

WASHINGTON AT WAR | 140 YEARS AGO

America's Bloodiest Day

Union and Confederate Armies Meet in the Battle of Antietam

After more than six weeks of fighting around Washington, Gen. Robert E. Lee's and Gen. George B. McClellan's armies clash at the Battle of Antietam. Twelve hours of fierce fighting results in 23,000 casualties, more than 5,000 of them dead or missing. Although the battle ends in a tactical draw because McClellan fails to drive the Confederates from the field, he claims a victory when Confederate losses prevent Lee from continuing

the invasion. President Abraham Lincoln uses this victory to make public his intent to issue an Emancipation Proclamation. Here is a look at the final actions that drew more than 130,000 soldiers to this battlefield.

By GENE THORP—Washington Post cartographer

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Civil War soldiers battled their way through the region 140 years ago this summer. This three-part graphic series explores those weeks, climaxing with America's bloodiest day, the Battle of Antietam, on Sept. 17, 1862.

METRO SECTION

Aug. 25: Setting the stage

Last week: Lee invades Maryland

This week: Antietam

WEEKEND SECTION

Sept 6: Guide to visiting the battlefields

Setting the Stage

Sept. 8-13, 1862

McClellan Searches for Lee

Uncertain of Lee's strategy or strength, McClellan heads northwest toward Frederick, gathering intelligence as he goes. The Union high command does not know if Lee intends to make a stand at Frederick, march into Pennsylvania, or recross the Potomac and swoop down on Washington. By the time McClellan arrives, Lee has left Frederick. Residents rejoice as Union troops enter the city. Troop morale soars at the enthusiastic reception.

Lee's Special Order 191

Lee has broken his army into five columns. Three columns under Gens. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, John Walker, and Lafayette McLaws converge on Col. Dixon Miles's command at Harpers Ferry. Longstreet's column moves to Hagerstown. D. H. Hill's column heads to Boonsboro to guard the South Mountain gaps and Lee's supplies.

UNION ADVANCE

While Union troops chase Lee ...

1 Sept. 13

Plan Discovered
Union infantrymen discover a rare find while camped near Frederick: three cigars wrapped in a sheet of paper detailing Lee's plan to capture Harpers Ferry. Based on this, McClellan sends Gen. William Franklin to relieve Miles, while he plans to pursue and overwhelm Lee's segmented army.

2 Sept. 14

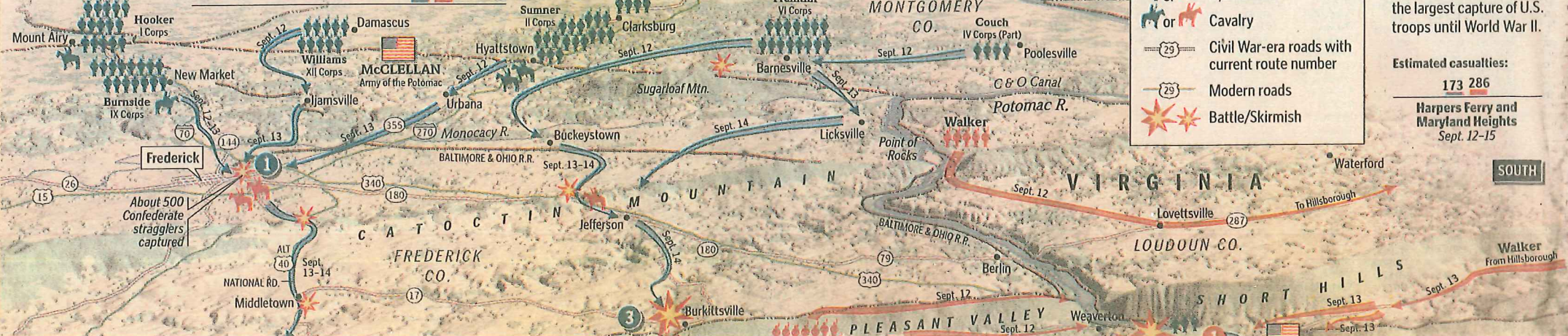
Battles of Fox's Gap and Turner's Gap
McClellan's main force assaults two gaps on South Mountain held by D.H. Hill and his men. The outgunned rebels buy enough time for Longstreet to arrive from Hagerstown, but the Union army seizes both gaps by nightfall.

3 Sept. 14

Battle of Crampton's Gap
Franklin's troops break through Crampton's Gap after a bitter fight with McLaws. They march to relieve Miles but halt at dusk when they find the remainder of McLaws's command blocking their path in Pleasant Valley.

