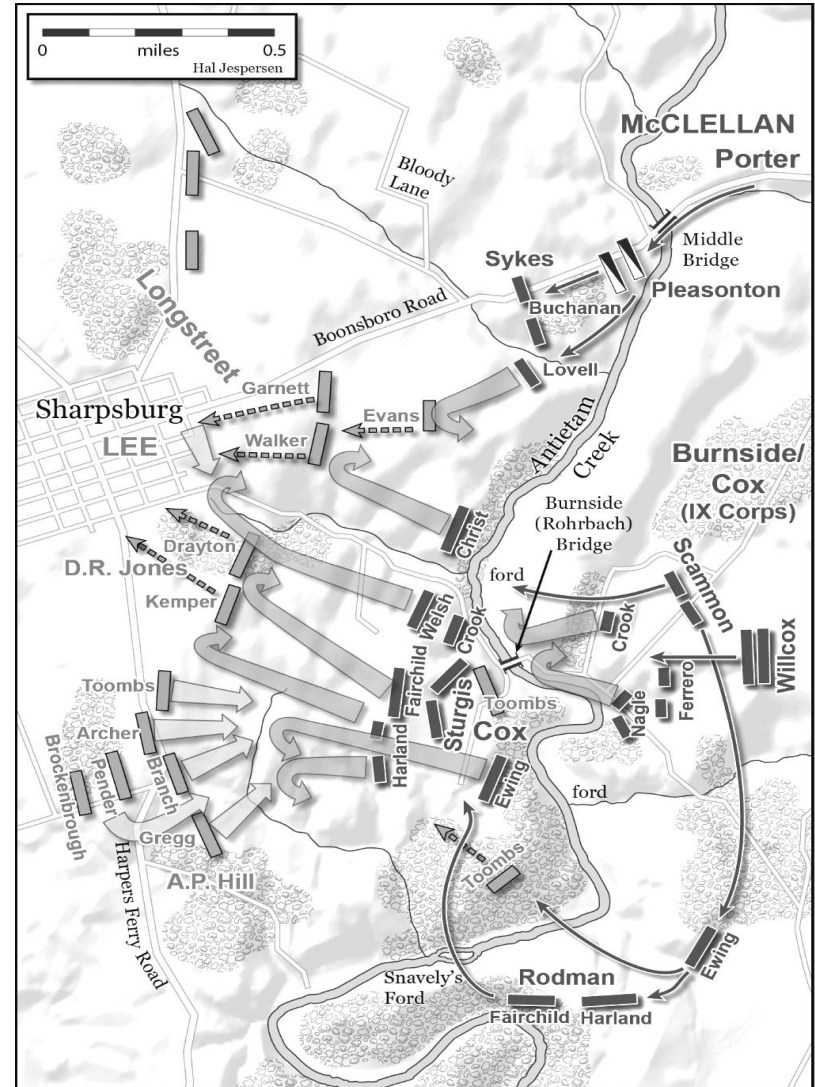
Mac wrote to Halleck at 1:20, "Burnside is now attacking their right, and I hold **my small reserve consisting of Porter's [5th Corps]** (emphasis added) ready to attack the center as soon as the flank movements are developed."



A Minor Delay, a Major Effect 2

Despite mentioning Franklin in his original attack order, Mac did not mention now that Franklin's 10,000 men of the 6th corps were also in reserve.

In fact, at 2 PM Franklin had urged an attack in the weakened Confederate center, noting that his men were fresh. This was rejected by Mac.

