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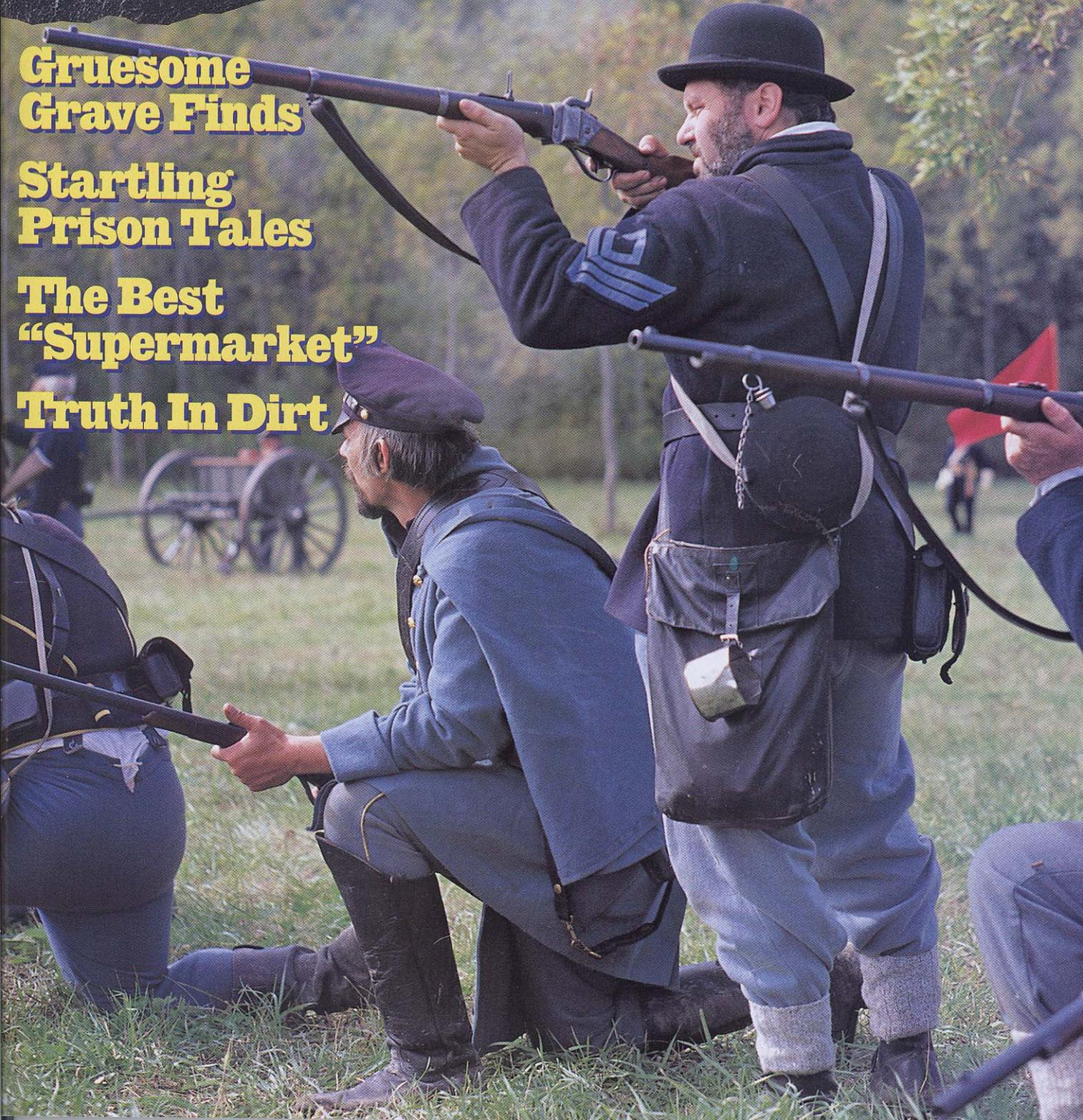
# CIVIL WAR BATTLEFIELDS

**Gruesome  
Grave Finds**

**Startling  
Prison Tales**

**The Best  
“Supermarket”**

**Truth In Dirt**



# Mystery Men of the Irish Brigade

by Lois Miner Huey

Discovering the identities of these “reckless” and “aggressive” fighting men proves challenging.

