

*From every point of view it was heroism.*  
—Union Gen. Lew Wallace on the defense of the Monocacy River bridges

## The Battle that Saved Washington, DC

Monocacy National Battlefield preserves the site of a Civil War battle fought on July 9, 1864, south of Frederick, Maryland, during the third and final Confederate invasion of the North. The Battle of Monocacy is less famous and smaller than the battles of Antietam and Gettysburg—during the first and second invasions—but it also proved crucial. The Battle of Monocacy delayed Confederate forces sent to capture the Nation's Capital and ultimately forced them to withdraw to Virginia.

### Third Confederate Invasion of the North

By mid-1864 the tide of war had turned against the Confederacy. In the West its army was being beaten back toward Atlanta, Georgia. In the East, Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia was forced to establish battle lines around Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia. To bolster Union forces besieging the cities, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant removed thousands of troops from the defensive ring of forts around Washington, DC, leaving the city lightly defended and a tempting target.

To relieve pressure on his beleaguered army, Lee sent 15,000 troops under Lt. Gen. Jubal Early to secure the Shenandoah Valley and then invade Maryland. Lee hoped to force Grant to divert troops to protect the North by threatening—and possibly capturing—Washington. Early headed west to the Shenandoah Valley, then swept north into Maryland. His goal was to threaten or capture the Nation's Capital. Lee also hoped that this third invasion of the war-weary North would further erode public support for the war there.

Early's army reached Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, on July 4. Crossing the Potomac River near Sharpsburg, Maryland, they

headed east toward Frederick and the road to Washington. Seeing their movements, railroad agents alerted Baltimore and Ohio Railroad President John W. Garrett, who notified Maj. Gen. Lew Wallace, the Union commander in Baltimore. Wallace quickly assembled 3,200 troops, mostly new or short-term recruits without experience.

Unsure of Early's strength or whether the Confederates were headed to Baltimore or Washington, Wallace rushed his troops by railroad to Monocacy Junction, an important trade and transportation center. There, the Georgetown Pike to Washington and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad crossed the Monocacy, as did the nearby National Road to Baltimore. Guarding the three bridges and several fords, Wallace hoped to delay Early until Washington could be reinforced.

By dawn on July 9, the last of the 3,400 Union veterans that Grant had sent reached Monocacy Junction, more than doubling Wallace's force to 6,600. Early's army—in Frederick now—still outnumbered Wallace more than two to one, although Early had sent some cavalry to raid the Union prison at Point Lookout and free the thousands of Confederates held there.

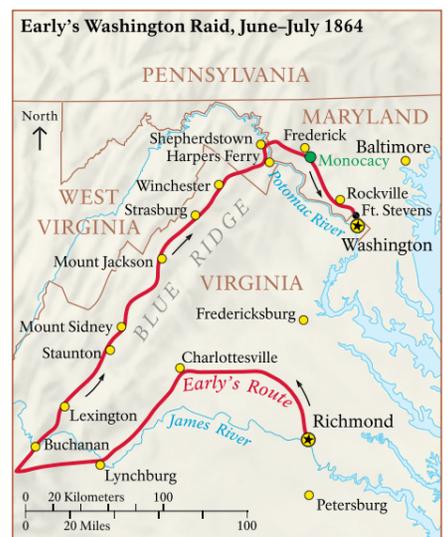
Burning the wooden bridge over the Monocacy.  
NPS / KEITH ROCCO



**Lt. Gen. Jubal Early**  
Early, one of Lee's most experienced commanders, was ending his invasion of Maryland, when he said, "Major, we haven't taken Washington, but we scared Abe Lincoln like hell!"

**Maj. Gen. Lew Wallace**  
Ulysses S. Grant said that Wallace's defeat at Monocacy contributed "a greater benefit to the cause than often falls to the lot of a commander of equal force to render by means of a victory."

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## The Armies Clash at Monocacy

Wallace determined that Early was headed toward Washington. He concentrated his veterans on the east side of the river at Monocacy Junction, where the road to Washington crossed. He also placed a line of skirmishers along the railroad tracks on the west side. On the morning of July 9, advancing Confederates attacked Union troops defending the Monocacy River bridges.

The Confederates brought up artillery and heavy fighting ensued around the Best Farm as they tested the Union defense. Early decided a direct frontal assault would be too costly. Instead, his cavalry found a place downstream to ford the river and attack the Union left flank. Alerted to the movement, Wallace shifted troops onto the Thomas Farm to meet the assault.

Early's cavalry crossed the river at the Worthington Ford, dismounted, formed ranks, and advanced across the Worthington Farm fields. Instead of springing a surprise attack, they marched into a line of soldiers concealed along a fence on the Thomas Farm. Union rifle fire raked the Confederates, forcing them to fall back.

