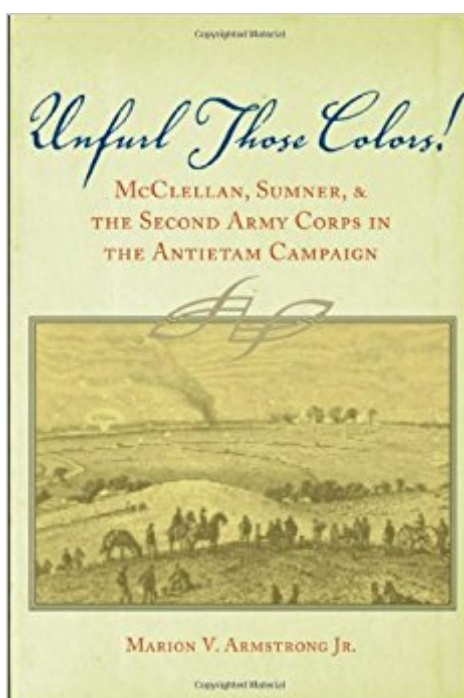


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Unfurl Those Colors: McClellan, Sumner, And The Second Army Corps In The Antietam Campaign



Synopsis

Unfurl Those Colors! provides an operational study of the Army of the Potomac during the pivotal Battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862, illuminating in details that will fascinate scholars and armchair generals alike US army commander George B. McClellan's command decisions and how those decisions were carried out in the middle and lower ranks of the Second Army Corps. Armstrong offers the most comprehensive account yet of the Second Army Corps' fight at Antietam, including Sedgwick's division in the West Woods and French and Richardson's divisions at Bloody Land. He offers a fresh reappraisal of the leadership of Bostonian Edwin V. "Bull Head" Sumner as the only federal corps commander who doggedly and accurately carried out McClellan's battle plan and effectively directed the battle on the Federal right. Many esteemed Civil War historians consider Antietam a watershed moment in the Civil War, a crucial success after which Abraham Lincoln was emboldened to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. Unfurl Those Colors! offers a vital examination of the operational fabric of the Army of the Potomac's leadership and command in one of the most important days in American history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Military historians will find plenty of useful material in Unfurl Those Colors!

Armstrong's book serves as a model for a new style of Civil War campaign history, as it integrates traditional tactical minutiae with social histories of the different Union regiments and

biographies of the different battlefield leaders in the Second Corps. The tactical material is not terribly new, but this book will serve as a useful tool for military staff rides, battlefield enthusiasts, and historians of Civil War combat.

H-Net Reviews "Fully complementing each other, the maps and battle narratives of the companion studies *Unfurl Those Colors!* and *Opposing the Second Corps at Antietam* together comprise the literature's clearest and most complete tactical history of the West Woods and Sunken Road phases of the Antietam battle. These volumes should be regarded as essential components of the 1862 Maryland Campaign bookshelf."

Civil War Books and Authors "Unfurl Those Colors! is a very important contribution to the field of Civil War and military history. While a number of significant books have been written on the Battle of Antietam and the Maryland Campaign, none have narrowed down a particular phase as this book does."

Ted Alexander, Chief Historian at Antietam National Battlefield Park and a Smithsonian Associates tour guide specializing in Civil War sites "Marion Armstrong has done a good job examining the generalship at Antietam. This is a terrific book."

John Michael Priest, noted author of books on Antietam and teacher at South Hagerstown High School in Boonsboro, Maryland

Marion V. Armstrong Jr. is a retired U.S. Army reserve officer and teaches history at colleges in middle Tennessee.

A highly detailed account of the Second Corps action at Antietam. Given the many books, and there are a lot, that I have read about the battle, I think I now for the first time really know what happened in the West Woods and the Sunken Lane. If I have any complaint at all it's that I needed to use a magnifier for some of the map labels, but that might be just because I'm old.

Finally a campaign study by a soldier historian and not by some academic or amateur who has never served in the military! Very well written, great maps placed where you need them, plus a mastery of his subject. Some minor wrong details (at one point [p. 207] he calls Morris' brigade [Third Division Second Corps] one made up of new nine-month's troops when it was actually comprised of new three years soldiers), but overall this is a book to be savored in its details. Armstrong rehabilitates corps commander Edwin Sumner, writes a remarkably lucid narrative of the corps' actions throughout the campaign, and taps published and unpublished sources. This has to be one of the better books published on the Civil War in this century-the number is not slowing down folks. Both beginners and professional historians will learn from this work. Six stars.

Got it, Thank You !