**O**n September 17, 1989, hundreds of people came to Maryland’s Antietam National Cemetery to pay their respects as the remains of four Civil War soldiers were buried. The ceremony took place exactly 127 years to the day after they had died in 1862. Who were these mystery men?

The remains had been discovered in 1988 in a plowed field next to Antietam National Battlefield. The following August, archaeologists from the National Park Service, bone experts from the Smithsonian Institution, and volunteers began excavating the area. In 1998, the land became part of the Antietam Battlefield site.

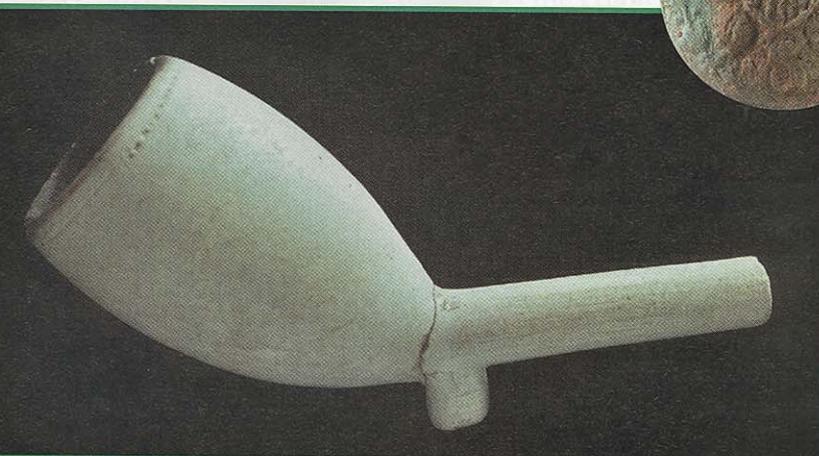
## Fearless Fighters

Information recovered from excavated finds, combined with bone analysis, documentary research, and a close study of the movements of troops during the battle revealed that all were members of the Irish Brigade from New York City. An officer during the Civil War noted that the Irish volunteers were “impetuous” and “reckless” in battle. With a reputation for aggressive behavior, they were chosen at Antietam to lead the attack against the Confederates holding the Sunken Road, which lay near the center of action.

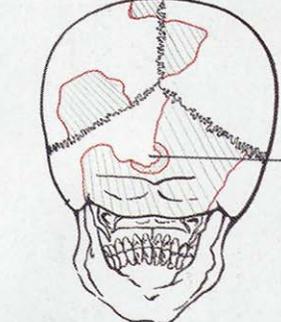
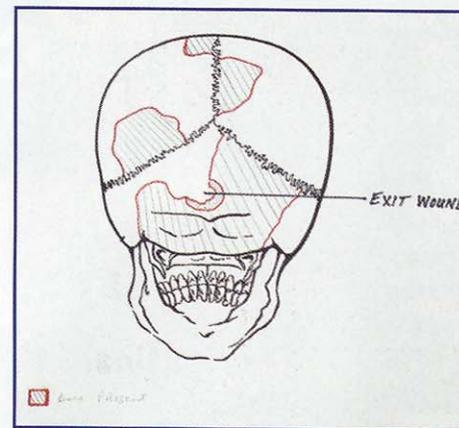
According to Dr. Stephen R. Potter, the archaeologist in charge of the excavations, more than half of the brigade members were killed in action.

The excavations showed that the bodies had been disturbed before, probably right after the Civil War. At that time, the government paid laborers to find battlefield graves and rebury bodies in military cemeteries. At Antietam, however, the laborers missed some of the bones. These bones, together with artifacts recovered in the excavation, revealed much about these four soldiers.