Meanwhile, Wallace ordered his men to burn the wooden covered bridge on the Georgetown Pike to keep Confederates on his right from storming across the river. By doing so, he also cut off the best route of retreat for his skirmishers, still stubbornly holding their ground near the junction. Wallace bolstered his left flank and shifted more troops to the Thomas Farm, preparing for a second Confederate assault.

A mid-afternoon Confederate cavalry attack pushed the Union soldiers back and captured the Thomas House. Then a Union counterattack recaptured the house. On the Worthington Farm, a full Confederate



Confederate artillery on the Best Farm fires on Union troops at the Battle of Monocacy, July 9, 1864.  
NPS / KEITH ROCCO

division forded the river in late afternoon and launched a three-pronged assault against the Union line.

The day's heaviest fighting raged across the wheat and corn fields of the Thomas Farm, as the Confederates again pushed the Union soldiers back. At the junction they also dislodged the Union skirmishers and forced them to flee under fire across the railroad bridge.

Wallace could hold his position no longer. He ordered what was left of his small army to fall back past Gambrell Mill and retreat toward Baltimore. He left behind some 1,300 men—dead, wounded, missing, or captured.

### MONOCACY AND THE MEDAL OF HONOR



**Lt. George E. Davis**      **Corp. Alexander Scott**

The Medal of Honor is the highest decoration for valor awarded by the US government. It was awarded twice at the Battle of Monocacy, both times to members of the 10th Regiment of Vermont Volunteers: Lt. George E. Davis, for defending the two bridge approaches at Monocacy Junction against the repeated assaults by a larger force; and Corp. Alexander Scott, for saving the regiment's national flag from capture.



## Significance of the Battle

The exhausted Confederates encamped on the battlefield that night before resuming their march toward Washington. The battle had cost them as many as 900 men killed, wounded, missing, or captured, as well as a precious day of time. On July 11, two days after the Battle of Monocacy, Early's army reached Fort Stevens in northwest Washington. By the time his army arrived, the two divisions Grant rushed to Washington

from Petersburg were moving into Fort Stevens and other city defenses.

Early's and Grant's troops battled on July 12, with President Lincoln watching the action, but any opportunity to capture the city had been lost. The Confederate cavalry sent to liberate prisoners at Point Lookout was recalled before they could reach their destination, and on July 12, under the cover

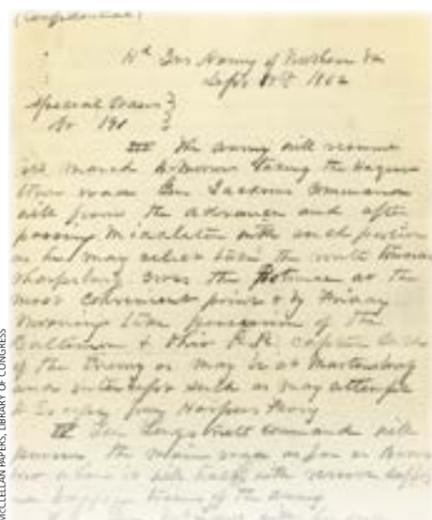
of darkness, Early started to withdraw his army back into Virginia, ending the last Confederate invasion of the North.

At Monocacy, Wallace's small improvised army had held its ground against repeated assaults by a much larger, battle-hardened Confederate force, delaying their advance for one critical day. His troops had lost the battle, but they had saved Washington.



NPS / RICHARD SCHLECHT

# Monocacy Battlefield Then and Now



## Lee's Lost Orders

When General McClellan received this copy of Lee's Special Orders No. 191, he exclaimed, "Here is a paper with which, if I cannot whip Bobby Lee, I will be willing to go home."

## Two Other Significant Civil War Events

took place on the Monocacy battlefield before and after the battle:

**On September 13, 1862,** Union soldiers made a surprising find—they discovered an envelope containing two cigars and a copy of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's Special Orders No. 191. The orders, detailing movements of the Confederate army September 10–12, were written a few days before as the army was camped at the Best Farm. This information enabled Union Gen. George B. McClellan to determine Lee's movements and intentions, and to move his army quicker and with more confidence. His clash with Lee at Antietam on September 17, the bloodiest day of the war, ended in a draw—a missed opportunity to destroy the Confederate army. A historical marker on the Monocacy battlefield identifies Lee's headquarters site where Special Orders No. 191 was prepared.

**On August 5, 1864,** Union Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant met with several of his generals in an upper room at the Thomas House (known as "Araby") to devise a plan to drive Lt. Gen. Jubal Early's army from the Shenandoah Valley and then

systematically lay waste to this "breadbasket of the Confederacy," therefore denying Lee's army a dependable source of food and forage. The next day he placed Gen. Philip Sheridan in command of the Union army in the Valley. Sheridan's assignment: destroy Early's forces and render the Valley so desolate that "even a crow flying over the place would have to take his rations with him."