2,325 2,300

South Mountain casualties Sept. 14



KEY

- Union (Blue square)
- Confederate (Red square)
- 1,000 men (Blue/red icons)
- Cavalry (Blue/red horse icons)
- Civil War-era roads with current route number (Blue/red lines with numbers)
- Modern roads (Grey lines with numbers)
- Battle/Skirmish (Starburst icon)

Estimated casualties:
173 286
Harpers Ferry and Maryland Heights
Sept. 12-15

BATTLE OF ANTIETAM (SEPT. 17, 1862) 5,425 dead or missing

ENTIRE REVOLUTIONARY WAR (1775-1783) 4,435 dead

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4 Sept. 15
Lee Retreats
 Lee withdraws from South Mountain after nightfall to Antietam Creek. He receives word that Harpers Ferry has fallen. Lee decides to risk another fight with McClellan, gambling that Jackson will arrive in time to reinforce him. McClellan also hears of Miles's surrender and summons Franklin, hoping to strike Lee a fatal blow before Jackson arrives.

5 Sept. 15-16
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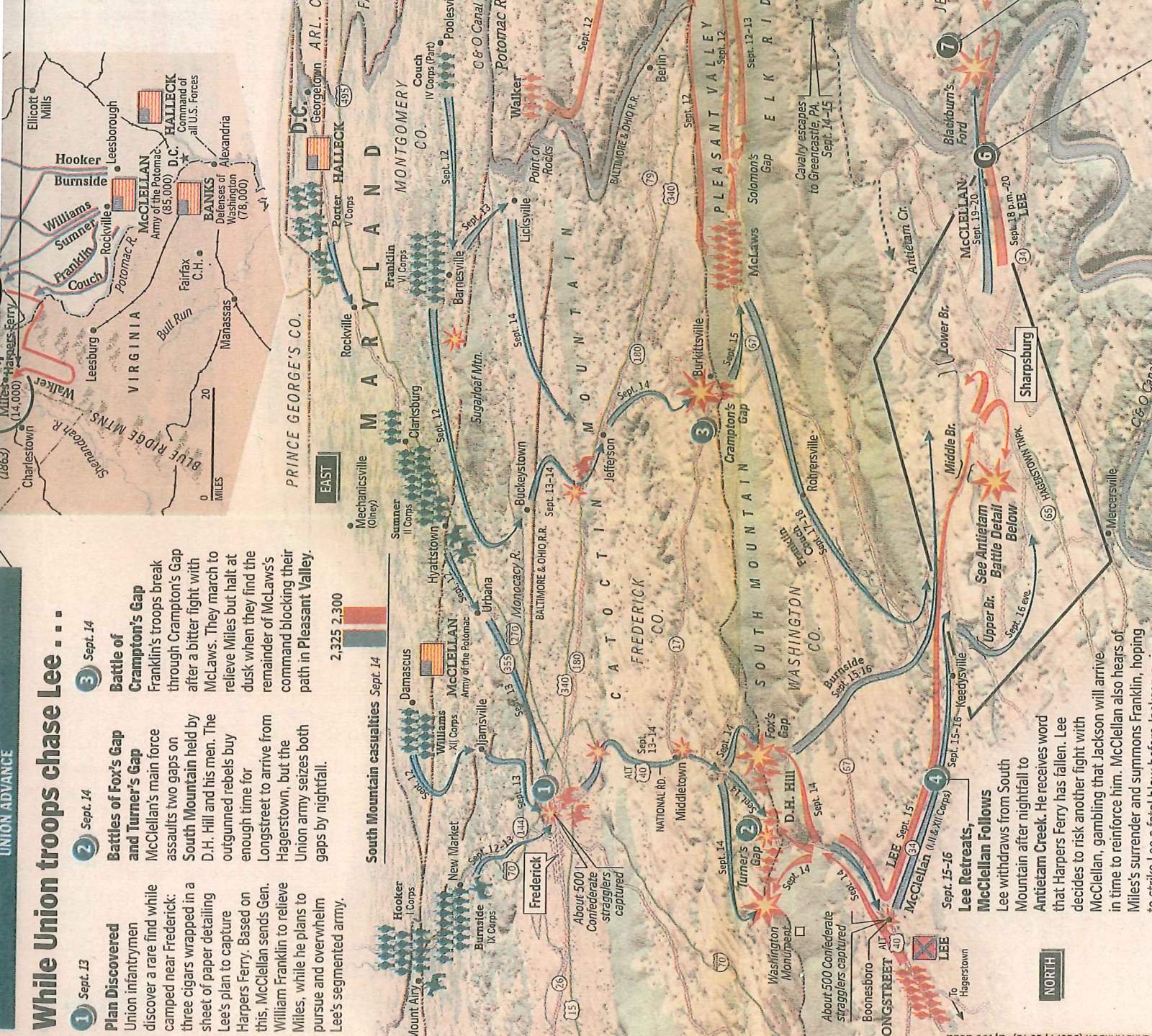
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Preparing for a Confederate Attack
 Miles's mostly inexperienced 14,000-man garrison is assembled on Bolivar and Maryland Heights, leaving Loudoun Heights undefended. All three columns now surround Miles.

