

A Place in Time—

Brian Baracz

Antietam 1862

After the Battle of Antietam, on September 17, 1862, a topographical engineer on the staff of Union General Abner Doubleday prepared this elaborate map showing the positions of the Union and Confederate forces on the morning of the battle. In addition to showing where the military forces were located at the start of the battle, Lieutenant William H. Willcox's map also included detailed terrain features, roads, houses, churches, and even mills. Maps such as Willcox's were often drawn by military mapmakers after a battle as an official record. The Philadelphia firm Duval and Sons published the map soon after the battle, capitalizing on an eager public's desire for accurate war information. This particular copy of Willcox's map, now in the collection of the Library of Congress, somehow found its way into the hands of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. A note scribbled in the lower left corner says the map was "Obtained from Washington and presented to Gen. R.E. Lee by J.E.B. Stuart." Stuart was one of Lee's cavalry officers, killed near Richmond, Virginia, in May 1864. If the note is correct, then Stuart gave this map to Lee before May 1864, but how Stuart "obtained" the map "from Washington" while the war was in progress is a mystery. The map came into the Library of Congress's collection in 1948, with the purchase of Jedediah Hotchkiss's papers. Hotchkiss himself was one of the premier mapmakers for Lee and the Confederates, and Lee may have passed this map on to Hotchkiss during the war.¹

Mapping during the Civil War varied greatly from elaborate and colorful maps such as Willcox's to simple pencil sketches.² A good map of an area of operation, and a staff officer capable of drawing a map, were invaluable to any competent Civil War general. At the beginning of the war, most maps available to the competing armies were fairly simple political maps. These provided information on townships, counties, and other political boundaries, but were often outdated and lacked local features important to an army moving about the countryside.³ Being without vital information in regards to local roads and their conditions, bridges, fords, and the topography of the area could greatly affect a commander's ability to move his troops from one location to another.

The Union forces had one advantage over their Confederate counterparts in cartography at the beginning of the war. The United States Army's

Corps of Topographical Engineers, as well as its Corps of Engineers and other organizations, contained talented and well-trained mapmakers who were able to begin their work of exploring and mapping the landscape in a relatively short time.⁴ The Confederate Army was without a comparable branch of service when the war began, and often lacked the funds during the war to purchase the proper equipment and supplies for its mapmaking agency. Since the war was mostly fought in the Southern states, however, the Confederates had the advantage of being more familiar with the territory the armies needed to traverse.⁵

One of the most talented Confederate mapmakers was Jedediah Hotchkiss, who at some time obtained Willcox's map of Antietam. Before the war, Hotchkiss lived near Staunton, Virginia. He was a leading geologist in the state as well as a school principal, but it was his love of cartography that made him invaluable to the Confederate cause.⁶ Hotchkiss was on Stonewall Jackson's staff and his elaborate map of the Shenandoah Valley enabled Jackson to shift his men up and down the valley to the dismay of his Union counterparts during the Valley Campaign of 1862.

The information gleaned from a map could spell victory or defeat, and the work of men such as William Willcox and Jedediah Hotchkiss often kept battlefield generals from moving their soldiers about blindly. Although Willcox's map of Antietam was drawn after the fact as a record of the battle, Union and Confederate forces traveled through this region of Maryland at least twice more before the end of the war, and Willcox's map of the area's terrain was possibly consulted by both sides.

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- 1 Richard W. Stephenson, *Civil War Maps: An Annotated List of Maps and Atlases in Map Collections of the Library of Congress* (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1961), 253.
- 2 James I. Robertson Jr., *Stonewall Jackson: The Man, The Soldier, The Legend* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1997), 709.
- 3 Earl B. McElfresh, *Maps and Mapmakers of the Civil War* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1999), 17.
- 4 Margaret E. Wagner, Gary W. Gallagher, and Paul Finkelman, eds. *The Library of Congress Civil War Desk Reference* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 345.
- 5 McElfresh, 20.
- 6 Robertson, 337.

Map of the Battlefield of Antietam on
September 17, 1862, by Lieut. William H. Willcox





THE
Antietam,
OP. OFF. & A.A.D.C.
presented to
BY'S STAFF.
GEN. ROSS
REBEL FORCES