

# THE BATTLE OF FOX'S GAP

SEPTEMBER 14, 1862

## MARYLAND PARK SERVICE DRIVING TOUR



Welcome to South Mountain State Battlefield! You have an opportunity to explore several sites upon which approximately thirty thousand men fought a series of battles and in which five to six thousand American fighting men were killed or wounded.

Before we begin, we would like to remind you that much of the battlefield area is private property and there is no "tour road" as is the case with many battlefields; the roads you will be driving are public thoroughfares. Also please note that the tour winds its way over narrow mountain roads, most of which existed at the time of the battle, and some of which are unimproved or no wider than a single vehicle. Please drive carefully and, above all, ***do not try to read this narrative while driving your vehicle!*** Please read the text only while your vehicle is not in motion.

The Fox's Gap portion of the South Mountain Battlefield tour should take approximately 30 to 60 minutes to complete.

You may begin the tour either at the park museum in Washington Monument State Park or at the end of the Turner's Gap tour. Driving directions for both options are provided.

**Driving directions from the Washington Monument Museum:** To exit the park, follow the tour road back to the four-way stop (the park entrance). Proceed straight ahead on Washington Monument Rd. for about one mile to Alternate U.S. Rt. 40. Turn left and drive for approximately one mile (**CAUTION:** this section of highway contains some *very* sharp curves). Turn right onto Fox's Gap Road. Continue 0.9 mile to the "T" intersection with Reno Monument Rd. Turn right and immediately pull over to the right side of the road.

**Driving directions from the end of the Turner's Gap tour:** Continue straight 0.9 mile to the "T" intersection with Reno Monument Rd. Turn right and immediately pull over to the right side of the road.

### **STOP #1 - SCAMMON'S DETOUR**

Early on the morning of Sept. 14th, the Union Ninth Corps broke camp near Middletown and began ascending the mountain, advancing on the road beside you (which was known at that time as the Old Sharpsburg Road). Around 8 AM, when Colonel Eliakim Scammon's First Brigade reached a spot near your current position, artillery fire from a Confederate battery in Fox's Gap (ahead of you) forced

them to abandon this direct route up the mountain. Instead they turned onto the farm lane about fifty yards ahead of you to the left. This lane was called the Loop Road at the time of battle and was a side road leading to Fox's Gap; taking this route shielded Scammon's men from the Confederate artillery.

Please do not travel on the Loop Road farm lane; it is private property.

**Driving directions:** Pull back onto the road and continue for 0.9 mile. Turn left onto Lamb's Knoll Rd. and then make an immediate right into the circular turnout. Exit your vehicle and walk across Lamb's Knoll Road, stopping on the edge of the grassy area containing two monuments and several interpretive markers.

### **STOP #2 - FOX'S GAP**

You are standing in Fox's Gap, the focal point of furious fighting on September 14th. The action here breaks down into two general phases, morning and afternoon. A brief orientation will help you to better understand the events here.

You are looking roughly eastward as you face the walled monument. Present day Lamb's Knoll Road does not exactly follow the track of the period Ridge Road, but it is close enough to use as a reference. The morning action happened in fields roughly a quarter-mile to your right (south; which you'll see in Stop #3).

The present day Appalachian Trail (which enters the gap across Reno Monument Rd. to your left, beside a large green marker) *was* here during the battle and known at the time as the Wood Road; Confederate reinforcements were fed from Turner's Gap (about a mile to the north) into Fox's Gap using this road. Union forces fighting here intended to use the Wood Road as a means of flanking the Turner's Gap defenders. This road is consequently the key to understanding the battle, as possession of this road was crucial to both sides.

The large field beside the Appalachian Trail/Wood Road was a pasture on the day of battle and belonged to Daniel Wise.

Wise's farmhouse was located in the present-day turnout in which you parked. After the battle nearly sixty Confederate bodies were dumped down Wise's well in lieu of burial; these men were later disinterred and reburied in Hagerstown, MD.

The remainder of the Fox's Gap tour can be accomplished easily on foot.