## Soldier Encampments on the Battlefield

Both Union and Confederate armies camped in the area before and after the battle. Archeologists have found many artifacts, including this inscribed canteen spout.

Lt. Ambrose B. Hart of the 128th New York Infantry lost the spout while encamped on the Best Farm in 1864. See more artifacts like this at the visitor center.

## Touring the Battlefield

*Every man tried to do his best against great odds.*

—Lt. M. J. Stearns, 106th New York Infantry



NPS / JANICE WHEELER

The self-guiding auto tour begins at the visitor center and covers about six miles.

### 1 Best Farm

Turn left on 355 and take the first right. As Early's troops advanced south toward Washington on the morning of July 9, 1864, along the Georgetown Pike (now MD 355), they met stiff resistance from Union skirmishers waiting along the railroad at Monocacy Junction a half mile away. The Confederates set up artillery at the Best Farm and opened fire on the junction. Union artillery across the river responded, eventually igniting a fire in the Best barn.

### 2 Monocacy Junction

Turn right on 355 and take the first right. About 350 soldiers guarded Monocacy Junction, where two B&O Railroad tracks converged and an iron railroad bridge and wooden covered bridge crossed the Monocacy River. As the battle unfolded, these skirmishers faced the main Confederate line. The main Union line lay across the river behind them.

Early decided to redirect his attack downstream rather than risk a direct frontal assault against the well-positioned Federals. Later in the morning, Wallace shifted most of his force to the left to counter that move and ordered the wooden covered bridge burned in case the Confederates broke through the skirmish line. Although the burning bridge cut off their best avenue of retreat, the Union skirmishers held their ground throughout the day. They repulsed a second attack before a third and final assault forced them to flee across the open trestles of the railroad bridge.

### 3 Worthington Farm

Turn right on 355 and take the first right on Araby Church Rd. Turn right on Baker Valley Rd. and proceed under the I-270 overpass and make an immediate right on the Worthington Farm lane. Confederate cavalry crossed the Monocacy in mid-morning at the Worthington Ford, then dismounted and formed for attack on the fields behind the Worthington House. As they marched toward the Thomas Farm, they ran into a well-concealed Union line positioned behind a fence on the Thomas Farm. The Federals opened fire, driving the Confederates back. The Confederates launched a second attack and took the Thomas House. The outflanked Federals fell back, attacked, and drove the Confederates back to the Worthington Farm. The Worthington House and yard were used as a field hospital.

### 4 Thomas Farm

Turn left on Baker Valley Rd. and take the first left. Caught between the two armies, the Thomas House became the focal point of the battle, as Confederates on the Worthington Farm and Federals on the Thomas Farm faced off in the most furious fighting of the day. Confederate artillery pummeled the house with shells to drive off the Union sharpshooters. Throughout the afternoon, the house was captured and recaptured as the battle line moved back and forth across the Thomas Farm.

Late in the day, a division of Confederate infantry, supported by a battery of artillery at

the Worthington House, attacked and drove the Federals from the field. Wallace's force fell back past Gambrill Mill and retreated toward Baltimore. The Confederates had won the battle, but they had lost a precious day in their advance on Washington.

### 5 Gambrill Mill

Turn left on Baker Valley Rd, then left on Araby Church Rd. At the stop sign proceed straight across 355. Built in 1830, Gambrill Mill was run by an interior undershot water wheel. The mill could produce 60 barrels of flour a day and kept two coopers busy producing barrels for its products. During the battle Union troops used the mill as a field hospital. Wallace later noted, "The place appeared well selected for the purpose, its one inconvenience being that it was under fire."

## Worthington House

Built in 1851, this house exemplifies the Federal-style residence found on many prosperous farms in the area. The Worthington family took shelter in the cellar during the fighting. Six-year-old Glenn Worthington

witnessed the fighting through a boarded-up window and later wrote a book called *Fighting for Time*, encouraging Congress to establish a "National Military Park at the Battlefield of Monocacy, Maryland."

