

# IN CAMP ALONG THE MONOCACY



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## ***Robert E. Lee's Special Order 191***

When Robert E. Lee sat down in his tent in Frederick Maryland on September 9, 1862 to write up Special Order 191 (hereafter known as S.O. 191) for the commanders of his army, I'm sure he didn't have any idea how much future generations would study it, talk about it, argue over it. For Lee, the order merely outlined his army's movements for the next few days as he moved through Maryland. But from the time it was found, clouds of mystery surround it.

**Gloria Swift with assistant Fred**

The first question that arose in the post war years was who lost it? While the order appears to be intended for General D. H. Hill, Hill claimed he never received this copy from Lee's headquarters. And, it appears it may never have been sent because: 1) Receipts were required for orders delivered. 2) There was no upset in camp over an unreceived receipt. 3) Hill was not under direct command of Lee until after the order was in effect—Lee would not have jumped military protocol to send Hill a copy of the order. Hill actually received a copy of the order from his own immediate commander—General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, written in Jackson's own hand. Hill took that copy and sewed it into the lining of his jacket to keep it safe. Is it not reasonable to assume that he would have done the same with an order received from Lee? Many would accuse Hill of losing the order from Lee, but Hill would defend himself on this issue until his death. Even so, many today still think that Hill is the guilty party. The Jackson copy of SO 191 that Hill received can be seen today at the North Carolina State Archives.

The second question about S.O. 191 is who found it? According to contemporary personal correspondence, Private Barton Mitchell of the 27th Indiana found the order as his regiment moved into a recently abandoned Confederate camp just south of Frederick, Maryland on September 13th.

His sergeant, Sergeant John Bloss, standing nearby, asked him what he had found. Together, they passed the document up the chain of command until it reached Union Army commander General George McClellan. Private Barton Mitchell died in 1868, but at the time of his death, he had been working on a petition to Congress asking for proper recognition of his finding of Special Order 191. Unfortunately for Mitchell, nothing ever came of his petition. However, after Mitchell's death, John Bloss seems to step in as a central figure of the story. Bloss began to take more and more credit that it was HE who found the order. It was HE who recognized the significance and took it to his superiors. We don't know for sure, but it may have been Bloss who started the rumor that continues to persist about Mitchell that he could not read or write—something we know is not true and have plenty of evidence of his literacy. The 27th Indiana held regimental reunions for 44 years in Indianapolis, Indiana. In looking through the reunion minutes, it is interesting to note how often the subject of S.O. 191 comes up and how often they argued over who found the order!

One of the final mysteries is the question of whether or not General George McClellan took advantage of having Lee's order placed into his hands. Some say yes, some say no. Did McClellan move faster than usual in following Lee across South Mountain? Did he move at a slower pace? You will have to decide for yourself if you study the Maryland campaign.

In the meantime, enjoy the attached articles about Special Order 191 from two fine historians. First is an article by Park Ranger Tracy Evans who works at Monocacy National Battlefield, where Special Order 191 was found. The second article is from Tom Clemens, who has written extensively on the Maryland Campaign. Read them, enjoy them, and see what you think of the mystery that continues to surround Lee's Special Order 191. Enjoy!

Gloria

(Confidential)

Head Quarters of Northern Va  
Sept 14 1862

Special Order 191

III The Army will resume its march tomorrow taking the Hagerstown road. Gen Jackson's Command will form the advance and after passing Middletown will such position as he may select take the route towards Sharpsburg. Cross the Potomac at the most convenient point & by Friday morning take possession of the Baltimore & Ohio R.R. capturing such of the Enemy as may be at Martinsburg and intercept such as may attempt to escape from Harpers Ferry.

IV Gen Longstreet's Command will follow the main road as far as Brownsville where it will halt, with reserve depots and baggage trains of the Army.

V Gen McLaws with his own division and that of Gen R.H. Anderson will follow Gen Longstreet on reaching Middletown will take the route to Harpers Ferry and by Friday morning possess himself of the Maryland heights and endeavor to capture the Enemy at Harpers Ferry and vicinity.

VI Gen Palmer with his division

after are the objects in which he is now engaged will cross the Potomac at Sharpsburg and encamp on right bank at Sharpsville take possession of Sharpsville by Friday morning before noon his left and the road between the Gap of Mountain and the Potomac on his right. He will as far as practicable cooperate with Gen McLaws & Gen Jackson in intercepting the retreat of the Enemy.

VII Gen D.D. Hill's division will form the rear guard of the Army following the road from the main body of the Army. The reserve artillery, Ordnance and supply trains will precede Gen Hill.