**Walking directions:** Walk south down Lamb's Knoll Road for about 0.1 mile, then walk about a hundred yards left down the unpaved path to reach the North Carolina Monument. Face the stone wall located just a few feet from the monument.

### **STOP #3 - GARLAND'S MORNING DEFENSE**

The small (about 950 men) Confederate brigade of Brig. Gen. Samuel Garland Jr.'s North Carolinians was sent southward from Turner's Gap early in the morning to guard against the (correctly) anticipated Union move into Fox's Gap. Garland marched his brigade down the Wood Road, crossed Fox's Gap proper, and then moved south down the Ridge Road. The brigade formed a loose line with wide gaps between regiments; Garland had far too few men to adequately cover the area he needed to

defend. Four of Garland's five regiments faced southward (the way you're currently facing across the same fields), their position ran from near your present location to a point about a half-mile away to your right (Optional Stop 3A)..

The fight began around 9 AM and raged all morning. Scammon's Union brigade (which had swung off the main road at Stop #2) surged forward toward your present position in an effort to drive off the Confederate defenders. Garland's brigade held until Scammon was reinforced by a second Union brigade under Col. George Crook; Garland's defenders were now outnumbered three to one. Unnerved by a Union bayonet charge, one of the Confederate regiments ran rearward, which caused a "domino" effect: Garland's remaining regiments scattered down the mountainside to the west (your right). The Union brigades advanced northward into Fox's Gap but were stopped by the fire of a Confederate artillery battery located near Turner's Gap. There was a lull in the fighting around noon; the deadly work wouldn't resume in earnest until reinforcements for both sides had arrived in piecemeal fashion

Although a small marker to Gen. Garland stands in the small grassy area in Fox's Gap proper, he was mortally wounded quite near your present location. The North Carolina monument was erected in 2003 and honors not just Garland's brigade but *all* of the North Carolina units which were involved in the South Mountain battles.

The field on the other side of the stone wall is private property. Please do not trespass.

### **OPTIONAL STOP #3A - GARLAND'S RIGHT FLANK**

You may walk or drive to this optional stop. If you choose to skip this stop, you should retrace your steps to the parking area.

**Walking directions:** Walk up the path back to the paved road and turn left. After approximately 0.5 mile, you will come to a large set of high-voltage power lines overhead. Stop at the farm gate to the left of the road and look into the field beyond it.

**Driving directions:** Walk back to your vehicle in the parking area. When pulling out of the parking area, turn right onto the paved road and drive for about 0.6 mile. As you pass under the high-voltage power lines, pull off into the turnout on the right side of the road. Exit your vehicle and walk across the road to the farm gate on the other side and look into the field beyond it.

This side excursion is included as an illustration of how much territory Garland defended with very few men; he attempted to hold a line running from the North Carolina Monument to the high ground directly in front of you (a total of about a half-mile) using just four-fifths of his brigade of approximately 950 men. (The fifth regiment was held in reserve just south of the parking area.)

The area on the other side of the gate is private property; please don't trespass.

**Directions:** Walk or drive back to the parking area. Walk to the walled monument in the grassy area across from the parking turnout. Then *carefully* cross Reno Monument Road, walk around the farm gate into the field beyond; this entire field is public property. The best vantage point is the high ground directly ahead of you. Walk as far into the field as you wish, then turn to your right and face down the hill.

#### **STOP #4 - WISE'S NORTH FIELD**

You are standing in Wise's north field, the scene of much of the afternoon action. Troops of both sides advanced, charged, and retreated here in a swirling maelstrom of battle throughout the afternoon.

About 3 PM, Confederate Brig. Gen. Thomas Drayton's brigade arrived from Turner's Gap and deployed into battleline along the Wood Road (on the other side of the treeline directly behind you, now the Appalachian Trail). Elements of the Union Ninth Corps were seen ascending the Old Sharpsburg Road (present-day Reno Monument Road) to your front right. Drayton believed he could gain an advantage by immediately attacking them, so he ordered a general advance across the field. His line became an "L" with one arm along the field's lower border and the other along the roadside (ahead to your right). Drayton's brigade delayed the Ninth Corps' advance, but the Union numbers ultimately proved to be too much for them; outnumbered and hit on two sides, Drayton's line broke and the men fled back up the hill, into the Wood Road, and thence northward toward Turner's Gap.