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 McLaws's men climb Elk Ridge and attack the Federals, driving them off the mountain. Rebels haul artillery to the vacated heights. All three columns now surround Miles.

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The Forces Meet at Antietam

Troops on both sides converge on Antietam Creek. McClellan formulates his plan of attack. The main assault, led by Gen. "Fighting Joe" Hooker, will fall on Lee's left flank, while Gen. Ambrose Burnside is to create a diversion and strike Lee's right. If either meets success, McClellan will attack Lee's center with his reserves.

1 6 a.m.-9 a.m.
The Cornfield
 Hooker with Gen. Joseph Mansfield assaults Jackson's men in the East Woods and the Cornfield to capture the high ground near the Dunker Church. Fighting is intense in the 30-acre cornfield, an area about the size of Georgetown. The battle lines roll back and forth as both sides push new troops into the fight. By 9 a.m., about 8,000 soldiers on both sides are dead or wounded. The Federals get a foot hold at the church.

2 9 a.m.
West Woods
 Gen. Edwin Sumner continues the assault. Walker and McLaws surprise the Federals and catch them in a deadly crossfire that kills or wounds more than 2,200 Union soldiers in less than 20 minutes. To send his reserves into the breach, enabling Lee's army to avert a potential disaster.

3 11 a.m.
Bloody Lane
 The remainder of Sumner's troops assault Lee's center, which is sheltered by a sunken road. The Union suffers high casualties in numerous frontal attacks, but the rebel line is finally broken. The dead and wounded lie two or three deep for half a mile. McClellan fails to secure the crossing, and Burnside pulls back to Antietam Creek where nightfall ends the fighting.

4 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
Burnside Bridge
 Burnside orders his men to take the 125-foot-long Lower Bridge spanning Antietam Creek, which proves to be a monumental task. Although his force greatly outnumbered the Confederates, it takes three hours and several disastrous assaults to finally secure the crossing, and Burnside pulls back to Antietam Creek where nightfall ends the fighting.

5 3:30 p.m.-nightfall
A.P. Hill Saves the Day
 Wearing the red flannel shirt he always wore into battle, A.P. Hill and his men are the last of Lee's troops to arrive from Harpers Ferry. Hill strikes an untrained unit on Burnside's flank, and the Federal line collapses. Reluctantly, Burnside pulls back to Antietam Creek where nightfall ends the fighting.