It was determined that three of the soldiers showed no evidence of arthritis or tooth wear and were between the



This white clay tobacco pipe with the maker’s mark “TK” was found in Grave 3. Its stem originally would have been at least 4 inches long, but through use and breakage, it is now less than 2 inches. Despite its shrinking size, its owner still used it. Many brass buttons embossed with the plain-shield eagle were found in the 4 graves, and all of these were coat buttons (inset).



Check the diagram and then the recovered part of the skull to locate the exit wound area. The right shoulder blade of the soldier in Grave 4 shows changes due to arthritis (right). A cuff button embossed with the shield of the State of New York—it would have been worn on a shoulder strap, a chin strap, or the cuff of a New York soldier’s state pattern fatigue jacket (below).

ages of 20 and 30. Unfired bullets of the type used by the Irish Brigade were found near their bones, along with parts of knapsacks, religious medals, buttons, pieces of a leather shoe, and a much-smoked white clay tobacco pipe. The excavators also found the Confederate bullets that killed the soldiers.

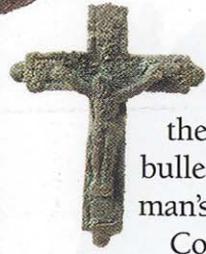
## Bullets to the Chest

But the man in Grave 4 proved the most exciting. He was at least 40 years old, his teeth were worn, and he suffered from arthritis. In the grave with him were Catholic rosary beads and a medal.





This soldier most likely wore the rosary into battle because individual beads were found in the areas of his neck and chest. A folding knife that he probably carried in his breast pocket was also found.

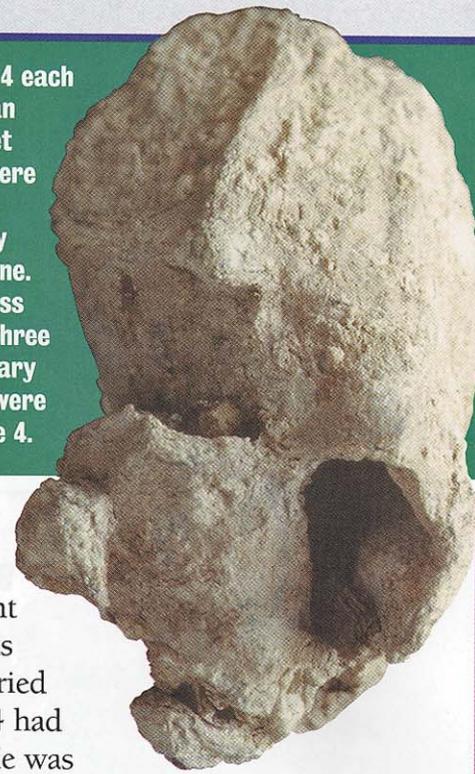


“Most startling of all,” according to Potter, “was the discovery of three fired bullets in the area of the soldier’s chest. All of the soft-lead bullets had struck bone, causing the man’s death.” (See page 11.)



Convinced that this mystery man was older than most other soldiers in the Civil War, researchers pored through service records, medical records, and muster rolls in the National Archives and the state registers of New York. They looked for every enlisted man of the Irish Brigade age 40 or older who had been killed in action at Antietam and found several, but only one matched the man in Grave 4. The record gave his vital information as 50 years old, Irish, a member of the Irish Brigade, and killed at Antietam. Records of the battle lines

Graves 2 and 4 each contained an Enfield bullet (right). Both were misshapen because they had struck bone. A medal, brass crucifix, and three Catholic rosary beads (left) were found in Grave 4.



proved that the regiment was in the right position for his body to be buried where Grave 4 had been found. He was Private James Gallagher of Company C, 63rd New York Regiment.

*Lois Miner Huey is a historical archaeologist with the state of New York.*

## Antietam

The Battle of Antietam, fought on September 17, 1862, was the bloodiest one-day battle in United States history. Confederate General Robert E. Lee invaded the North for the first time and was met at a creek known as Antietam in western Maryland by Union forces commanded by Major General George McClellan. Troops fought across plowed fields, in orchards and woods, across bridges, near churches, and at the Sunken Road. After the battle, Lee retreated to Virginia. Claiming victory, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves in the states at war with the Union.