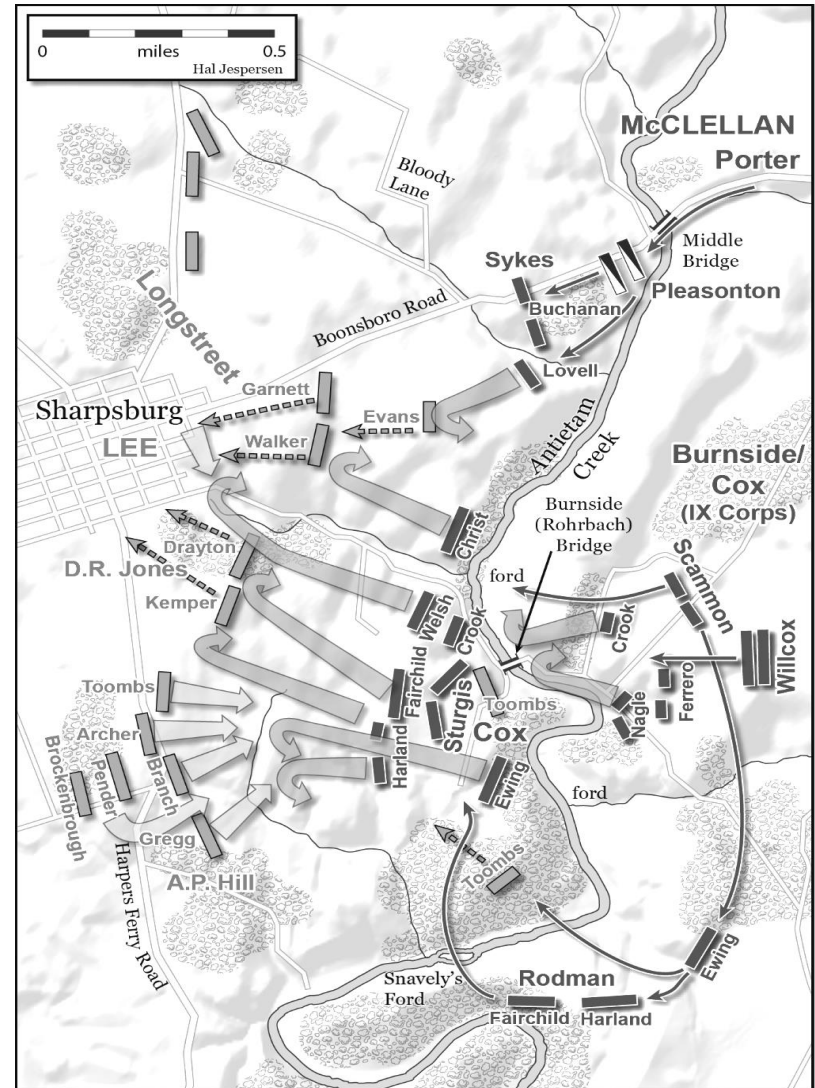


On the Verge of Victory

From 3-4:30 Cox's men advanced on Sharpsburg, and Lee and the Confederacy were in potential dire straits.

But A.P. Hill's men from Harpers Ferry were advancing and hit Union left around 4 PM

Mac, author of the army's cavalry manual, had not reconnoitered the left with his cavalry.



On the Verge of Victory



A.P. Hill

Union Signal corps advised Burn's headquarters at 3 PM of A.P. Hill's advance; Burn was with Cox, so he didn't get the message.

Once Hill attacked, Ninth Corps in difficult straits – by 4:30 Cox had decided to move back and form a new defensive line

Meanwhile, at 4:00 two senior officers told Mac the center was weak and now was the time to attack there. **We now know their assessment was accurate.**

Chimera at the Climactic Moment

Historians agree that this was the moment when the war could have ended with a resounding Union victory.

Instead, his chimera of countless rebel reserves in his head, Mac did not reinforce Burn or attack the Center.

Porter's influence was critical in making those decisions since he commanded the reserve. What was his motivation?

In Mac's report he said his force was too small to risk.



Burn and Pleasonton's Complaint?

- Soon after the battle, the first grumbling about Porter's inaction took place.
- Porter, who was ultimately convicted and cashiered from the army, put his thoughts on the record, as follows:

Porter's Third Complaint

404

OPERATIONS IN N. VA., W. VA., MD., AND PA. [CHAP. XXXI.]

HEADQUARTERS FIFTH ARMY CORPS,
October 8, 1862.

Brig. Gen. S. WILLIAMS,

Asst. Adjt. Gen., Headquarters Army of the Potomac :

GENERAL : I have heard from various sources at a distance, and seen it published, that Generals Burnside and Pleasonton had presented charges against me for refusing re-enforcements asked of me at the battle of Antietam. This report has gained much circulation and some credence, and is being used much to my injury. In order that I may take the necessary steps to free myself from unjust imputations, I respectfully request to be informed if any such charge or report has been made against me. I respectfully request an early reply.

I am, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

F. J. PORTER,
Major-General, Commanding.

(Indorsement:) Answered verbally.

GREEN SPRING, VA.,

October 8, 1862—11.20 a. m. (Received 4.50 p. m.)

Brigadier-General MARCY, *Harper's Ferry :*

As long as the river is at present stage, Colonel Campbell can maintain his present position with safety. If his companies are vigilant, if threatened by an overwhelming force, they can retire to the Maryland side. I will cover him with cavalry as soon as practicable. There are points of the road that cavalry cannot guard, on account of the extensive ruggedness of ground ; there are no continuous wagon roads along

Cox's Complaint

Just after the battle, Cox told his wife, “The only criticism I feel like making on the conduct of the battle is that we were not supported on the left by part at least of Fitz-John Porter’s Corps which was near and was not brought into the engagement.

