After repelling the Army of the Potomac’s invasion of Virginia and the subsequent major Confederate victory at the Second Battle of Bull Run, Robert E. Lee decided to invade Maryland. It was August 1862. His motivation was threefold. His supply wagons were bare, for northern Virginia’s farms and fields had been stripped of crops and livestock. Maryland offered the opportunity to replenish food and supplies. He also sought to sever railroad access to Washington and to win Maryland for the Confederacy. And perhaps most importantly, he wanted to demonstrate conclusively to Europe that the South was worthy of recognition.

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian James M. McPherson wrote in an essay “Antietam was unquestionably the most important battle of the Civil War in its impact on foreign relations. Never again did Britain and France come so close to intervention; never again did the Confederacy come so close to recognition by foreign governments. In the Revolution, the battle of Saratoga brought French intervention, which was key to ultimate American victory. In the Civil War, Antietam turned out to be the Saratoga that failed.”

On September 17, 1862, the opposing forces clashed near the...
By 10 A.M., the “first” Battle of Antietam was over, with 13,000 casualties lying in the cornfields and surrounding woods. It has been said that “No corn should ever grow there again, lest the stalks hang their heads in shame at the terrible carnage that took place in that field.”
Hats,” for the distinctive, broad-brimmed Hardy Hats they wore. These Midwestern boys took pride in both their nickname and their army designation -- the First Brigade of the First Division of the First Corps. (The article The Black Hats in the May 2008 issue of The Standard offers more on this legendary brigade.)

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As Hood’s Confederates retired, Hooker’s First Corps was left reeling. Mansfield’s Twelfth Corps then advanced and occupied the East Woods. The Federals were met by D.H. Hill’s brigades, and they fought each other to a standstill.

It was then that Union Major General Sumner deployed his Second Corps. The Confederates occupied a strong position in a natural trench formed by a sunken farm track -- later known as Bloody Lane. The violent struggle lasted until 12:30 P.M., when the Confederates fell back to regroup in the outskirts of Sharpsburg.

The Rebel center was now wide open, but McClellan refused to commit the fresh troops of General William Franklin’s Sixth Corps. The final stage of the battle commenced at about 3:00 P.M., on the Union left flank at Rohrbach Bridge over Antietam Creek, later dubbed “Burnside’s Bridge.” After intense fighting, Major-General Ambrose Burnside succeeded in advancing two of his Ninth Corps regiments over the bridge in an attempt to block Lee from re-treating across the Potomac. Finally, it looked as if the Union forces would prevail, but again, time and resources worked against them. Burnside took his time in organizing the attack (originally intended to be launched at 10:00 A.M.), and McClellan refused to commit his reserves (Fitz-John Porter’s Fifth Corps). Confederate General A.P. Hill arrived at the right time and right place with his Carolina brigades, after a forced 17-mile march from Harper’s Ferry. The battle ended with the Federals falling back towards Antietam.

Did you know?

Two future U.S. presidents, Rutherford B. Hayes and William McKinley participated in the Battle of Antietam. Captain Oliver Wendell Holmes of the 20th Massachusetts, who would go on to serve as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was wounded in the neck and left for dead.
Celebrated Civil War artist Keith Rocco captured the fervor of the Iron Brigade as they advanced through the cornfield, in a spectacular mural painted for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum.

The mural is complemented by life-size figures depicting the 2nd Wisconsin Regiment in action -- an awesome tableau.

The museum, located in Madison, Wisconsin, opened in 1993. With 10,000 square feet of exhibit space, concentrated in two galleries focusing on 19th and 20th Century battles involving Wisconsin regiments, the museum is a “must-see” for military history enthusiasts. For more information visit the museum website at: [www.wisvetsmuseum.com](http://www.wisvetsmuseum.com)

Antietam was a day of fearful violence, beyond anything in the nation’s experience. In the course of twelve hours, some 23,000 men lay dead, wounded, or missing -- more than three times those suffered on D-Day.

Jim Hillestad operates under the name The Toy Soldier Museum. His museum, containing more than 35,000 figures and a large collection of militaria, is located in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania. For directions and hours, call him at 570 629-7227, or visit his website: [www.the-toy-soldier.com](http://www.the-toy-soldier.com)