

Frederick County
Maryland

A Playground of the Civil War



Paul and Rita Gordon

Mountain raged ahead of them. Johnson would be wounded at Antietam and hospitalized in Frederick.²⁴

The Confederates claimed that Middletown residents were even less hospitable than those in Frederick. They felt that Middletown was the most Union of all places they had been during their brief sojourn in Maryland.

As troops from both armies crossed through the pass, they were reminded of the penalty for pilferage. Two Rebels hung from trees, their bodies swaying in the breeze, a warning that any violation of an order from Lee would carry the highest penalty. These were two of the unfortunate ones, ones who had gotten caught, while many of their companions had escaped punishment. There the bodies remained until cut down by a sympathetic Union officer who ordered their burial.

Meanwhile, McClellan had been given an advantage that he did not use immediately. Forever cautious, he was suspicious of what had been found.

A curious incident had occurred in the very fields in which Mrs. Markell had visited General Lee. Those grounds now were occupied by Union troops.

Corporal Barton Mitchell and First Sergeant McKnight Bloss had finished their cup of coffee and were complaining about the day's march. Both men spotted a large bulky envelope in the tall grass. Mitchell opened it and found three cigars wrapped in a piece of paper. The cigars received more attention than did the paper, for they aroused thoughts about an enjoyable smoke.

Finally, Mitchell noticed writing on the paper and halfheartedly began to read it. Entitled "Special Orders No. 191", it contained references to Southern Generals Jackson and Longstreet. It was addressed to Major General D. H. Hill and signed by R. H. Chilton, Assistant Adjutant General. Half in doubt, he turned the paper over to his commander, who passed it up the chain of command. Eventually, it reached McClellan's headquarters.

McClellan ascertained that it was an authentic document, because an officer recognized Chilton's handwriting. Before them lay Lee's marching orders in detail. It read:

The army will resume its march tomorrow, taking the Hagerstown road. Gen. Jackson's command will form the advance; and, after passing Middletown, with such portion as he may select, take the route toward Sharpsburg, cross the Potomac at the most convenient point, and by Friday

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night, take possession of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad,
capture such of the enemy as may be at Martinsburg, and
intercept such as may attempt to escape from Harper's
Ferry.

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Gen. Longstreet's command will pursue the same road as far
as Boonsborough, where it will halt with the reserve, sup-
ply, and baggage trains of the army.

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Gen. McLaws, with his own division and that of Gen. R. H.
Anderson, will follow Gen. Longstreet; on reaching
Middletown, he will take the route to Harper's Ferry, and by
Friday morning, possess himself of the Maryland Heights,
and endeavor to capture the enemy at Harper's Ferry and
vicinity.

Gen. Walker, with his division, after accomplishing the
object in which he is now engaged, will cross the Potomac
at Cheek's Ford, ascent its right bank to Lovettsville, take
possession of Loudoun Heights, if practicable, by Friday
morning; Key's Ford on his left, and the road between the
end of the mountain and the Potomac on his right. He will,
as far as practicable, cooperate with Gen. McLaws and Gen.
Jackson in intercepting the retreat of the enemy.

Gen. D.H. Hill's division will form the rear guard of the
army, pursuing the road taken by the main body. The
reserve artillery, ordnance and supply trains, &c., will pre-
cede Gen. Hill.

Gen. Stuart will detach a squadron of cavalry to accompany
the commands of Gens. Longstreet, Jackson, and McLaws,
and, with the main body of the cavalry, will cover the route
of the army, and bring up all stragglers that may have been
left behind.

The commands of Gens. Jackson, McLaws, and Walker,
after accomplishing the objects for which they have been
detached, will join the main body of the army at
Boonsborough or Hagerstown.

Each regiment on the march will habitually carry its axes in
the regimental ordinance wagons, for use of the men at their
encampments, to procure wood, &c.²⁵

Had McClellan used this knowledge, he might have
crushed the Army of Northern Virginia and perhaps ended the
war quickly. He told a fellow officer that the order now enabled
him to "whip Bobbie Lee".

McClellan, even before the finding of the "Lost Dispatch",
had guessed Lee's movements correctly. In a communication to
his superiors, he forecast that Lee would head toward Harper's