

Teaching Guide

SEGMENT 7, WEBISODE 6

Please note: Each segment in this Webisode has its own Teaching Guide



President Lincoln's brief, eloquent remarks at the dedication of a national cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, not only memorialized the war dead but also redefined the concept of the war: it was not just a struggle for the Union but a struggle to establish freedom and equality for all.

The three-day battle at Gettysburg in 1863 left 51,000 dead, wounded, or missing, and the small town of 2,400 residents saw their homes turned into makeshift hospitals. To bury the war dead, local leaders under the direction of the governor purchased land for a national cemetery. Organizers invited Edward Everett, the nation's most distinguished orator, to speak at the dedication ceremony. They later invited the president to make "a few appropriate remarks." While Everett's two-hour speech has passed into the forgotten pages of history, Lincoln's 250-word Gettysburg Address is considered one of the most significant speeches in American history.



Segment
Overview



Let's Discuss

Teacher Directions

1. Students, in small teams, discuss the following questions.
 - Who paid for the national cemetery at Gettysburg?
 - What was Lincoln's goal in creating and delivering the Gettysburg Address?
 - What was the mood of the country at that time?
2. Make sure students understand the following points in discussing the questions.

Eighteen northern states agreed to share the costs for a national cemetery at Gettysburg. Lincoln wanted to explain the deeper purpose of the war. He redefined the war as a struggle not only for the Union but also a struggle to establish freedom and equality for all. Many people were exhausted from two bloody years of fighting and wanted the war to end, even if this meant recognition of the Confederacy as a separate nation.



Teacher Directions

1. Tell students that today they will look closely at one of the most famous speeches in American history.
2. Ask students to briefly share recollections of speeches they have heard (political speeches, speeches by students or the principal, acceptance speeches at music awards). Accept student responses.
3. Ask students to discuss the following questions with team partners.
 - Might a speech have more than one goal?
 - What makes a speech memorable and effective?
4. Explain that while a speech also depends on delivery (the speaker's tone of voice, gestures, eye contact) to be effective, the content—what the speaker says—is critically important. The Gettysburg Address is considered a masterpiece for its words and ideas alone.
5. Distribute the Student Sheet: *The Gettysburg Address*. Students read the text of the speech. If possible listen to an audio version of the speech.
6. Distribute the Student Sheet: *The Gettysburg Address: A Closer Look*. Guide the students in reading and discussing the questions in an interactive, whole-class activity.
7. Students share answers with the class.
 - Answers to Student Sheet: *The Gettysburg Address*
 - Lincoln is referring to 1776, the year the Declaration of Independence was adopted.
 - “We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives”
 - That a nation dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal might live
 - No. While Lincoln makes the goals of the war sound noble, he does not glorify war itself. His tone is solemn.
 - He urges the listeners to “be dedicated here to the unfinished work....to the great task remaining before us....that government of the people, by the people for the people should not perish from the earth.”
 - Lincoln does not mention the South or any enemy. He discourages anger or revenge.
 - Brought forth, conceived, created, new birth of freedom
 - Gave their lives, dead, honored dead, not died in vain, perish
 - Consecrate, hallow, devotion, under God. “Four score” also echoes the language of the King James Bible.
 - Birth vs. death, other nations vs. America, life vs. death, mortality vs. immortality, present vs. past, the dead vs. the living, words today vs. the deeds of the dead soldiers, men perish vs. government will not perish



Moving Toward
Freedom

Teacher Directions

1. Introduce students to the topic of Civil War medicine by sharing the following information.

While over 600,000 men died in the Civil War, over 400,000 of those deaths were the result, not of the minie ball and cannon blast, but of disease. Of those who died, two out of three succumbed to diseases like measles, diarrhea, mumps, pneumonia, and typhoid fever. Although the soldiers feared the enemy's shot and shell, battle was infrequent; but an unseen, deadly enemy—the microbes that flourished in the filth of their camps and on the hands of their doctors—was constantly with them.

Although medical care during the Civil War was primitive by today's standards, the dedicated efforts and sacrifices of surgeons, hospital stewards, and nurses accomplished miracles in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulties.