VIII Gen Stewart will detach a squadron of Cavalry to accompany the Command of Gen Longstreet Jackson and McLaws and the main body of the Cavalry will cover the route of the Army & keep up all inquiries that may have been left behind.

IX The Command of Gen Jackson & Stewart after accomplishing the objects for which they have been detached will join the main body of the Army at Middletown or Hagerstown.

X Each Regiment on the march will deliberately carry its arms in the Regimental ordnance wagons for use of the men at their encampments to prevent noise &c.

By Command of Gen R.E. Lee  
R.E. Johnston  
a General

Photo of Robert E. Lee's Special Order 191 that was found by the 27th Indiana in Frederick Maryland. Original order is housed in the Library of Congress, George McClellan papers.

# INVITATION TO BATTLE: SPECIAL ORDERS 191

By Tracy Evans, Park Ranger, Monocacy National Battlefield

*On the morning of September 13, 1862, Union soldiers on a skirmish line near Frederick, Maryland, found what appeared to be an official Confederate document and immediately took it to their commander, who sent it up the Union chain of command. This document, known to history as Special Orders 191, gave the Union commander General George B. McClellan crucial information about the location and future movement of Confederate commander General Robert E. Lee's army. Armed with the information in Orders 191, McClellan set his own army in motion and precipitated the Battles of South Mountain and Antietam.*

*Two years later in July 1864, the Battle of Monocacy was fought in the same fields where the Confederate army was camped in 1862, and where Special Orders 191 was written and ultimately found by Union soldiers. Although Monocacy National Battlefield's primary purpose is to preserve and protect the site of the Battle of Monocacy, other events including those associated with Special Orders 191 are interpreted.*

## LEE MOVES INTO MARYLAND

Taking advantage of the Confederate victory at Second Manassas in late August 1862, General Robert E. Lee led his army across the Potomac River into Maryland, intent on drawing the Union army away from Washington and into a battle he believed he could win. By taking the war into the North and winning a battle there, Lee hoped to damage Union morale and encourage antiwar sentiment in the North. With a victory on Union soil, he also hoped to encourage the European powers, particularly Great Britain, to recognize the Confederacy as a separate nation and intervene in the conflict. Thus, in early September Lee's army entered Maryland east of the Blue Ridge Mountains to threaten Washington and Baltimore and force the evacuation of the stranded garrisons at Martinsburg and Harpers Ferry. This would allow Lee to shift his communications to routes through the Shenandoah Valley. Lee also planned to cut area railroads to cut Washington off from the rest of the country. The Confederate army began crossing the Potomac on September 4, 1862.

By September 7, the Confederate Army was camped on the Best Farm, approximately three miles south of Frederick City, and now part of Monocacy National Battlefield. It was obvious the Confederate army had been in a hard campaign. General John Robert Jones, a division commander in Jackson's command, said, "Never has the army been so dirty, ragged, and ill-provided-for as on this march." Regardless, they were victorious at Second Manassas and came into Maryland with high spirits, many believing Marylanders would rally to their flag. In this they would be disappointed for they met with a cool reception; only 130 men from Frederick and 40 from Middletown joined the Confederate army. This can be attributed to the part of Maryland they entered, which was largely Unionist. Had they been in counties further east and south, they would have enjoyed a warmer reception.

While camped at the Best Farm, Lee learned that Harpers Ferry and Martinsburg had not evacuated as he had hoped, so he formulated a plan which would force them to surrender. His plan was to divide his army to take the garrisons, then reconsolidate and march north into Pennsylvania, where he could bring McClellan to battle on a field of his choosing. Brigadier General John G. Walker wrote post-war about a conversation with Lee concerning his plan to split the army, during which Lee replied, "Are you acquainted with General McClellan? He is an able general but a very cautious one ... His army is in a very demoralized and chaotic condition, and will not be prepared for offensive operation – or he will not think it so – for three or four weeks. Before that time I hope to be on the Susquehanna."

## **SPECIAL ORDERS 191 AND HARPERS FERRY**

On September 9, after meeting with Major General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, Lee ordered Robert Hall Chilton, his assistant adjutant general, to write and distribute his orders regarding the army’s movements over the next several days. That document is Special Orders 191. Another member of Lee’s staff, Walter Taylor, wrote in his memoirs that he was not present to “supervise the promulgation” of the orders, suggesting that he was normally responsible for the administrative duties attendant upon the issuance of orders, i.e., making copies, overseeing delivery and verifying receipt of orders. This may explain some of the confusion surrounding the delivery and absence of a paper trail that would normally follow the issuance of orders.