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McClellan
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7 Sept. 19-20
Lee Retreats
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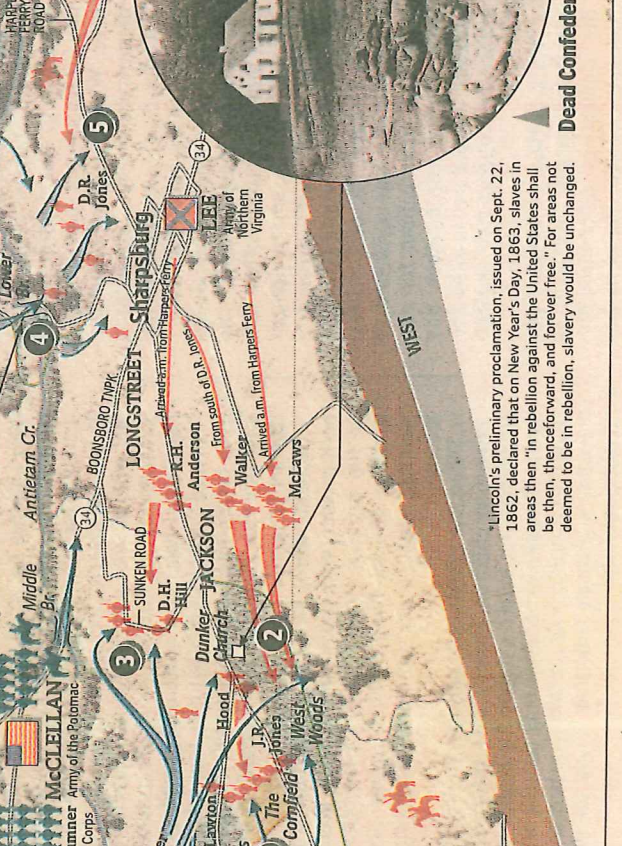
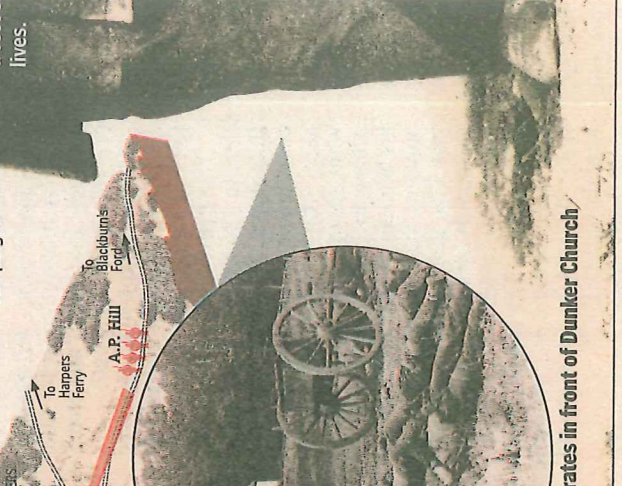
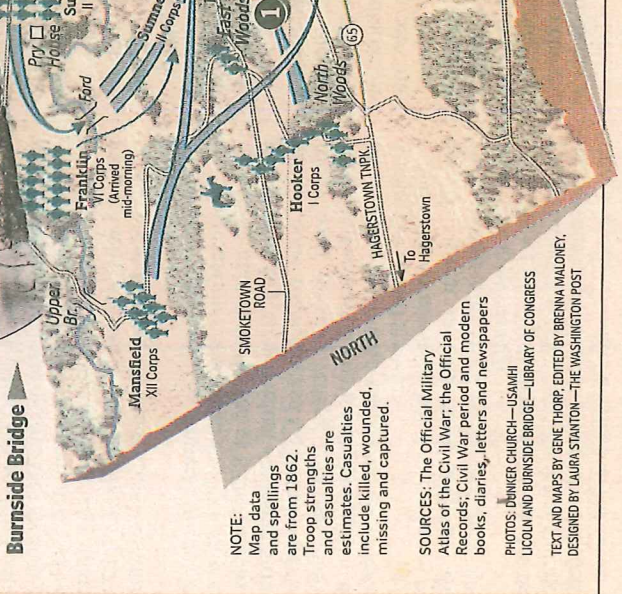
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Dead Confederates in front of Dunker Church

NOTE:
 Map data and spellings are from 1862. Troop strengths and casualties are estimates. Casualties include killed, wounded, missing and captured.

SOURCES: The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War; the Official Records; Civil War period and modern books, diaries, letters and newspapers. PHOTOS: DUNKER CHURCH—USAMHI; LUCON AND BURNSIDE BRIDGE—LIBRARY OF CONGRESS. TEXT AND MAPS BY GENE THORP; EDITED BY GRENN MALONEY. DESIGNED BY LAURA STANTON—THE WASHINGTON POST.