2. Assign one of the following topics to each team and distribute the accompanying Student Sheets.
 - Disease
 - Surgeons
 - Field Hospitals
 - General Hospitals
 - Nurses
 - Anesthesia
 - Voices
3. Explain the team activity. Each team investigates one of the topics and plans a two-minute skit or presentation to share information about its topic with the class. Students can share the information by making a poster, collage, drawing, transparency, skit, or in some other way. Students use the photographs, student sheets, web sites, resource books, and other materials.
4. Visit each team as the students read the information sheets and research their topics. Help students locate, organize, and record appropriate information and plan their presentations. Check that each student has a definite task in planning and presenting the team's information to the class. Answer and ask questions, help students clarify information, encourage oral elaboration, and give positive feedback.
5. Each team shares its information with the class. Use a timer to ensure that each team has equal presentation time. During each presentation, other students record at least two facts or items of information on a web.
6. As a class, discuss the following question.
 - How did medical advances during the Civil War help America move toward freedom?

Moving Toward Freedom,
Continued.



Connections

7. Ask the teams to list the medical changes that came about because of the need to care for all the sick and wounded soldiers (emergency medicine techniques, pavilion style hospitals, use of anesthesia, nursing as a profession for women, embalming, learning from documented case studies, medical personnel as neutrals in wartime, and other changes).
8. Teams share their lists with the class. If time permits, ask the teams to decide what was the most important medical change. Answer any questions and encourage students who are interested to further research this topic in the resource books or on the web.

Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

Language Arts/Drama – Students memorize and recite the Gettysburg Address. Award a prize to the best recitation.

Language Arts/Library – Students use the internet or a recording to listen to other famous historical speeches, such as Patrick Henry’s “Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death” (speech to the Second Virginia Convention), Martin Luther King Jr.’s “March on Washington Address,” or Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “War Message to Congress” (after Pearl Harbor), and compare it to Lincoln’s address.

Science/Library – Students research and discuss the major diseases that killed many during the Civil War. What caused them and how do we treat them today (vaccines, antibiotics, sanitation practices)? Also note that we still have infectious diseases today, such as AIDS (which has no vaccine).

Math/Library – Students research the casualty statistics of the Civil War and create charts or graphs to show causes of death.

Music – Students listen to a recording of “The Invalid Corps,” a humorous song about a conscript who is rejected for military service because of his many ailments.

The Gettysburg Address: A Closer Look

1. What year was Lincoln referring to in his opening sentence? Why was he reminding his listeners of that year?

2. What phrase tells the reason for this ceremony?

3. According to Lincoln, why did the soldiers die?

4. Some speeches make war sound exciting and full of glory. Does this one? Why or why not?

5. Lincoln's speech has two goals: to honor the war dead, and give advice to the living. What advice does Lincoln give?

6. Some speeches urge the hearers to keep fighting by stirring up anger against the enemy. Does Lincoln show any anger towards the South? Is there any mention of the South as an enemy?

7. What words deal with images of birth?

8. What words deal with images of death?

9. What religious language does Lincoln use?

10. What "big ideas" does Lincoln contrast?

----- versus -----
----- versus -----
----- versus -----
----- versus -----

The Gettysburg Address

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Disease

When we think about soldiers dying in war, we imagine that most are killed in a battle. But during the Civil War, for every soldier killed in battle, two died because of disease.

Today, doctors know much more about disease than did the surgeons during the Civil War. First of all, Civil War doctors did not know what caused or spread disease and infection. Even you know more about disease than those doctors did.

You know that germs cause disease, but Civil War doctors did not. The relationship between germs and disease had not yet been discovered. Most doctors thought disease was caused by “bad air” or by an imbalance in body fluids—blood, black bile, yellow bile, and mucous. Furthermore, Civil War doctors didn’t know how to stop disease from spreading from one sick soldier to another. They did not have antibiotics or antiseptic medicines. They did not even know that washing their hands would stop disease and infection from spreading. Back then doctors were just beginning to use vaccines to prevent smallpox, measles, and other diseases. In fact, some soldiers got so sick when doctors used too much vaccine on them that they missed battles.

Another reason why so many soldiers died from disease was the spoiled food. Both the Union and Confederate armies found it hard to get food to their soldiers. Horse-drawn supply wagons got stuck on muddy, unpaved roads. Often supply wagons traveled much slower than the soldiers marched. In the South, the railroad tracks were different gauges, so food sent by railroad had to be unloaded and carried from one train to another. The cavalry of both armies destroyed bridges, tore up train tracks, and attacked supply wagons.