—Lois Miner Huey



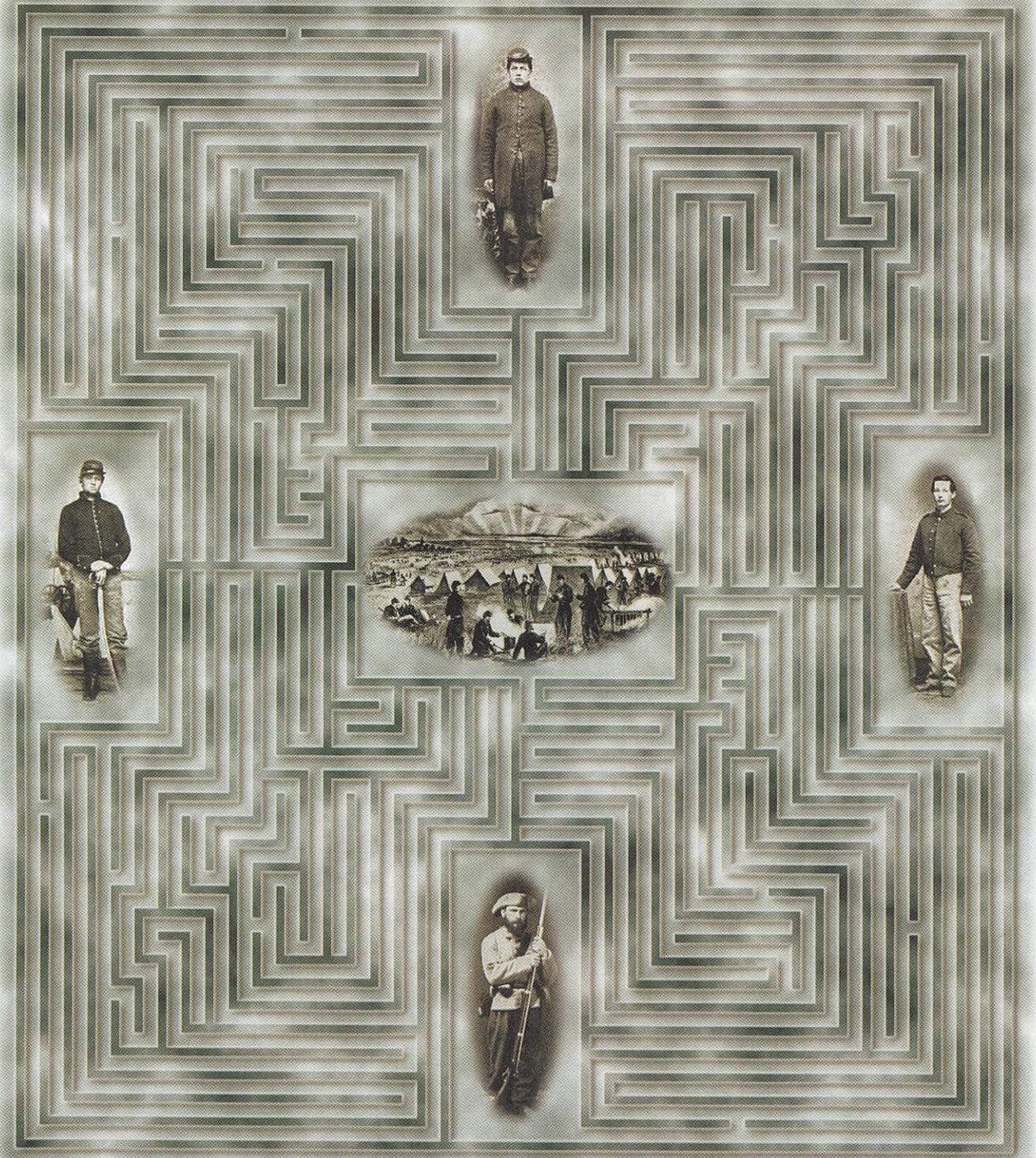
More than 23,000 Confederate and Union soldiers were killed during the one-day battle at Antietam. This sunken road near a cornfield where fighting raged became known as “Bloody Lane.”

