



“What if?”

They can be some of the most haunting words I know.

What if we hadn’t called the homeowner just minutes before they listed this Antietam battlefield property for sale?

What if we don’t raise the funds in time?

Dear Friend and Fellow Preservationist,

Thanks to patriotic individuals like you, no other nonprofit organization in America has done more to save historic battlefields than we have. I’m immensely proud of that, and ***you*** should be, too.

But sometimes I’ll admit that I’m haunted by the ***what ifs of our work***. *The properties where the price of the land was just too prohibitive. The tracts that got away — before we even knew about them! — where homes and roads and data centers were built over sacred ground, and history was lost forever.*

Frankly, it very nearly happened to two extraordinary properties at Antietam. Both landowners planned to sell their properties. One was literally hours away from listing their property for sale! But luckily, just before it was too late, we were able to speak with the landowners and negotiate a purchase contract.

I am so grateful we could intervene in time, but I also can’t help but think ... *What if* the homeowners hadn’t picked up the phone when we called ... and taken our offer instead of someone else’s?

My friend, the loss to our country would have been immeasurable. For these two tracts are part of what we know as ***The Final Attack at the Battle of Antietam*** ... *a major turning point on the single bloodiest day in American history.*

The two properties we have the chance to save today total just over two acres. “Small,” the casual observer might say. But **huge in importance** for anyone who knows their history like you do. (You’ll see what I mean when you look at the battlefield maps I’m enclosing.)

All told, it’s going to cost us just over \$1 million to buy them — \$1,025,000 to be exact. That’s a hefty sum, I know, but the good news is we’ve already lined up \$510,000 from an expected federal grant and our partner, the Save Historic Antietam Foundation. Help arrived, and now we need yours.

Because here’s the kicker. The remaining funds need to be in hand before the end of the year. *No ifs, ands, or buts.* We must raise the money now, so I’m asking you to please make the best gift you can today!

**Will you help the American Battlefield Trust
save this hallowed ground at Antietam?**

Your gift will be matched \$2-to-\$1 when you do.

Let’s face it — the outcome on September 17, 1862, could have been very different. It was the first time the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia had invaded the North, and no one knew if their greatly outnumbered forces could match up to the Union troops under the command of Gen. George McClellan.

In a bold move, Gen. Robert E. Lee took a stand with his back to the swollen Potomac River. ***If*** McClellan defeated Lee, the Army of Northern Virginia could be surrounded, with no means of escape.

As the bloodiest day in American history continued to unfold, the question became sharper and sharper — just how long could Lee’s forces hold out? By late afternoon, he had reached the breaking point, with Union troops pushing across Burnside’s Bridge and threatening his right ... and his only route of retreat.

I can’t know if Lee said a prayer at that moment — but if he did, his prayers were answered — just in the nick of time, Gen. A.P. Hill arrived with the reinforcements that would prevent complete devastation of Lee’s remaining troops.

Indeed, some nine hours earlier, the 3,500-man Light Division under Hill’s command had begun their march. They left Harpers Ferry at 7:00 a.m., trudged *17 grueling miles without respite (men died of heatstroke along the way)*, and waded across the Potomac River. At around 4:00 p.m., three of Hill’s five brigades, numbering about 2,500 men, arrived at the very last minute ... in time for ***The Final Attack***.



Both properties sit right at the edge of the Antietam National Battlefield. A.P. Hill’s men crossed the Harpers Ferry Road, visible just beyond the cannons. © American Battlefield Trust

As A.P. Hill would later write (I have added the emphasis here), “*My lines advanced and soon encountered the enemy. This advance was made in the face of the most tremendous artillery fire I ever saw, and too much praise cannot be awarded to my regiments for the steady, unwavering step. It was as if each man felt that the fate of the army centered in himself.*”

As students of history, we know there are many *what ifs* that surround the Battle of Antietam. *What if* McClellan had pushed Lee back to the Potomac? *What if* Hill and his men hadn’t arrived at the last minute? *What if* McClellan had pursued Lee and the wounded Confederate Army into Virginia?

These are some of the many questions we ask ourselves but can never know the answers to. **But here’s what we *do* know with absolute certainty about this battle. 23,000 men from both sides were killed, wounded, captured, or went missing.** The Confederates showed that, even outnumbered, they could fight with valor, and the Federals made clear they could withstand the Rebel invasion of Union territory.

Beyond its military importance, the Battle of Antietam had significant political ramifications, too. President Lincoln turned Lee’s retrograde to Virginia into a “strategic victory” by issuing the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation ... *and American history was changed forever.*

We can’t know what would have happened if the landowners hadn’t answered our phone calls about this irreplaceable land. But something else we do know with absolute certainty: If we don’t act now, we could lose this incredible opportunity to save the land that witnessed this remarkable history.

What if the Trust didn’t have members like you that we could turn to for reinforcements? I don’t want to imagine. As it is, we have only a few weeks left to raise the funds to save these two extraordinary properties forever.

So please hurry to make your most generous gift to save this sacred land at Antietam while every dollar you give is worth DOUBLE. *Can I count on you for help?*

It’s the season of giving, and I want you to know how truly grateful I am for every preservation gift you give. Please rush your gift now so we can get to the closing table in time to preserve these precious tracts at Antietam for all time.



‘Til the battle is won,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David N. Duncan". The signature is fluid and cursive.

David N. Duncan
President

P.S. I’ll have more to tell you about these two properties in a future letter. *There is so much still to be done, including removing the two existing houses so we can return the land to historically accurate battlefield conditions.* I also want to let you know about a new Antietam driving tour video we’re creating that you’ll be able to watch, marveling at the history and scenery, even seeing some of the properties you helped to save!