U.S. Army Military Historical Institute, Carlisle, PA

Confederate field hospital in a cornfield.
Dr. Anson Hurd (in hat) is surgeon in charge.

Fresh food supplies were often far from marching or fighting soldiers. In a day without refrigerated trucks or railroad cars, it took too long to get fresh food from the farm to the soldier. Sitting in warehouses or beside the rail lines, fresh meat and vegetables rotted, bread and crackers grew moldy, and flour got full of weevils and maggots.

When the men finally got the food, which was often spoiled, they didn't cook it properly. Most cooking was done over a campfire, and the food was often burnt or still raw when eaten. The germs in the spoiled food caused the men to get sick with stomach cramps and diarrhea. Before a battle or on the march, the men sometimes ate their meat raw between two hard crackers. Most soldiers lived on fatty meat, hardtack or cornbread, and coffee. They ate few vegetables or fruits. Sometimes the men foraged the countryside for apples, berries, or corn. Often these fruit and vegetables were not ripe and caused intestinal problems. No one knew that to stay healthy people should eat a balanced diet including fruits, vegetables, grains, and dairy products.

The third reason that soldiers died from disease was overcrowded army camps and hospitals. People didn't know how disease spreads from one person to another. With thousands of soldiers crowded into camps and hospitals, when one soldier got sick so did many others. Many soldiers slept in tents so small that they couldn't even turn over in their sleep. Men from farms who had never been around crowds were suddenly in camps with men from the cities. The farm lads had no immunity to many of the childhood diseases that spread through the camps. Epidemics of diarrhea, dysentery, measles, malaria, typhoid fever, and yellow fever killed thousands of men. Many young soldiers never got to a battle; instead they died in camp of measles or chicken pox.

The fourth reason that soldiers died from disease was the unclean conditions of the camps and the men. Not only were the camps and hospitals crowded, they were filthy. Without latrines or toilets, men used ditches called "sinks" as toilets, but many just went on the ground near their tents. Beef and hogs were butchered for food, and the blood and unused meat was left rotting on the ground. Flies, rats, and other insects and rodents were everywhere. The men had races with the many cockroaches, betting on their favorite to win.

Many people in Civil War times believed that taking a bath too often was harmful. But even if a soldier wanted to take a bath, he had no tub or shower. Water was limited, needed for drinking, and often far away from the camp. On the march and in battle, soldiers had no way to even wash their hands or faces. Many did not brush their teeth. The army provided only one uniform which had to last an entire year. The soldier lived, fought, and slept in that same uniform without washing it. Every soldier suffered from fleas and body lice that were not only annoying but also carried disease. Citizens who witnessed soldiers marching through their towns observed that the men were the filthiest creatures they had ever seen. One man wrote in his diary that he could smell the army long before he could see it.

The poor food, the filthy men, the crowded, dirty camps, and the long marches caused disease to spread at an alarming rate. It's amazing that any of the soldiers survived and were well enough to fight.

General Hospitals

When the Civil War began neither the North nor the South had enough hospitals. At that time people rarely went to a hospital; nearly all were treated at home. In fact, people feared hospitals, and with good reason. Most people did not get well in hospitals, but instead died there. The armies were not prepared for the vast numbers of sick and wounded. No one expected the war to last for years or anticipated that so many soldiers would be wounded, get so many diseases, or heal so slowly from ugly wounds and amputations.

Both the armies and the civilians realized the need for more hospitals and better conditions. Until new hospitals could be built, churches, warehouses, and government buildings were converted into general hospitals. Many hospitals were housed in large army tents. Both sides turned their capital cities into hospital cities. In Washington City (D.C.), the United States Capitol building itself became a hospital. In Richmond, Virginia, even the pews in churches became hospital beds.

The general hospitals were terrible places; filthy and smelly, dark and dank, over-filled with weakened sick and wounded soldiers. Many injured lay in their dirty, bloody uniforms. Cots and bedding, if available, were caked with dirt and blood. The men were not bathed, and even their hands and faces were not washed. Many still wore the uniform in which they had been wounded. Flies, lice, and rats were everywhere. Frequently, amputated arms and legs were not properly buried but left in piles to rot.