Marion V. Armstrong, Jr. *Unfurl Those Colors!: McClellan, Sumner, and the Second Army Corps in the Antietam Campaign*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press (March 26, 2008). 424 pages, 32 maps, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0817316006 \$39.95 (Hardcover w/DJ). Does Edwin V. Sumner, commander of the Army of the Potomac's II Corps at Antietam, deserve praise or disdain for his actions on September 17? Marion V. Armstrong, Jr. attempts to answer that very question in his controversial new book *Unfurl Those Colors!: McClellan, Sumner, and the Second Army Corps in the Antietam Campaign*. Armstrong believes Edwin Sumner has been unfairly castigated for his actions on the field that day and sets out to show readers why this is so in a detailed tactical analysis of the situation. Armstrong only partially succeeds in his goals, but his work is sure to promote new looks into the actions of the Second Corps and its leaders at Antietam. The Maryland Campaign of 1862 saw both armies in a worn out condition after the Seven Days and Second Bull Run earlier in the year. The battle of Antietam was fought less than three weeks after Second Bull Run. In addition, the Union command structure was jumbled. The Army of the Potomac of the Peninsula Campaign, the Army of Virginia, and Burnside's IX Corps had to be merged into a new Army of the Potomac. Add to this the numerous new regiments formed as a result of the reverses suffered by the Federal army. George McClellan, able organizer, was called in to handle the task. The Second Corps, like the others, saw an infusion of new units, both brand new regiments and veteran organizations which were new to the corps. A third division was formed under William French as a result. Armstrong follows the Second Corps throughout the campaign, from the march to Frederick, the battles for South Mountain, and eventually on to Antietam, where the corps saw its first large scale combat of the entire campaign. Sedgwick's division assaulted the Confederate-held West Woods and suffered a disaster. French and Richardson assaulted the Sunken Road, eventually driving away the Confederate defenders after suffering many losses. The Maryland Campaign ended very quickly after the battle, and the Second Corps saw no further combat. In this detailed tactical study, Armstrong follows the Second Corps and its leader Edwin Vose Sumner by looking at what was known at the time, on the ground. This approach is very similar to that used by Joseph Harsh in *Taken at the Flood*, his masterful book on the Maryland Campaign. Armstrong's goal throughout is to reassess the performance of George McClellan, Edwin Sumner, and his Second Army Corps throughout the campaign. He believes the book will change the way readers view the performances of Sumner and his men, especially at the battle of

Antietam. The battlefield movements of the Second Corps divisions and batteries of artillery throughout the campaign are covered in great detail. Sedgwick's assault into the West Woods and the attacks by French and Richardson on the Sunken Road take up 85 pages of the text. Throughout, Armstrong describes what he believes were the views available to Edwin Sumner as he came onto the battlefield and while his units were in battle. The Confederate leaders and units are hardly mentioned by name, instead showing up as shadowy figures opposing Sumner and his men. This technique differs from some of the other established titles on the subject, including Stephen Sears' *Landscape Turned Red*, which take a more "God's eye" look at the battle. Fans of detailed tactical history will not be disappointed here. I was a little puzzled but pleasantly surprised by the inclusion of a discussion of unit formation and tactics during the Civil War period. It's a great primer for those looking to get into reading detailed battle studies, but my assumption was that anyone looking to read an account of a specific corps in a campaign probably already is familiar with the tactics and formations of the time. In any event, this makes *Unfurl Those Colors!* a great first read for those new to the minutiae of this type of study. The book includes detailed diagrams showing infantry formations (page 35) and artillery formations (pages 42-43). I found I agreed with Armstrong on some points in his reappraisal of Sumner's role at Antietam, while in others I either disagree completely or need more convincing. Let's start with the good. The author pointed out that Sedgwick's Division did have flank support on both sides when the division moved into the West Woods. Some have argued that Sumner went into the West Woods without that all-important support. Armstrong also convinced me that if not for some bad luck involving the 34th New York of Gorman's brigade getting separated from its parent unit and a ravine which led into the resulting gap, the disaster which befell Sedgwick's division would not have been as bad as what actually occurred. In addition, I agree with the assertion that the attack wasn't as foolhardy as is commonly portrayed. Sumner saw the one area where an attack seemed imperative in order to provide the right wing with a clear path to advance on a united front to the south towards Sharpsburg. If the West Woods had Confederate units in it, it had to be cleared. Lastly, I agree that George McClellan should bear a lot of the blame for fighting the battle piecemeal, leading to the conditions which Sumner found as he approached the battlefield. If the I, II, and XII corps had all attacked from the beginning of the battle (with one of the three in reserve), the Confederates would have had a much more difficult time fending off this powerful assault. As the battle was fought in actuality, Jackson was able to fend off each successive attack as it came. There were several points which I immediately disagreed with or need more convincing on. First, Armstrong makes the assertion that Sumner specifically ordered French to attack the Sunken Road at the same time he ordered

