

The Antietam Project: Examining the Civil War's Bloodiest Battle from a New Lens

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Background

- The Civil War (1861-1865) was the first major conflict to be recorded using photography. With this breakthrough in visual documentation came a glimpse into the Battle of Antietam.
- The Battle of Antietam was the bloodiest battle ever fought on American soil. With over 23,000 casualties in approximately 12 hours, it is considered the turning point that led the Union's victory and the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation.
- Written documents from the period describe soldiers as poorly-resourced and lacking shoes; however, photographs taken by Civil War photographers like Alexander Gardner tell a different story. In the grand majority of images captured, soldiers can be seen wearing shoes.
- This inconsistency between written and visual evidence led us to question the extent to which Confederate soldiers were adequately equipped to fight in the Battle of Antietam, taking both photographic and written accounts of soldiers, generals, civilians, and quartermasters into account.

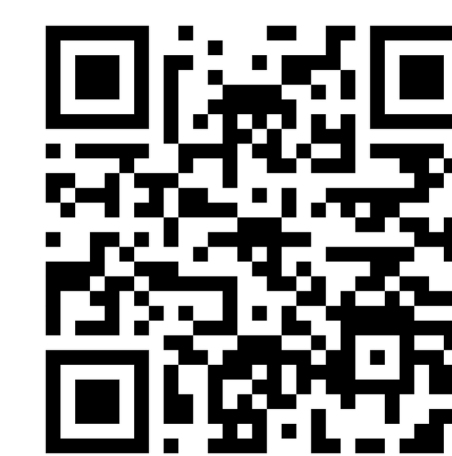


Alexander Gardner, *Dunker Church*

Methods

- Resources were collected through online archives, programs, and databases such as the the National Park Service, Google Maps, the National Archives, and various educational institutions. These digital repositories hosted an array of photographic and economic evidence outlining 19th century clothing prices, military resource inspections, maps of Civil War battles, and more.
- These primary sources were digitized when we accessed them and were found through Google advanced searches and the FSU library database.
- Analyzing records from photographer Alexander Gardner, author T. B. Arthur, and Confederate officers and enlisted soldiers allowed us to measure Confederates' resources visually, socially, and numerically, respectively.
- Oftentimes, a single book or document pointed us in the direction of numerous new sources. By conducting cross-topic comparisons, we were able to get a clearer picture of the soldiers' situations.
- For example, when conclusions drawn from STEM and fashion-oriented documents intersected, we theorized that soldiers took their undersized shoes off to prevent blistering.
- Because we, as historians, will never experience the Battle of Antietam in person, our research is limited to the surviving sources we have access to.
- Cross-topic analyses allow us to compensate for this loss by putting ourselves in the soldiers' shoes to the best of our abilities.

References



Scan this QR code to see the bibliography compiled over the course of this project.



Alexander Gardner, *Confederate Dead*

Results and Conclusions

- Of the photos analyzed, only 4% were found without shoes; however, due to the grainy quality of some of the images, it was difficult to definitely tell. This challenges written correspondence that said the Confederates did not have enough shoes.
- With additional research, we found that the weather surrounding the battle was very rainy. Because many of the roads soldiers walked on were dirt roads, the wet conditions likely led to muddy terrain. In addition, boots in 1862 didn't have much grip and lacked "half sizes." Calluses can develop after a few weeks of wearing shoes that don't fit; therefore, most soldiers traversing North and South likely had calluses. It may have been easier and more comfortable for soldiers to walk without shoes.
- Given the soldiers' limited incomes (\$11 per month for privates) and Confederate regulations stipulating soldiers would be issued four pairs of shoes per year, they would have been unable or unwilling to divert their wages from their family at home to replace a pair of shoes worn out within a month and a half.
- One book, "Advice to Young Men" by T. B. Arthur, stressed the importance of being fiscally responsible. We can assume this was the prevailing mindset at the time, leading soldiers to consider inflationary prices when divesting resources back home.

Significance and Future Considerations

- Our results suggest implications to greater, more long-lasting effects of the Civil War on the South, such as the notion spread after the war that the confederates only lost the war due to their lack of supplies, their hesitancy to take accountability, and the justification of their cause and southern identity.
- The results of this study suggest a possible discrepancy between written and visual accounts of the same event. This points to the necessity to consider multiple avenues of documentation and analysis when researching.
- There is an importance in troop research, specifically when it comes to how much and how often supplies are being replaced.
- To continue the preliminary conclusion of this research, it would be useful to dig deeper into the role families and inflationary costs had on soldiers.
- Honor and sacrifice were key aspects of the Confederates' mentalities in warfare and influenced the content of their after-action reports and letters. In doing so, they often tied their suffering to that of their forefathers in the American Revolution. In the future, it would be useful to consider the impact previous wars had on soldiers' minds.
- Moving forward with research on the Civil War, particularly the battles themselves, it is important to keep an open mind to ideas and tangents not tied to the initial topic or thesis.

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