

Antietam Endnote: One Historian's Interpretative Method Offers Research 'Template'

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Review

ANTIETAM ENDNOTE

One historian's interpretative method offers research 'template'

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Harsh, Joseph L. *Sounding the Shallows: A Confederate Compendium for the Maryland Campaign of 1862*. Kent State University Press, 1999-09-01. ISBN 873386418

The award-winning *Taken at the Flood: Robert E. Lee & Confederate Strategy in the Maryland Campaign of 1862* did not exhaust Joseph L. Harsh's thoughts concerning those fateful days in September. If doubts existed in, or about, Harsh's analysis of the events, readers are provided extraordinary insight into the author's mind in **Sounding the Shallows**, the companion volume to *Taken at the Flood*.

The book invites readers to see explicitly how an author comes to his conclusions. Scholars will find it a useful template for how an author may create a framework for analysis. Although significant to the study of the Maryland campaign, **Sounding the Shallows** is more important as a basis for educated, informed, and objective historical interpretation. In this giant endnote, the reader will join the author in laying out fully and clearly the bases for his interpretations.

Through a wide array of tables and analysis dealing with almost every aspect of possible controversy, Harsh penetrates into the combat experience of Confederate troops, their organization, and their deployment - before, during, and after the engagements. Among the details included is information on unit commanders' fates in the campaign. And, drawing from the Eighth U.S. Census and other sources, he is able to explain the conditions of the field and the people who lived there.

A set of nearly 100 research appendices deals with Lee's decision to enter Maryland, the battles of South Mountain and Harper's Ferry, Antietam, and the

aftermath. The topics include such matters as weather, the impact of straggling on the Confederate army, Lee's injury before the crossing into Maryland, the placement of supply trains, the activities of specific units and their accomplishments, the impact of the loss of Special Order No. 191 and accounting for the lost copies, and exactly when Lee met with whom when.

Critical to the study of any event are the recollections of the participants afterward, in some cases decades later. Harsh's comparative study of the remembrances of these soldiers is detailed and exhaustive. He is especially critical of the memory of John G. Walker and the discrepancies in his writings following the War. He demonstrates that Walker is often not credible as a witness in much of what he writes about.

In order to understand the full import of the analysis contained in **Sounding the Shallows**, the reader must digest *Taken at the Flood*. Hardly a problem, since a serious student of the Civil War should miss neither.

Craig R. Scott is a Certified Genealogical Records Specialist who specializes in military records in the National Archives. He is a frequent lecturer on military research methodology at national genealogical conferences.