The orders specified the planned movements of Lee’s army for the following three days (September 10-12), splitting Lee’s army, and explaining each assignment.

- Major General Jackson, with three divisions, was to lead the advance through Middletown, Maryland, on to Sharpsburg, Maryland, and across the Potomac. There he was to take control of the B&O Railroad, capture the Federal garrison at Martinsburg, Virginia, then move toward Harpers Ferry, Virginia.
- Major General Lafayette McLaws, with two divisions, was to take Maryland Heights, a promontory which dominates Harpers Ferry from the north, and attempt to capture the garrison.
- Brigadier General John G. Walker, with another division, was to take possession of Loudoun Heights, south of Harpers Ferry, then assist McLaws and Jackson in capturing the garrison.
- Major General James Ewell Brown “Jeb” Stuart, Lee’s cavalry commander, was to detach a squadron of cavalry to accompany Longstreet, Jackson, and McLaws. The main body of the cavalry was to cover the rear of the army, bring up stragglers and watch for the advancing enemy.
- Major General Daniel Harvey Hill, with his division, was to be the rear guard of the army.
- Major General James Longstreet, with the remainder of the army and the supply and baggage trains, was to march west to Boonsboro, Maryland, across South Mountain. Lee would move with Longstreet.
- Jackson, McLaws and Walker, after obtaining the surrenders of the two Federal garrisons, were to rejoin the main body of the army, which would be in either Boonsboro or Hagerstown, Maryland.

Chilton initially made seven copies of the orders for Jackson, Longstreet, Walker, Stuart, McLaws, Taylor, and a file copy for Confederate President Jefferson Davis. When the copies of Orders 191 were initially written, D.H. Hill fell under the command of Jackson. As such, he received a copy directly from Jackson. Special Orders 191, however, defined Hill’s new role as an independent commander and Chilton took it upon himself to pencil Hill a copy as well. The confusion surrounding the loss of the orders began when Chilton sent the additional copy. Hill was sent orders from Jackson, which he kept, and from Chilton, which he said he never received. That copy is the “Lost Orders.”

## **UNION ARMY ON THE MOVE**

The Union military in the East was in disarray after the Battle of Second Manassas. After an overwhelming defeat, General McClellan had the task of combining two armies, the Army of the Potomac, which he commanded and had just returned from its unsuccessful siege of Richmond, and that of General John Pope, who had been defeated at Second Manassas. Then, he had to move the reorganized army out of Washington and find Lee. In addition, General Henry Halleck, the Union General-in-Chief, feared Lee might draw McClellan and the Army away from Washington,

then turn and attack the city. Thus, McClellan had to move somewhat carefully, making sure to cover Washington.

On September 12, the day before Special Orders 191 was found, McClellan was still unsure of the Confederate movements after their occupation of Frederick. Union General Ambrose Burnside, on the right wing of the Union army, entered Frederick from the National Road and skirmished with the Confederate rear guard on the outskirts of Frederick while Union General Jacob Cox's Kanawha Division fought with the rearguard of the Confederates in downtown Frederick. On the 13<sup>th</sup> as the remainder of the Union army entered Frederick, McClellan's luck changed when soldiers of the 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana Volunteer Infantry found the lost orders.

## **SPECIAL ORDERS 191 IS FOUND**

Soldiers on a skirmish line from Company F, 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana Volunteer Infantry, found Special Orders 191 as they were resting from their early morning march. Tracking the movements of the 27<sup>th</sup> is the most likely way to locate where they found the orders. Ezra Carman's manuscript and his annotated maps of "The Maryland Campaign of 1862," Edmond Brown's, The Twenty-Seventh Indiana Volunteer Infantry In The War of the Rebellion 1861-1865, and soldier's interviews and letters are the most valuable sources to use in reconstructing the possible location of where the orders were found.

Ezra Carman was a Colonel in the 13<sup>th</sup> New Jersey Volunteer Infantry, attached to the XII Corps during the 1862 Maryland Campaign. In the 1890s, as part of the Antietam Battlefield Board, he was tasked with creating a map to show terrain and troop positions during the battle, and create a report on the Battle of Antietam. Carman had been collecting research on the Antietam Campaign since the Civil War; returning to the battlefield in November of 1862 to interview soldiers and civilians. Edmond Brown was a corporal in Company C, 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana Volunteer Infantry, and a participant in the Antietam campaign. Brown's work has been the most quoted source of documentation and interpretation related to the finding of the lost orders. However, while it gives a great description of the regiment's movements prior to crossing the Monocacy River, Orders 191 was found after they crossed the river, which is where Brown's 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana becomes vague and Carman's annotated maps become invaluable. Brown's history says:

*"On the 13<sup>th</sup> September we moved by the direct road to Frederick, this took us immediately past Mr. Clay's house, in whose orchard we had camped the previous December. Looking northward, we could plainly see our deserted cabins of the previous winter . . . The bulk of Lee's army had been at Frederick up to a very recent period. We were likely at the time to encounter rebel scouts or outposts. The 27<sup>th</sup> led the column, expecting at any moment to sight an enemy. There being no bridge over the Monocacy on this road, we forced that stream. The water was only knee deep and warm, so it was no hardship. When we emerged from the timber east of the Monocacy, we saw smoke rising from several pieces of artillery engaged in the open country west of Frederick."*

The 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana's movements can be followed using the above description on the Carman maps, from their camp at Ijamsville Crossroads on the night of September 12 through their march on the 13<sup>th</sup> on the Ijamsville Road. South of that road not far from Ijamsville was the Clay Farm where they camped the previous December, and north of the road was the Hoffman Farm where they had wintered. There was no bridge at Crum's Ford at the time, and given the detailed description that Brown gave about their movements prior to crossing the river, he would have likely mentioned that the bridge had been destroyed had they crossed at Monocacy Junction Confederate General D. H. Hill destroyed both the B&O Railroad Bridge and covered wooden bridge on September 8-9. Once the 27<sup>th</sup> crossed the river, however, the description fades. An assumption has been made



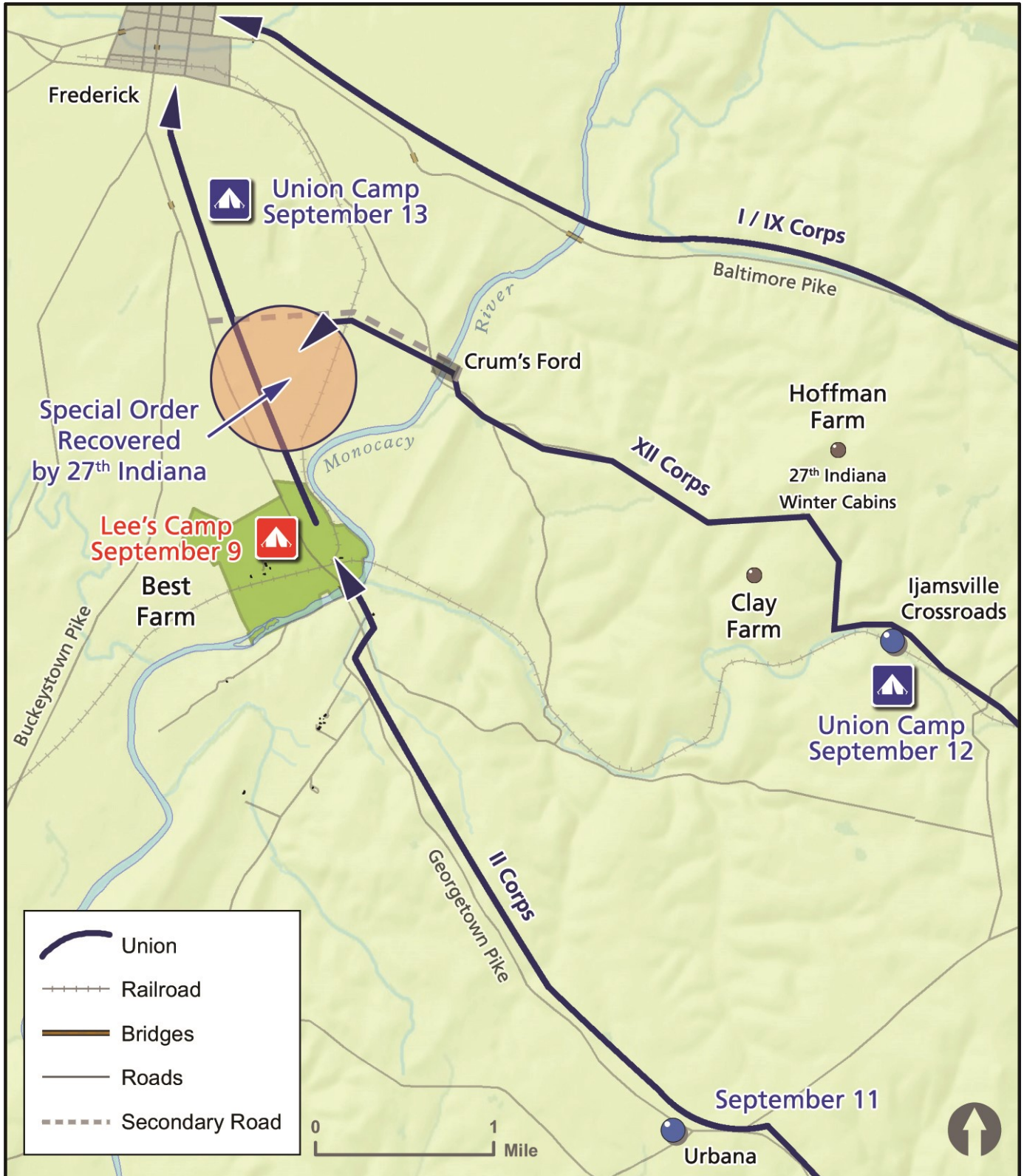
that the regiment along with the rest of the XII Corps continued on this road and into Frederick; this would indeed have put the finding of the orders on the east side of Frederick. However, according to the movements of the XII Corps on Carman's maps, on September 13 the corps had moved to the Georgetown Pike, just south of the outskirts of the city, which aligns with the soldier's descriptions of converging lines on the outskirts of the city. During the Civil War a secondary road stretched from Crum's Ford across farm fields to the Georgetown Pike; it is conceivable that the soldiers used this secondary road to cut south toward the Georgetown Pike.

