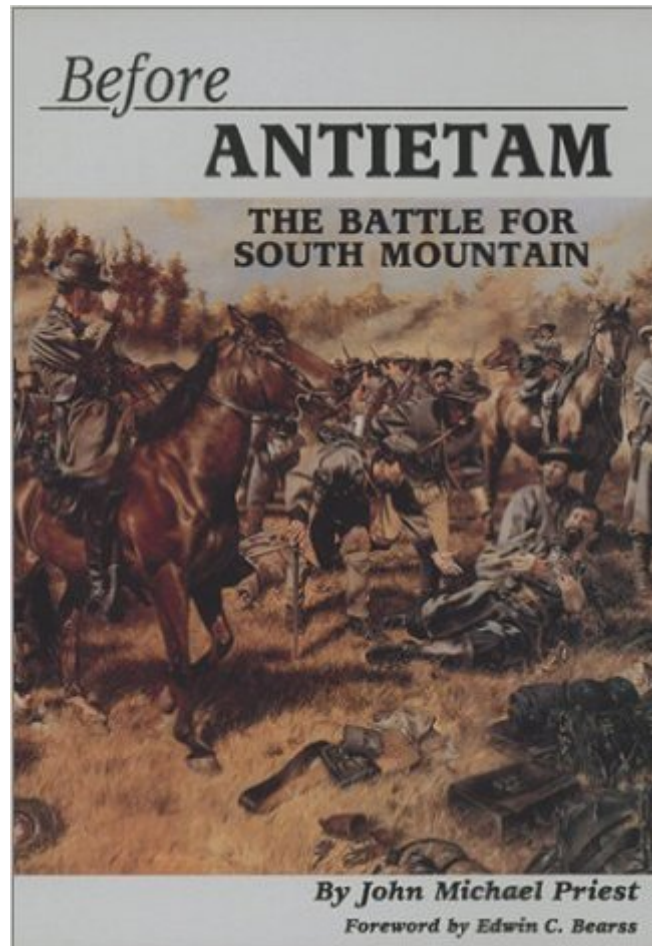


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# Before Antietam: The Battle For South Mountain



## Synopsis

Civil War buffs and scholars quickly recognize the dates of September 16-18, 1862 as the period marking the bloodiest battle of the entire campaign--Antietam. But until now, the ten days prior to that event have remained in relative obscurity. In *Before Antietam*, John Michael Priest offers the first book-length, tactical exploration of the Maryland campaign and the Battles of South Mountain, describing the decisive events leading up to the famous battle and elevating them from mere footnote status to a matter of military record. Chronicling Robert E. Lee's turnabout from defensive manoeuvres to full scale Confederate invasion into Maryland, Priest demonstrates how this tactical change brought about a series of engagements near Sharpsburg, Maryland that came to be known as "The Battle of South Mountain" in which the Federal and Confederate forces struggled fiercely over Union territory. It was here that George B. McClellan, the new Northern commander, led his Army of the Potomac to its first victory over Lee in a furious action that produced one of the war's few successful bayonet charges. Written from the perspective of the front line combatants (and civilian observers), the book recounts the Confederate invasion and the Federal pursuit into Sharpsburg that set the stage for Antietam. From September 5-15, a total of twenty-five skirmishes and three pitched battles were fought. Priest provides graphic descriptions of the terrible conditions surrounding these events and so thoroughly enters into the common soldier's viewpoint that military history quickly gives way to gritty realism. He vividly shows that, had Robert E. Lee not been bested at the gaps along South Mountain, there would have been no Antietam. Lee's decision to make a stand along Antietam Creek was a point of pride--he had never been "whipped" before and would not return to Virginia defeated. That decision was a fateful one, since the sparring and fighting drove him into an untenable position that became his downfall. Priest's revealing narrative establishes that, at this stage of the Civil War, the Federal cavalry was better equipped and just as well trained as the Confederate cavalry thereby settling a point of debate among historians. Scholars and Civil War buffs alike will applaud the efforts of John Michael Priest in bringing us the means to view those devastating encounters from a true military perspective. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Noted Civil War Historian and author John M. Priest has written an excellent book titled "Before Antietam: The Battle for South Mountain". The author based the book on the letters, diaries, and personal memoirs of the soldiers in the battle. This battle in September of 1862 occurred when the Army of Northern Virginia invaded Maryland when General Robert E. Lee wanted to divert federal troops (Army of the Potomac) away from the Confederate Capital of Richmond, Virginia. The area of South Mountain is part of the Blue Ridge Mountain Range of Maryland and Pennsylvania. It begins at the Potomac River and increases in height and width as it goes northward. It is not a "good area" for battles, yet the battle occurred in September 1862. When General Lee's "Special Orders No. 191" were captured by a Union corporal and a 1st Sergeant they were quickly passed to the Army of The Potomac's leading General George McClellan. He believed it was a great stroke of luck and inspired him to make a quick move (unlike his prior performance as leader of the Army of The Potomac) and march towards South Mountain. But as usual "Little Mac" made some great mistakes. He overestimated the number of troops the Army of Northern Virginia (ANV) had, and as a result he went back to his overly cautious nature and postponed encountering the ANV. Secondly, the Union commanders made no moves to hide their army's presence. Thus the ANV knew the Union army was on the move to meet and battle them. The author then tells the history of the battle where overwhelming numbers of Union troops battled savagely with the ANV and the fighting turned into hand-to-hand combat with bayonets and clubbed muskets. Two generals (CSA and USA) would be killed, Union General Jesse Reno and Confederate General Samuel Garland.

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