“With its aid...we would have driven his [Lee’s] two wings back on the Potomac by different lines & probably in a panic rout...Not to seize the moment to throw his fresh reserves into the scale seems to have been McClellan’s error.”

McClellan's First Reaction

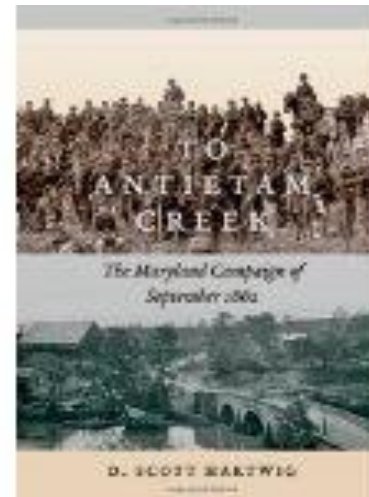
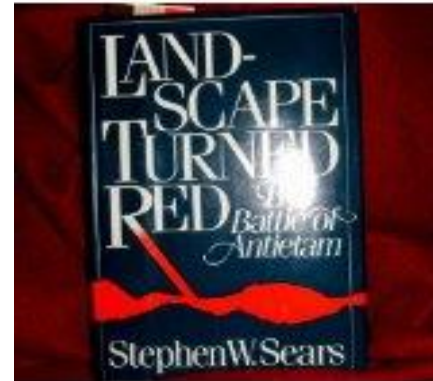
Mac wrote to his wife, “Those in whose judgment I rely tell me that I fought the battle splendidly and that it was a masterpiece of art.”

Summing Up – The Controversy over Command at Antietam

Most major historians, e.g. Stephen Sears and Scott Hartwig, agree with Cox's thesis, or at least its essence.

Scott Hartwig wrote in The Maryland Campaign (2012),

“from the morning of the 15th on, McClellan's once-warm relations with Burnside grew markedly cooler. One of the precepts of warfare is unity of command, but McClellan set about undoing that in the morning. The seeds he had sown would bear their unfortunate fruit over the next few days...Perhaps Fitz-John Porter influenced McClellan's actions...By Porter's lights Burnside could not be trusted and his loyalty to McClellan was questionable.”



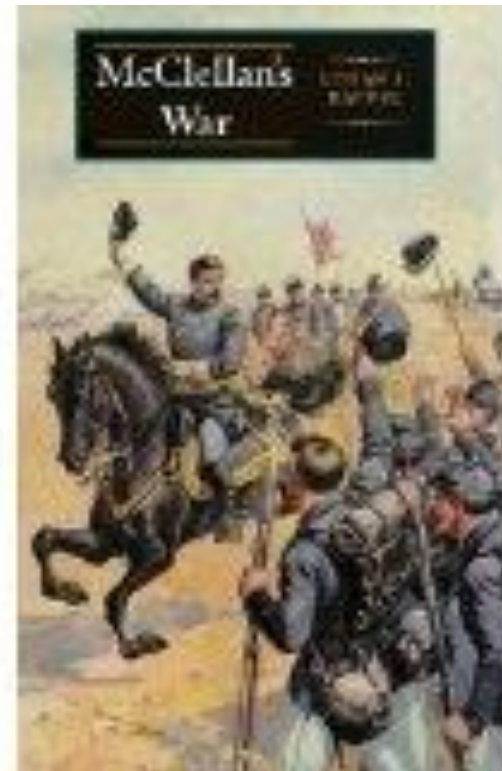
Summing Up – The Issue of Command at Antietam

One historian who takes an opposite view to Cox is Ethan Rafuse.

In a 2008 article in “Civil War History” he attempted to debunk what he called Cox’s “conspiracy theory.”

Rafuse believed every action Mac took was reasonable and understandable based on his understanding of the battlefield and his and Lee’s forces.

He wrote that there was little evidence that any of the key figures “acted in anything other than good faith throughout the campaign”



Who's Right?



Jacob Cox, Citizen General,
Official Portrait as Ohio Governor

**Cox has a well-founded
circumstantial case, but the
evidence is not definitive.**

Few question Cox's integrity and
reputation as a man of honor.

**From the evidence, it actually
seems clear that Porter acted
"in anything but good faith."**

The debate will continue, but now you
know how this issue came to be,
from Cox's highly-respected
histories of the Civil War