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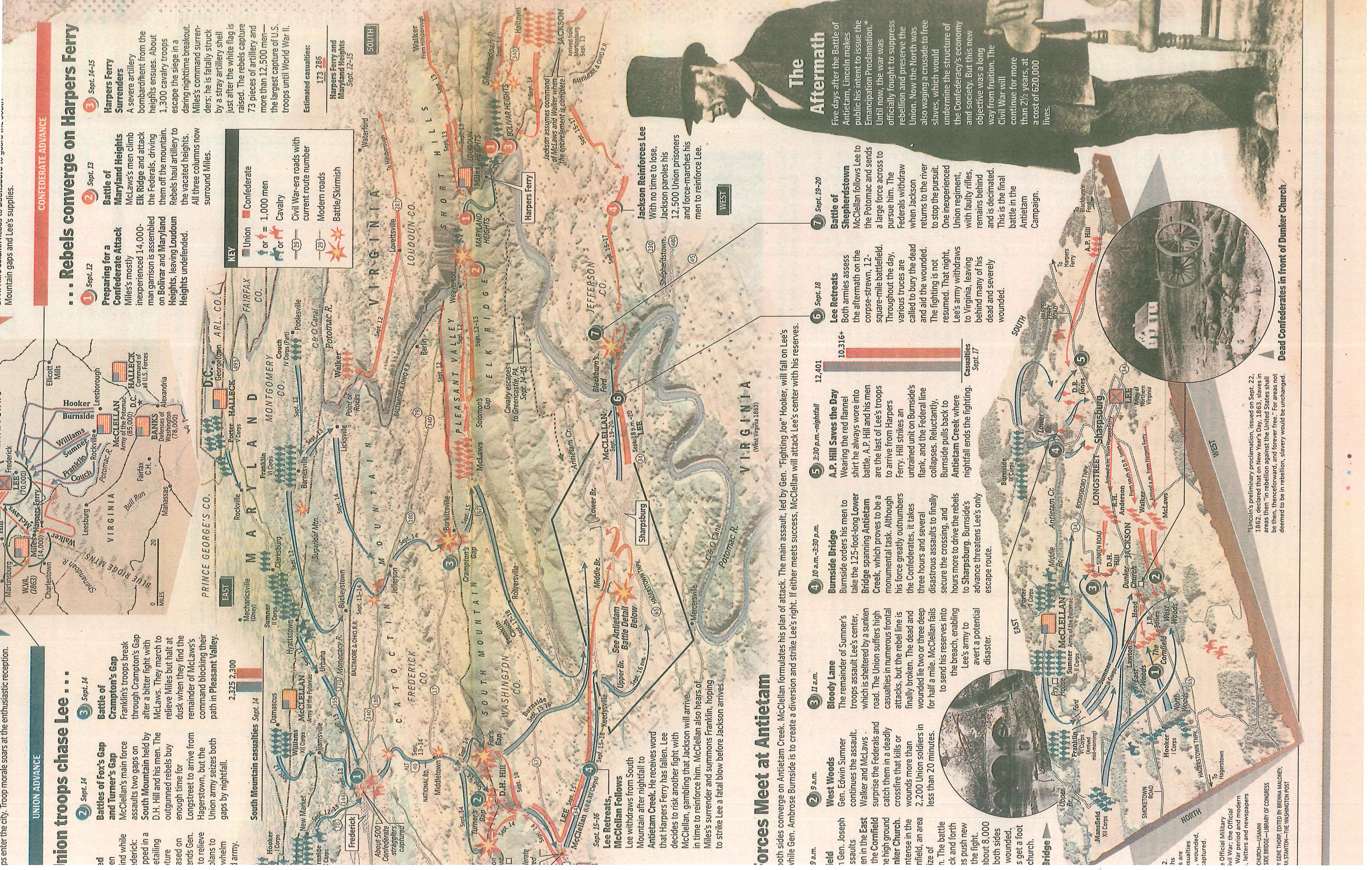
3 Sept. 14-15
Harpers Ferry Surrenders
 A severe artillery bombardment from the heights ensues. About 1,300 cavalry troops escape the siege in a daring nighttime breakout. Miles's command surrenders; he is fatally struck by a stray artillery shell just after the white flag is raised. The rebels capture 73 pieces of artillery and more than 12,500 men—the largest capture of U.S. troops until World War II.

Estimated casualties: 173 286

Harpers Ferry and Maryland Heights Sept. 12-15

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Sept. 19-20

7 Sept. 19-20
Battle of Shepherdstown
 McClellan follows Lee to the Potomac and sends a large force across to pursue him. The Federals withdraw when Jackson returns to the river to stop the pursuit. One inexperienced Union regiment, with faulty rifles, remains behind and is decimated. This is the final battle in the Antietam Campaign.

The Aftermath

Five days after the Battle of Antietam, Lincoln makes public his intent to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. Until now, the war was officially fought to suppress rebellion and preserve the Union. Now the North was also waging a crusade to free slaves, which would undermine the structure of the Confederacy's economy and society. But this new objective was a long way from fruition. The Civil War will continue for more than 2 1/2 years, at a cost of 620,000 lives.

"Lincoln's preliminary proclamation, issued on Sept. 22, 1862, declared that on New Year's Day, 1863, slaves in areas then 'in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.' For areas not deemed to be in rebellion, slavery would be unchanged.

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