In the post-war years soldiers of the 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana were called upon to provide affidavits about the circumstances surrounding the finding of the orders. The differences in their accounts are understandable considering many were conducted around turn of the century. A few letters about the march that day still exist as well. According to their interviews and letters, on the morning of September 13, 1862 the 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana was up for reveille around 3:00 a.m. and began their march at approximately 6:00 a.m. In a war-time letter home, Major Charles J. Mill wrote, "... *came on to where I am now writing, a field about half a mile from Frederick, which the rebs have evacuated.*" He said they heard firing all morning; General Burnside was believed to be driving back the enemy. Sergeant John M. Bloss said they were expecting an engagement with the enemy and his Company F was on the skirmish line in front of the brigade. They never encountered the Confederates, and once they were closer to Frederick, converging lines of other divisions and corps along the Georgetown Pike caused them to halt. Private William H. Hostetter, also of Company F, 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana was on the skirmish line and said the company, "Moved forward out to discover no enemy and halted near the city limits in a meadow; it was a warm morning and when we halted we threw ourselves on the ground to rest." George W. Welch, Company F, remembered camping in an old meadow that had been occupied the day before by D.H. Hill. A few other soldiers noted that they were in Hill's former camp; however, an assumption could have been made that since Hill's name was on the orders, it must have been his camp. Bloss, who was wounded at Antietam, wrote a letter from a field hospital 13 days after Orders 191 was found. Bloss' letter and description is the earliest primary source at present to the time of the event, making it the most reliable information yet. In this unpublished letter, Bloss gives a few details about the finding of the orders. He said that the orders were found in a wheat field, under a locust tree, with two cigars.

Once discovered, Orders 191 was sent up the 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana's chain of command to Captain Peter Kop, Colonel Silas Colgrove, then to General Alpheus Starkey Williams, commander of the XII Corps. In an interesting twist of fate, Williams' acting adjutant general Samuel E. Pittman authenticated the orders by identifying Chilton's signature. Prior to the war Pittman had been a teller at Michigan State Bank in Detroit at the same time Chilton was paymaster for the army. As paymaster, Chilton kept an account at the bank and Pittman was familiar with his signature from checks and account records.

## **McCLELLAN MOVES BASED ON ORDERS 191**

McClellan received the orders by mid-day on September 13. At 3:00 p.m. he sent the orders to his cavalry chief, General Alfred Pleasanton and told him to find out if the Confederate movements in the orders had been followed. In a 6:20 p.m. message to VI Corps commander General William Buel Franklin, McClellan informed him about the orders and what he was able to discern about how closely they had been followed. McClellan also let Franklin know that Pleasanton had skirmished in Middletown and occupied the town. Also, Burnside's command, including Hooker's corps was marching that evening and early in the morning toward Boonsboro, followed by Sumner, Banks, and Sykes' division. He wanted Franklin to move at daybreak by way of Jefferson and Burkettville toward Rohrsersville. His intention was to cut the Confederate Army in two. McClellan undoubtedly was pleased to inform Lincoln, "*I have the whole rebel force in front of me, but am confident, and no time shall be lost...I think Lee has made a gross mistake and that he will be severely punished for it ... I hope for a great success if the plans of the Rebels remain unchanged... I have all the plans*