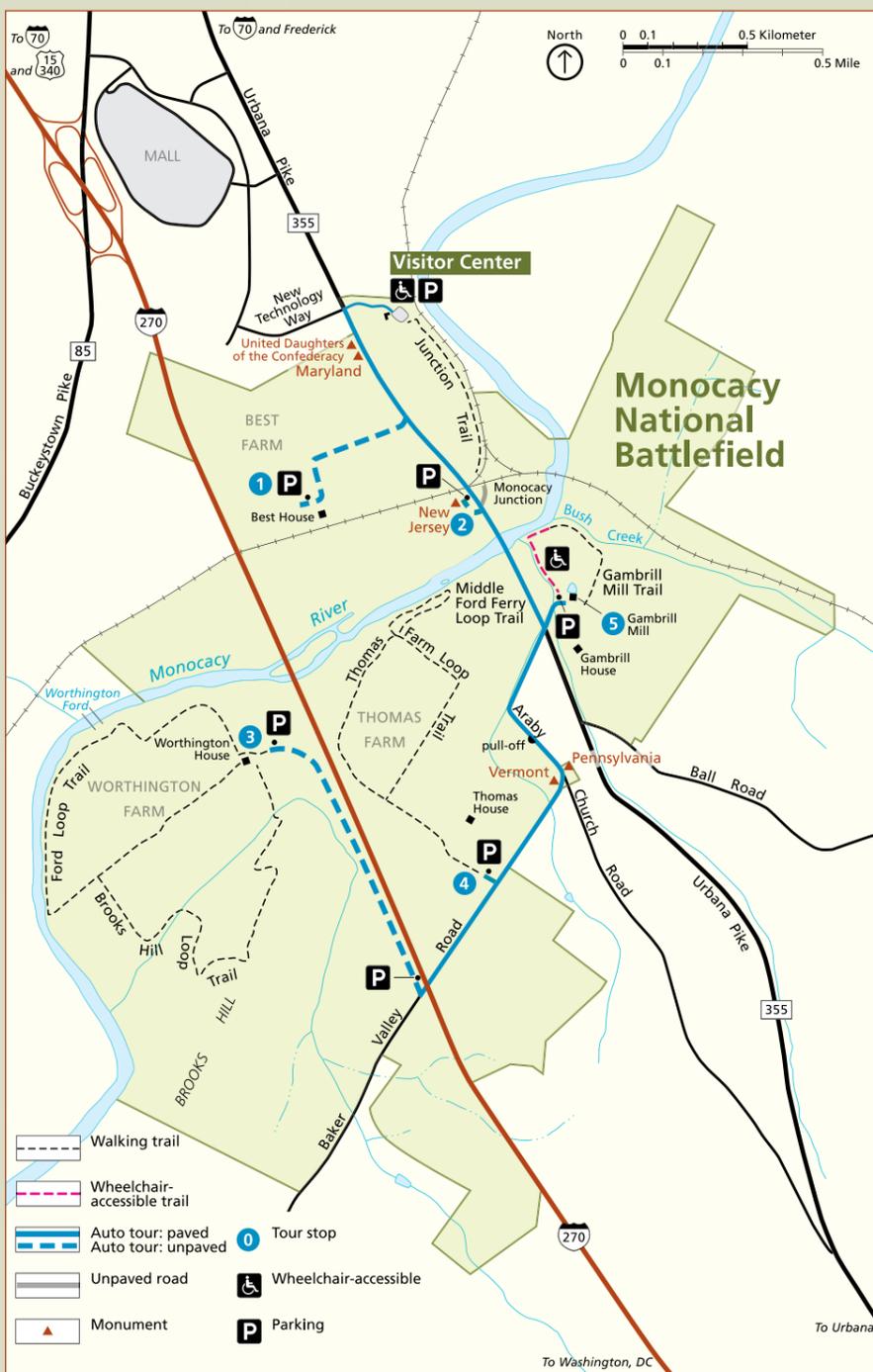


NPS / JANICE WHEELER

Here at the Worthington Ford, Confederate cavalry crossed the Monocacy to attack the

Union left flank on the Thomas Farm. You can see the ford from the Ford Loop Trail.

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## Enjoy Monocacy Battlefield's Trails and Auto Tour

### Hours and Admission

The battlefield is open from 7 am to 20 minutes after sunset. The visitor center is open 8:30 am to 5 pm daily; closed on Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Check website for other closures. Admission is free.

self-guiding auto tour here.

### Safety and Regulations

Railroad tracks, agricultural fields, private property, and designated administrative areas are not open to the public. Please be respectful.

littering; hunting or harassing wildlife; possession of cultural (bottles, ceramics, etc.) or natural resources (flowers, rocks, etc.).

For firearms regulations check the park website.

**Emergencies call 911 or NPS at 1-866-677-6677.**

### Accessibility

We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

### More Information

Monocacy National Battlefield  
4632 Araby Church Rd.  
Frederick, MD 21704  
301-662-3515  
www.nps.gov/mono

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Monocacy National Battlefield is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more about national parks at [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

### Visitor Center

The visitor center provides information, interpretive exhibits, trail brochures, and a museum store. Water and restrooms are available only at the visitor center. Start the

Stay on marked trails. Beware of wildlife and poisonous plants.

The following are prohibited in the park: bicycles on trails; relic hunting; pets off leash; metal detectors;



THIS BROCHURE IS BASED ON ORIGINAL TEXT BY DAVID ROMANOWSKI.