## games

BY KEN FEISEL

# Hazy Maze

A dense fog has settled over Antietam, and our four fearless fighters from the Irish Brigade have lost their way. Help each of them find his way back to camp.



# ORDER FROM CHAOS

BY LOIS MINER HUEY

## WHAT BROUGHT A MULE AND A STOVE LEG TOGETHER? THE BATTLE OF ANTIETAM!

**M**etal flew through the air. “In one instance a mule of ours was struck with the leg of a cooking stove!” reported a Union officer. To be sure, the Battle of Antietam was chaotic.

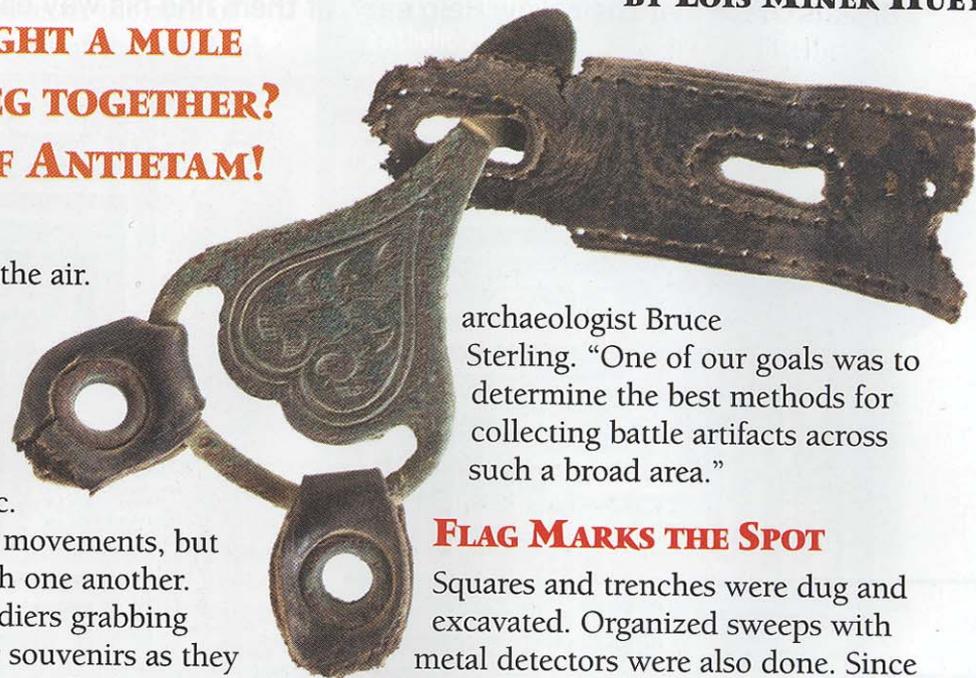
Eyewitnesses described troop movements, but their stories often conflict with one another. There are also accounts of soldiers grabbing revolvers, canteens, and other souvenirs as they left the battlefield. Other reports tell of civilians swarming the area after the battle to gather remains they considered collectible.

Is there anything left to be excavated at Antietam? Is it possible, nearly 150 years later, to uncover artifacts that will help interpret a battlefield where so much happened?

“Like many military historians, we archaeologists want to impose order on chaos,” says

The fancy trouser-suspender clasps suggest that the soldier in Grave 2 owned them and did not use government-issued ones. The buckshot (far right) and round balls

(left) found in the graves were unfired. Analysis suggests they were ammunition carried by the Irish soldiers. At right are 81 unfired percussion caps from Grave 1. The tinned-metal 4-hole button (above round balls) was worn on Federal-issue trousers.



archaeologist Bruce Sterling. “One of our goals was to determine the best methods for collecting battle artifacts across such a broad area.”

### FLAG MARKS THE SPOT

Squares and trenches were dug and excavated. Organized sweeps with metal detectors were also done. Since the detectors can provide considerable information about the distribution of battle-related artifacts, the decision was made to concentrate on metal detecting.