*of the Rebels and will catch them in their own trap if my men are equal to the emergency..."*

Lee was surprised that the Union army was moving quicker than anticipated, and by McClellan's sudden change in tactics after the Union army arrived in Frederick. When Lee learned some time after the Maryland Campaign about the lost orders he understood the change, saying, "to discover my whereabouts . . . and caused him to act as to force a battle on me before I was ready for it...I would have had all my troops reconcentrated . . . stragglers up, men rested and intended then to attack." The importance of finding Orders 191 was increased by the delay in the fall of Harpers Ferry. Jackson's operation in Harpers Ferry was three days behind schedule. If Jackson had been on schedule, the finding of the orders would have been "old news" and of limited value to McClellan. The fact that Jackson was behind schedule and the operation still active made the orders invaluable information. McClellan moved his army quicker than the Confederates anticipated, forcing Lee into battles at South Mountain and Antietam instead of allowing him the opportunity to choose his own location and time.

The lost orders captured the attention of veterans after the Civil War and the circumstances surrounding the finding of the orders continue to be of interest to Civil War enthusiasts today. Historians have been left with the task of deciphering fact from fiction in what has been written about the orders, particularly with primary sources that in many cases are far removed from the actual event; some written 20 – 40 years post-war. How well McClellan used this important information continues to be debated among historians; however, it is clear that McClellan sent orders to his commanders and moved his army quicker and with much more confidence about the Confederate army's location than he had up to that point in the campaign, surprising Lee with the swiftness of his movements, and thus halting Lee's plan. One can only imagine the excitement the soldiers of the 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana felt when they realized what they found in that field. Their find combined with the delay at Harpers Ferry changed the direction of the campaign and the war quite literally.

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### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SPECIAL ORDERS 191**

There are several commonly asked questions pertaining to Special Orders 191 that were not addressed in the main text of this article but are repeatedly asked, such as who lost the orders, who found it, and when did Lee know the orders had been lost?

One of the most intriguing mysteries of the Orders 191 story is who lost it. Orders were delivered in envelopes to be signed and returned to headquarters as a receipt that they had been received. When the envelope intended for D.H. Hill wasn't returned however, no alarm was raised at Lee's headquarters. Did a courier lose the orders? Did Chilton decide the copy of Orders 191 did not need to be sent to D.H. Hill and discarded it? Or, did the orders reach Hill's camp, and were then lost?

D. H. Hill became the obvious scapegoat since his name was on the orders. In fact, several stories circulated about how Hill came to lose the orders. One suggested the orders were found on a table at a house which served as Hill's headquarters in Frederick. Another tells of Hill throwing the orders down on the street. These stories are complete hearsay and are prime examples of the misinformation perpetuated about the loss of the orders. In 1868, Hill wrote of the war-time editor of the Richmond Examiner who had blamed him for the loss, "The harsh epithets he applies to me are unworthy of the dignity of the historian, and prove a prejudiced state of mind. Second, if I petulantly threw down the orders (as was claimed), I deserve not merely to be cashiered, but to be shot to death with musketry. General Lee, who ought to have known the facts . . . never brought me to trial for it." In fact, when asked about Hill's guilt Lee said he "... did not know that General Hill had himself lost the dispatch and in consequence he had no ground upon which to act, but that General Stuart and other officers in the army were very indigent about the matter." In Hill's defense, Major James W. Ratchford, his adjutant general, gave sworn



testimony that it was part of his exclusive duty at the time to take custody of such papers, and no orders were delivered to him except the one from Jackson.

Hill spent many years after the war defending himself against accusations that he lost the orders, explaining that he went into Maryland under Jackson's command and was under his command when Special Orders 191 was issued. Therefore, he knew he would receive his copy of the orders through Jackson and not Lee. He also understood the sensitive nature of the orders and pinned it securely in his inside pocket. He was able to produce his copy of the orders from Jackson after the war to prove he had it. Walker also secured his orders in his pocket. Longstreet said he thought about pinning it in his jacket, but instead memorized, it then "chewed it up!"

Chilton's memory appears to have faltered in the matter; whether his was a case of selective memory or there were large cracks in administrative process due to the absence of Taylor and Marshall we may never know. In 1874, responding to former Confederate President Jefferson Davis' questions about the loss of the orders, Chilton said, "That omission to deliver in his (the courier's) case so important an orders we'd have been recollected as entailing the duty to advise its loss, to guard against its consequences, and to act as required . . . But I could not of course say positively that I had sent any particular courier to him (Hill) after such a lapse of time." In 1887 Chilton admitted to Hill he didn't have paperwork to prove the receipt had not been returned to headquarters, except to say that if orders were missing it should have been noticed.