Sedgwick into the West Woods. I do not see how this is possible. French's division was far enough behind Sedgwick and Sumner was so involved with Sedgwick's division that I'm convinced Sumner did not even know where French was. French and some of his subordinates more than likely mistook Greene's XI Corps division, facing south towards the Sunken Road, for Sedgwick and his men. In any case, the evidence submitted by Armstrong is not nearly enough to create a reasonable case for his theory, especially since other theories make more sense and fit the available evidence better. I believe this theory must have been developed within the last few years since the author's earlier work *Disaster in the West Woods* does not mention this. Armstrong also relieves Sumner of any blame for the failure of the Federal right to renew the attack on the Confederate lines after Richardson's division took the Sunken Road. I can partially see his point, but Sumner argued vehemently to McClellan that the troops on the Federal right were barely in condition to form a cohesive defense line, much less renew the assault. Franklin, with his fresh VI Corps and Couch's division of the now-defunct IV Corps, wanted to press on. McClellan was cautious by nature and probably would have suspended the assault anyway, but even an aggressive man would have had to think twice when their senior subordinate, a man on the field for hours and known for his tendency to attack, tells you to stay on the defensive. As that senior leader on the field, Sumner bears almost as much blame as McClellan for not renewing the fight. With that said, just how capable were the men of the three corps already involved in heavy fighting (I, II, and XII) to renew the assault in tandem with Franklin's VI Corps? In any case, some of Armstrong's main points in this book just do not hold up satisfactorily under scrutiny.

The 32 maps and 7 diagrams in *Unfurl Those Colors!* had good and bad points. First, the detailed tactical maps go along well with the text and were obviously situated in the text for ease of use. I rarely had to turn more than one page to see any map referred to in the text. Each time a map was mentioned, the page number it fell on was also listed. I found this to be a very helpful feature. Obviously the large number of maps was also a plus. Too often today maps are shortchanged. In a detailed tactical study of this nature, maps are not only not secondary but critical to the text. I am pleased to say the author and The University of Alabama Press recognized the importance of maps and fully delivered in this department. The diagrams showing troop formations were also welcome additions to the text. However, I did not particularly like the maps depicting the entire battlefield. The triangles for each brigade and division encircled to depict larger formations just did not impart to me what was happening on the battlefield. Actual battle lines are not indicated in any way. This also is sometimes the case on some of the more detailed tactical maps as well. I can understand doing so for the Confederates since the text describes only the Union part of the battle, but this lack of actual battle lines also occurs for some

Union units as well. Wargamers interested in the battle of Antietam will enjoy this book tremendously. Scenario designers will find much material to use in the book, including a look early on at the armament for every regiment and battery in the corps. Unfortunately this comes prior to the mention of some of the new units added to the corps as the campaign progressed. The maps, as mentioned above, provide great detail as well. I enjoyed Armstrong's writing style and found the book to be a pleasant and interesting read. While I did not entirely agree with the author's conclusions, his book is sure to provoke discussion within the Civil War community about the actions of the Second Corps at Antietam. Readers interested in this subject may also look to purchase his earlier book *Disaster in the West Woods* to see how the author's views have changed over the last several years. Marion Armstrong's *Unfurl Those Colors!* is an attempt to reassess the role of Edwin Sumner and his Second Corps in the Maryland Campaign, especially at the battle of Antietam. Unfortunately some of Armstrong's conclusions do not fit the historical evidence, especially his assertion that Sumner ordered William French to assault the Sunken Road. Despite this, I would highly recommend Armstrong's work to those interested in detailed tactical studies, those interested in the Maryland Campaign of 1862, wargamers, and students of either Edwin V. Sumner or his Second Corps of the Army of the Potomac. The book's conclusions will cause readers to take their own new look at an often discussed battle and draw their own conclusions. Thank you to Shana Rivers at The University of Alabama Press.

This is an extremely detailed study of the movements and battle actions of the Army of the Potomac's 2nd Corps, commanded by Gen. Edwin V. Sumner at the Battle of Antietam. I had always felt that Sumner was badly treated by most historians for his performance during this battle. In this work, author Anderson goes a long way toward restoring the reputation of this veteran campaigner. This is not a book for the casual reader. It is a very detailed, at times almost myopic, study of the 2nd Corps actions before, during, and after the battle. Anderson states early on that he will present the situations to the reader as Sumner saw them on that day and under the circumstances as he encountered them. This is really a "you are there" treatment of the Union right during the battle. Do not expect a detailed examination of the whole battle. The actions of Burnside at the Rohrbach Bridge are only covered in a cursory manner. The author concentrates almost entirely on the actions as they unfolded in the Cornfield, East & West Woods, and Sunken Road. He succinctly explains the actions Sumner took and why he took them. As a result, he goes a long way toward making Sumner's actions on that day very plausible and reasonable, given the circumstances as they occurred. The narrative would be very difficult to follow were it not for the over

30 detailed maps showing the various movements of the 2nd Corps divisions, brigades, and batteries. This is one of the best battle histories I have read in many a year. I do have one nitpick, however. The typeface is very small and my eyes are not what they once were. It can be a bit of a strain when reading for any length of time.

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