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Civil War Resources

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ANTIETAM

Outline of the Battle

At the battle of Antietam, Maryland, fought on Sept. 17th, 1862, there was no general concerted advance by the Union Army under Gen'l. McClellan. Nearly one-third of the Union troops present were not engaged in the battle. They were held in reserve. The line was practically semi-circular - extending from a point on the Hagerstown Turnpike nearly a mile from the Dunker Church, it crossed the turnpike near the church, on to the head of Bloody Lane and to the present lookout tower at the end of the lane. That Tower stands near the centre point of the Union Lines. From the Tower, it extended in a some what curved line, to Antietam Bridge. The battle began early in the morning along the Hagerstown Turnpike, beyond the Dunker Church. The fight down to and around the Church was hotly contested - each line alternately driving the other back. This backward and forward movement extended for half a mile or more. The last of the rebel dead on that part of the field were buried on Sunday afternoon about three o'clock, succeeding the battle of the previous Wednesday. It was near the spot where Capt. Colwell, of Carlisle, commanding Co. A, of the 7th Regiment of Penn's. Reserve Corps, was killed, as well as some members of his Company. It was at a point nearly opposite the Church, and at least half a mile or more distant from it. The burial party consisted of what was left of the 130 Reg't. Penn'a. Volunteers under my command, specially detailed to bury the enemy's dead, from a point a little beyond the monument of that Regiment at the head of Bloody Lane, to a point near the Lookout Tower at the other end of the lane. The work began on Friday afternoon and was finished on Sunday afternoon, near the spot

where Capt. Colwell was killed. The number of rebel dead buried was about 440, and so reported to an Officer of Gen'l. McClellans Staff. The battle on the right down to and including the Church was practically ended between nine and ten o'clock in the morning. About nine o'clock in the morning the center of the Union lines went into action. Its fight continued until nearly two o'clock in the afternoon. There was no driving backward and forward on that line. It was a terrific musketry duel. The loss sustained by the 2nd Army Corps in that musketry duel was almost one-half of the entire loss of the Union Army in that battle. At one time a force of the enemy moved in by the lane which leaves the Turnpike a little below the Tollgate and continues on curving to the right until it becomes Bloody Lane. Some short distance in from the turnpike a lane runs to the left into what were the buildings on the Mumma Farm, and which were burned during the battle. The force of the enemy took that lane to get at a right angle to the line of the Union Centre. It was a beautiful sight to see them advance on that line as if they were marching in a dress-parade. They advanced in line about half way to the right of the 130th Regt. Penn'a. Volunteers until they were held in check. Some of the muskets of Cumberland County men helped to check them, until a battery of Artillery, with supporting troops, hurled them from the field.

About the time the fight in the centre was dying down to an irregular fire of artillery the drive on the left of the Union line was made against Antietam Bridge. Gen'l. Burnside kept up a desultory fight without effecting anything until finally he was peremptorily ordered to advance in force and capture Antietam Bridge. Burnside's men gallantly advanced, captured the bridge, and drove the enemy up over the hills to about the

line of the road near which I think stands the McKinley Monument. The Union line of battle, at that time extending round from the advance beyond the turnpike and up that road towards Hagerstown, around by Bloody Lane to the advance from Antietam Creek, was almost semi-circular in shape. It was like a man standing with both arms extended and slightly curved, as if he were about to clasp an object in front of him. On the inside of that curved line was the enemy's line.

He could move his forces by short lines to every part of the battle field, and he did so as the markers on the field show that the small commands fought near the Dunker Church, near the Lookout Tower, at the end of Bloody Lane and resisted the advance from Antietam Bridge.

By four o'clock in the afternoon the noise of the battle died down to irregular cannon shots. It was a critical moment. Two Thousand Union Men lay dead upon the field. Twenty Thousand Union Men had not fired a shot to help them nor to avenge their death. It is a historical fact that at this juncture, the officers and General McClellan's Staff advised and asked him to send forward the large force held in reserve and advance the entire army. The General refused. He was implored to do so, but he again refused, saying that he had done enough and would do no more. The Staff-Officers applied to Gen'l. Hooker to take command, send forward the reserve force, and advance the entire army. They promised to be responsible for doing so. Gen'l. Hooker was suffering from a severe wound received in the early morning fight, and said he could not possibly sit a saddle. They promised to get a carriage and take him over the field in it. Gen'l. Hooker consented. The carriage was brought. The General was placed in it, and fainted from the effects of his wound, and the attempt had to be given up. It

might have succeeded. It might have failed. None can tell. This may be said against it. The reserve Artillery of Gen'l. Lee was parked in a commanding position some three hundred yards behind the Dunker Church. The position of it was pointed out to me by Judge Christian of Richmond who belonged to one of the batteries. It was a commanding position. If the encircling lines of the Union Army had advanced, every part of the line could have been reached by the guns located there. Judge Christian said that the location had been selected designedly. The move was not made. The battle of Antietam was ended - both armies resting on the field. Gen'l. Lee withdrew his army. He was not driven from the field by force of arms. He was simply stopped by force of arms in his advance. He voluntarily withdrew his army. This was an admission of defeat, and the victory was accorded to the Union Army. Very little of strategy and less of tactics were shown in the battle. But History hails it as the bloodiest battle of the entire civil war. It settled one thing effectively - the intended invasion of the North by General Lee's Army. Nothing else resulted from it, for the battle was not followed up.

Incorrect

The Confederate dead at the battles of South Mountain, Antietam and in skirmishes in that section of the country are buried in a cemetery on the left of the Road as you leave Hagerstown for Antietam. They are in semi-circular rows with a handsome monument in the centre of the circle erected by the States of Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia. Two years ago not a single grave had a marker. When the writer first saw them each grave had a marble marker. There, over four thousand unknown brave men quietly sleep in death.

JOHN HAYS.

13th June, 1916.