Twenty-five years after the event, questions continued to circulate, but memories were fading. If Chilton discarded the orders realizing that Hill would receive his from Jackson, he never said so, nor did he remember which courier was sent to deliver the orders. Clearly, Chilton did not maintain proper administrative procedures in Taylor's absence. Hill and his adjutant remained adamant that the orders never entered their camp. Short of an admission of guilt squirreled away in an archive that has yet to be discovered, the guilty party may never be revealed.

## **WHO FOUND THE ORDERS?**

Among the many questions associated with the lost orders is the matter of who found it. Corporal Barton Warren Mitchell is most often attributed as the finder, and appears to be the one who physically picked up the orders. However, there were several soldiers who were present when it was found, and when the story was retold through the years the finder changed numerous times.

After the war, Mitchell wrote letters to other participants in the campaign, including Bloss and Colgrove, and various government officials to gather necessary confirmation that he had been the one who found Special Orders 191, in order to petition Congress for recognition. When Mitchell died in January of 1868, his son, William Mitchell, continued the task with letters to McClellan and Colgrove. Colgrove acknowledged that Mitchell was the finder of the orders, but Mitchell never received Federal recognition.

At the 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana Regimental Reunion in 1904, the issue of the lost orders was discussed among the surviving members Sergeant John McKnight Bloss and Private David B. Vance. Vance suggested that he picked up the package and gave it to Bloss while Mitchell merely picked up the cigars that fell out of the package. In 1905, Private Dariel Burrell, who was on the skirmish line with Company F, said he saw the envelope laying in the grass and weeds and picked it up at the same time that Bloss asked him to hand it to him. . It passed over Mitchell and the cigars fell out, but Mitchell did not see the papers. Private William H. Hosteiter, of Company A, said he was on the extreme left of his company, just to the right of Company F, and he saw, "Sergeant Bloss with the envelope in his hand drawing a paper or papers out of it, he then and there read the contents . . . " He claimed no one but Bloss handled the letter. Later, Bloss and Vance seemed to have come to an agreement that Bloss was the finder and Mitchell had a smaller role, and then in another script change, Vance claimed in 1904 that he was the finder of the orders.

Mitchell died in 1868 and could not defend his claim, but in the letter Bloss wrote thirteen days after the finding of the letter, he gave Mitchell credit for finding it:

*“Corporal Mitchell was very fortunate at Frederick. He found General Lee’s plan of attack on Md and what each division of his army was to do. I was with him when he found it and read it first. I seen its importance and took it to the Col. He immediately took it to General Gordon, he said it was worth a Mint of Money & sent it to General McClellan”.*

In different accounts, various individuals were given credit for finding the orders; however, the simple answer is that Mitchell and several other soldiers on the skirmish line were probably all involved.

## WHEN DID LEE KNOW THE ORDERS WERE LOST

When exactly Lee knew McClellan had a copy of his orders is also a difficult issue. A popular story circulated that when McClellan received the orders he was meeting with a delegation of men from Frederick. Among these men was a sympathizer who told Confederate Major General Jeb Stuart that McClellan had the orders. Perhaps a civilian was present who saw that there was excitement and movement in the Union camp; however, there is no conclusive evidence that Confederates were alerted to the fact that the Union had the orders.

Lee contributed to some of the misinformation on this matter. In an 1868 letter to D.H. Hill, Lee said he knew on September 14 that McClellan had the orders directing the movement of his army, but it is clear from Lee’s wartime correspondence that he did not know a copy of Orders 191 was in Union hands. In a September 16, 1862 letter to Davis, Lee gave no indication that he knew about the lost orders. There was also no mention in any wartime reports of Longstreet, D.H. Hill, or Stuart. In a 1867 letter to Hill, Lee’s aid-de-camp, Colonel Charles Marshall noted, “I remember perfectly that until we saw that report (by McClellan) General Lee frequently expressed his inability to understand the sudden change in McClellan’s tactics which took place after we left Frederick.” The *New York Herald* did report on September 14 that Union officers had Lee’s orders, and the same was reported in a Washington newspaper on the 15<sup>th</sup>, but it seems that Lee did not know about it until either January 1863 from an article in *Journal of Commerce*, (a weekly magazine out of New York) or in March 1863 when McClellan testified about the finding of the orders before the Congressional Joint Committee on the Conduct of War.