Among the Union units heavily involved in this stage of the battle was a rookie regiment from Col. Benjamin Christ's brigade, the 17th Michigan. Their story is told on the large green plaque located where the Appalachian Trail meets Reno Monument Road (to your right rear). This is not a Maryland highway marker; it is a historic marker registered with, and placed by, the state of Michigan.

**Directions:** Stay at your present position in the Wise north field.

#### **STOP #5 - HOOD'S FINAL ATTACK**

Near sundown, Drayton's brigade retired from the field. As elements of this disorganized unit retreated northward up the Wood Road toward Turner's Gap, they encountered the last Confederate reinforcements entering the battle: a division of two brigades under Brig. Gen. John Bell Hood. Informed by Drayton's fleeing troops of the situation in Fox's Gap, Hood formed his brigades into battleline about a half-mile northwest of your present location and angled his way cross-country into Fox's Gap. His men charged into the Wood Road and the northwest corner of the field (behind you to your left) and unleashed a devastating musket volley; this counterattack smashed into the Union forces who were holding this field and drove them back down the hill ahead of you.

When night fell, Wise's pasture had become a charnel house with bodies littering the field. The Old Sharpsburg Road was carpeted with the dead and wounded of both sides. As for the living, possession of Fox's Gap was still disputed, but Confederate commanders decided that the gap could not be successfully held for another day. Hood's division remained in Fox's Gap overnight to cover the Confederate withdrawal into the valley to the west.

We'll see another effect of Hood's initial volley in the next stop.

**Walking directions:** Return to the farm gate, then carefully cross Reno Monument Road and walk to the walled monument. Open the gate and walk up the steps to the monument.

#### **STOP #6 - THE DEATH OF GENERAL RENO**

While Drayton's Confederates fled the field, Union Ninth Corps commander Maj. Gen. Jesse Reno and his staff rode up from the foot of the mountain. Reno's intent was to clarify his understanding of the situation in the gap. At the moment Reno arrived at the spot where you now stand, Hood's

Confederates suddenly launched their assault, rushing across the Wood Road and firing a volley (described in Stop #5). A bullet struck Reno in the chest and he slumped in the saddle; he was led rearward by Corporal Charles Goodwin. (Cpl. Goodwin's .44 Army Colt revolver is on display in the Washington Monument Museum).

As Reno was being carried by litter back down the mountainside he spotted division commander (and old friend) Brig. Gen. Samuel Sturgis nearby; propping himself up for a moment, Reno called out to Sturgis, "Hallo, Sam! I'm dead!" Gen. Reno expired from his wound later that evening.

The monument before you stands at the approximate spot where Reno was mortally wounded. It was erected in his honor and lists the battles and campaigns of his command, the Union Ninth Corps.

**This ends the Fox's Gap portion of the South Mountain Battlefield tour.** If you wish, you may now start the third part of the "linked" tour (Crampton's Gap), which commences from the parking area. Otherwise you may return to Alt. US Rt. 40 the way you came at the start of this portion of the driving tour, or reach it by another route which travels somewhat wider roads: leave the parking area, making an immediate left onto the paved road. *Carefully* make a left turn onto Reno Monument Road (the large mirror on the tree ahead of you will help you to see any traffic approaching from your left). Drive 2.1 miles to the intersection with MD Rt. 67. Make a right turn and continue to the intersection with Alt. US Rt. 40.



Ranger/interpreter guided tours of the battlefield are available to visitors by pre-arrangement. Please contact the South Mountain State Battlefield office during weekday business hours by calling 301-432-8065.

*Tour narrative written by Steve Lopez (Maryland Park Service), with additional contributions by John Miller (Maryland Park Service) and Paul Miller (National Park Service). Copyright 2010; all rights reserved.*