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## Four Days in Heaven Spending Four Days in Hell

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# Four Days in Heaven Spending Four Days in Hell

## Abstract

I spent four days this past weekend wallowing in the depths of hell. Around me swirled the maelstrom of battle, a spinning vortex of blood, death, destruction and loss. Outside the windows, every patch of ground is a reminder of the sacrifice and heartache.

If you squinted your eyes, or better yet closed them completely, you could see it all. [*excerpt*]

## Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Civil War Interpretation, Antietam

## Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Military History | Public History | Social History | United States History

## Comments

*Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public* is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

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# Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

[www.civilwarconnect.com](http://www.civilwarconnect.com)



## Four Days in Heaven Spending Four Days in Hell

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2012**



The German Baptist Brethren Bible on the front table inside the sanctuary of the Mumma Meetinghouse, 150 years after it sat there on the eve of the battle.

I spent four days this past weekend wallowing in the depths of hell. Around me swirled the maelstrom of battle, a spinning vortex of blood, death, destruction and loss. Outside the windows, every patch of ground is a reminder of the sacrifice and heartache.

If you squinted your eyes, or better yet closed them completely, you could see it all.

The Dunker Church (more accurately called the "Mumma Meetinghouse" or "German Baptist Brethren Meetinghouse") is a purely magical place, an amazing environment in which to weave tales of meaning for visitors.

Those tales were ones of fear and trepidation, as pacifists confronted the awful prospect of war. Those tales were ones of hope and heartache, as Emancipation came within a hair's breadth of freeing the men and women enslaved on Sharpsburg's landscape, but not quite close enough in 1863. Those tales were ones of horror and shock, as Civil War photos became portals to the past *and the present*.

I kept getting asked the question, over and over again, "aren't you tired?"

But the opposite was true. Each interaction with a visitor refreshed me, uplifted me and brought light to my step. By Monday, I could barely hobble out of bed and slide into my green and grey uniform. But the pain was a good one, the aches were almost therapeutic.



My hat / PD NPS Photo

I had forgotten the joy of seeing someone have that moment of new appreciation for a place, whether that place be old friend or new acquaintance.

All told, I spoke to the majority of the people who visited Sharpsburg this weekend and wandered onto the battlefield. The location was prime, the crowd flow was intense, but the opportunities for meanings were limitless. From the fight against slavery to the fight over secession, from smouldering Libya to the streets of New York, the Dunker Church became a time machine allowing all of us to view ourselves from wild perspectives and amazing heights.

Tune in next week, same Bat-time, same Bat-channel and you might get a glimpse at some of the meanings I shared with visitors.

Maryland, it turns out, was an amazing, violent, vibrant, frightening and befuddling place in 1862. It only takes a time machine to visit it.