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# **The Lost Orders**

By Dr. Thomas Clemens

One of the most enduring, controversial, and mysterious aspects of Maryland Campaign of 1862 is the discovery, importance and usage of the famous Lost Orders. Specifically, Special Orders 191, September 9, 1862, dictated by General Robert E. Lee, directed the splitting of his army into five parts, three of which were to neutralize the threat to his supply depot in Winchester VA posed by the Union garrison at Harpers Ferry. As most Civil War students know, these orders were lost somewhere near Frederick MD, and found on September 13 by some enlisted soldiers in the 27th Indiana Infantry. Taken to their Captain, Peter Kop, they were quickly confirmed as genuine as they passed up the chain of command to Union General George B. McClellan.

Many historians have touted this discovery as a dramatic event which offered a golden opportunity to the Union commander to destroy Lee's separated forces. One author described its discovery as "handing one general's army to another." Similar superlatives abound from other writers, many berating McClellan for missing this alleged golden opportunity to destroy the Army of Northern Virginia. It therefore seems time to give a closer look at what S.O. 191 did, and did not, tell McClellan and whether this golden opportunity ever existed.

Several sets of orders had been captured in the summer of 1862, most were of undoubted authenticity, timely, and were immediately acted upon. Conversely, S.O. 191 was four days old when it was found on September 13. By noon, or shortly after when McClellan received the document he already knew that Lee's army was divided, he also knew that Harpers Ferry was cut off and likely surrounded, and he knew that some Confederate troops had re-crossed the Potomac into Virginia. But some information in S.O.191 was contradicted by information McClellan received from other sources. For instance, 191 stated Jackson's command, (whatever that was; McClellan had no idea) was to cross the Potomac at Shepherdstown, but McClellan had reliable information he had crossed at Williamsport. It also stated Longstreet's command, (again an unknown quantity to McClellan) would halt in Boonsboro, but McClellan was reliably informed they were in Hagerstown.

Other information also gave reason for suspicion; McClellan knew that some of Gen. JEB Stuart's cavalry was in Westminster, on McClellan's right rear, and yet there was no mention of that in 191. Perhaps more troubling was the copy of 191 McClellan obtained begun with paragraph three, giving him good cause to wonder what the first two paragraphs contained. Since rumors, based on fact, suggested Loring's Army of Southwest Virginia would march down the Shenandoah Valley to join Lee, or even that Gen. Braxton Bragg's army at Chattanooga would send troops by rail to Lynchburg to join Lee, it is not surprising the orders gave McClellan reason to hesitate. Yet he didn't.

The best guess is that the orders were received by McClellan at noon or shortly after. (the famous "12 M" telegram to President Lincoln was most likely sent at midnight, as the Lincoln copy has written on it). That telegram stated McClellan had "possession of Catocin" meaning Hagan's Gap where the National Road traversed Catocin Mountain, which did not occur until 1:00 p.m. or later. In a telegram to Gen. Henry Halleck that night McClellan described S.O. 191 as being brought to him "this evening." Since leaving Rockville, McClellan had sent marching orders in the evening for the next day to each of the three wing commanders of his army. September 13 was no different,



and despite sending a copy of the orders to his cavalry commander, Gen. Henry Pleasonton, for verification, at 6:15 p.m. he sent orders for an attack at South Mountain the next morning, before hearing from Pleasonton.

McClellan is often accused of moving too slowly, yet he faced the same problems Lee experienced in moving a large force westward out of Frederick on one road. Lee couldn't get his army out of Frederick in one day. On the 13th McClellan's army was already in motion, and moved as expeditiously as possible. When Hagerstown Gap fell in the afternoon The Ninth Corps moved westward through the day, and night, much of it bivouacking after midnight near Middletown. This was before any order related to finding 191 was issued. On the 14th the First and Second Corps followed, and eventually the Twelfth as well. Likewise the Sixth Corps was sent forward from Adamstown on the 14th. The idea that McClellan was dilatory is simply not true, but he did have a traffic problem, just as Lee did.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of S.O. 191, as far as McClellan is concerned, is that it contained no numbers, and little description of the order of battle of the Army of Northern Virginia. Other intelligence, including Pleasonton, told McClellan he was out-numbered, perhaps heavily so. S.O. 191 did little to dispel that belief. It told McClellan that Lee, moving in enemy territory, was dividing his army despite the proximity of McClellan's army. Today we, of course know that is not true, but McClellan did not have the advantage of our hindsight. In fact, given that 191 told him the "main body" of the army was at Boonsboro or Hagerstown, it is uncharacteristically bold that McClellan attacked on the 14th, and his boldness gave him an unqualified victory as Lee retreated from the field that night.

"Handed one general's army to another?" I think not.



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