A small flag was pushed into the ground at the location of each beep of a metal detector. Two archaeologists then excavated the spot and mapped the location of each military item found. Among the finds were gun parts, buttons, canteen parts, belt buckles, and bullets—proving there were still battlefield artifacts to be discovered and studied. Special attention was given to Union and Confederate bullets.

Archaeologists studied the locations of the bullets to reconstruct troop movements across the battlefield. The results contradicted some



of the written accounts. In one case, the Union brigade under Brigadier General Nathan Kimball was not located on a hill in an orchard as reported by battle survivors. Instead, the brigade was 100 yards farther north, in a low area below a different hill. This makes more sense, as the latter site provided shelter from enemy gunfire.

### MELTED BULLETS?

Confederate bullets found in the North Woods were a surprise. No one had realized that Confederate soldiers had, in fact, reached that area. Melted drops of lead helped identify the site of the East Woods. The intense fighting there left trees riddled with bullets and bits of shell (see page 33).

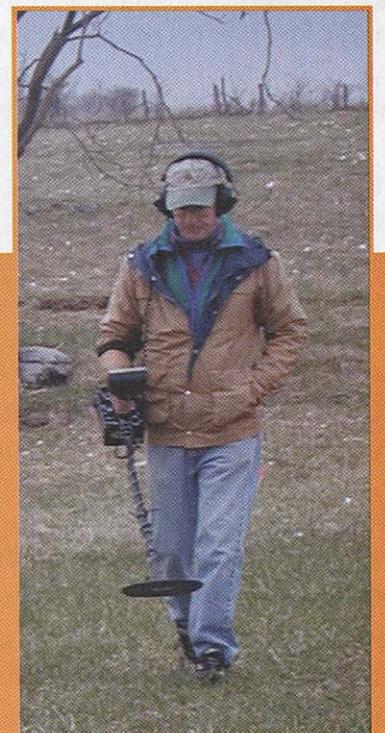
When the trees were burned for farm fields, the lead melted, forming the drops found by archaeologists.

The surveys of the Antietam battlefield have certainly provided new, exciting information. Yet, despite the countless artifacts uncovered, the stove leg that struck the mule is still missing!

### Dig Data

Swept close to the ground, handheld metal detectors produce a magnetic field that causes electric currents, or “eddy currents,” in buried metal objects. These eddy currents generate an opposite current in the machine’s coil, sending a signal that says metal is present. Because different metals give different signals, the machines can identify the depth and type of metal—iron or brass, for example. Detectors can be adjusted so that items such as bottle caps are ignored. Those used in the Antietam survey were set to find all metals. The excavators then identified the find and decided whether to record it.

**GRAVE FINDS:** The three ‘kill’ bullets found with the remains of the 40+ soldier (right). Federal-issue square-toed leather shoe of a type called a brogan. Union soldiers also called them “mud scows” or “gunboats” (below). Brass cuff button embossed with the seal of the state of New York and a large brass coat button embossed with a plain-shield eagle (left).



## Meet Stephen R. Potter

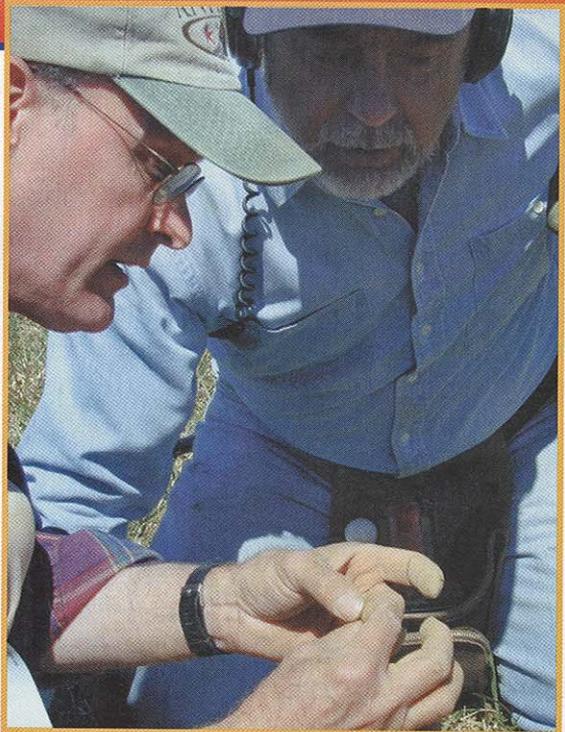
Stephen R. Potter, regional archaeologist for the National Park Service, National Capital Region, has been involved in prehistoric and historic archaeological fieldwork in Alabama, Kansas, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

### What interested you in battlefield archaeology?

My interest in history and archaeology began when I was a little boy. Grandmother Viar told me stories about my great-great-grandfather's exploits in the Civil War that she heard from her grandparents. When I was six, I was walking with Grandfather Viar in the family barnyard in Culpeper, Virginia. A heavy rain the night before had exposed some objects along the foundation of the granary. Granddaddy kicked something up with the square toe of his left riding boot and told me to pick it up. I did and was surprised that the object was so heavy, even though it was small. It looked like a gray blob. "What is it?" I asked. "It's a bullet from the war," replied Granddaddy. I asked him if he meant the same war that Grandmother Viar told me stories about, and he said, "Yes." A light bulb went on, and I made the connection between the oral history of my Civil War ancestors and the artifacts I could find that once touched their lives. I was hooked. It was just a question of whether I would become an archaeologist and get dirt under my fingernails or become a historian and get dust up my nose from searching through old archives. I chose to try to do both.

### How can historical archaeology contribute to understanding battles?

Many things happened during battle that were not written down but that left evidence in the ground. Through the techniques and methods of historical archaeology, researchers have been



Stephen Potter (left) and volunteer Keith Zorger examine a fired .69 caliber round ball found in the North Woods at Antietam National Battlefield.

able to determine: 1) the movements and firing lines of specific units, which aren't always where the historical accounts said they were; 2) the intensity and closeness of combat and the manner in which soldiers fought; 3) the types of firearms and ammunition used by certain units; 4) what life was like for the soldiers after the combat; and 5) the effects of a battle on the civilians who lived on land that became a battlefield and the effects of the battle on the land itself.

### Why was a survey of the Antietam battlefield necessary and what do you foresee will happen as a result of the survey?

Only two percent of national parks have been surveyed for archaeological resources. To best care for these special places, the National Park Service needs to know first where significant archaeological resources are located. These resources can then be interpreted for the visiting public, while preserving them for future study. At Antietam National Battlefield, we hope to incorporate knowledge gained from the archaeological survey into new exhibits being planned for the park.

# dig this!

Camp near I Parsons, Texas to  
July 6<sup>th</sup> 1863.  
Wm. Cornum  
Dear Girl,  
After a long march and two  
hard fought battles kind pro-  
vidence has again spared my  
life. it has been impossible for  
me to write sooner either to you  
or to Mother, for we have been  
on the go just three weeks to  
days in that time we marched  
over two hundred miles and  
rested about four days. The  
last two weeks the weather  
has been very rainy. I  
have had but one changed  
of clothing. Which is enough  
to cause sickness. But  
my health is still good.  
though I am nearly wore out

with fatigue and exposure.  
To gain our point of  
destination our Corps was  
compelled to march 35 miles  
in the inside of 10 hours,  
and then to fight in one of  
the hardest contested battles  
on this continent. We  
not arrive in time to take  
part in the first days fight.  
But on the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> of July  
we was placed in the central  
front. There we built a  
poorly breast work. But  
at night came we found it of  
great advantage. In this  
one day under the cannonading  
of 1.15 guns for one hour and  
a half. one shell passing through  
our breast work  
wounding  
including  
brought in



## BATTLEFIELD TREASURES!

What do these objects have in common? Gettysburg!

All relate to the area where, on July 1-3, 1863, the battle that became the turning point in the Civil War was fiercely fought.

The letter, written on July 6, refers to the battles of July 2 and 3.

The single die and 8 dominoes were excavated at the Bliss Farm, on the field where Confederate general George E. Pickett led his now-famous charge.

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