Finally, in the North, a group of civilians became so upset about these conditions that they organized the Sanitary Commission to inspect hospitals and help the soldiers. The Sanitary Commission made recommendations about cleanliness, provided nurses and matrons, set up hospital diet kitchens, and collected and distributed food,



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Carver General Hospital, Washington, D.C.

clothing, and supplies for the sick and wounded. Slowly the conditions began to improve.

As the war continued, the numbers of sick and wounded greatly increased. More hospitals were needed. A great hospital building plan began in both the North and the South.

In the Southern capital at Richmond, the Confederates built the largest general military hospital ever. It had eight thousand beds in over thirty buildings. Each one-story building had from forty to sixty patients. There were five soup houses, five ice houses, a brewery, and a bakery that produced over five thousand loaves of bread a day. The hospital even had its own farm to provide fresh fruits, vegetables, and meat for the convalescing soldiers.

Instead of one big hospital, the North built many smaller hospitals. These hospitals, located in different cities, each served about five hundred men. By the middle of the war, the North had one hundred and fifty hospitals and, by war's end, enough hospital beds for 135,000 soldiers.

The hospitals included a number of separate buildings or tents. These wards were arranged in rows or were like the spokes of a wheel. Because many doctors believed that "bad air" caused disease, the buildings had good ventilation. In fact, the circulation of air did reduce the spread of germs and viruses. Improved sanitary conditions included cleaner rooms and bedding; flannel or soft cotton hospital clothes instead of dirty uniforms; washing the faces, hands, and feet of the wounded each day; and burying the amputated arms and legs. Instead of hardtack, salt pork, and coffee, the wounded were fed soft, digestible foods such as pudding, broth, soup, and gruel.

The surgeons were in charge of these hospitals. The hospital steward, who was a soldier, helped the surgeon operate the hospital. Besides keeping the medical records, the hospital steward made and dispensed pills and other medicines. He also pulled teeth, bandaged wounds, and supervised the nurses. For the first time, women worked as nurses and matrons. Before this, recuperating soldiers acted as nurses until they were well enough to return to their regiments. The female nurses improved patient care by keeping the hospital and the men clean, preparing food and feeding the patients, and reading to and writing letters for the wounded.

The nurses in both the North and the South noted improvements in the hospitals. Confederate nurse Kate Cummings reported, "I think there will be a different order of things now. (Dr. Smith) is having the house and yard well cleansed." Mary Livermore, a Union nurse, said, "Here were order, comfort, cleanliness, and good nursing. The food was cooked in a kitchen outside the hospital... (There was) an ample store of medicines, ...clothing and delicacies for the sick."

Surgeons

If you were a Civil War soldier, what would you fear the most? If you said “getting shot!” or “dying!”, you would be wrong.

Although soldiers were afraid of getting shot and dying, most were more afraid of hospitals and surgeons. Perhaps the most feared and hated man in either army was the surgeon. Even today, the Civil War surgeon is pictured as a butcher in a bloody apron who chopped off arms and legs.

During the Civil War, three out of every four operations were amputations. In the 1860s, surgeons did not know the importance of sanitary operating conditions, how to clean a wound properly, or how to repair shattered bones and damaged muscles. A wounded soldier had a much better chance to live if the mangled limb was removed.

Civil War wounds were horrible. The bullet fired from the rifled musket, called a minie ball, flattened when it hit bone. It shattered bone, ripped arteries and veins, and mangled tissues and muscles. The damage was so great it could not be repaired. Usually the bone was completely smashed into tiny fragments that if not removed would cause infection and eventually gangrene, which was fatal. The only way to remove the dead bone fragments was to remove the injured arm or leg.



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Surgeons prepare for an amputation
at Gettysburg, July, 1863

When the war began, surgeons were not prepared to treat battle wounds. Most had never performed an operation or even seen one. They had learned to be surgeons by listening to lectures and reading books in medical school, and then by practicing on-the-job with another doctor. Surgical operations, especially for wounds, were not common practice. Emergency medicine and the treatment of battle wounds required entirely different skills,

knowledge, and procedures, which the surgeons had to learn even as they tried to help the enormous numbers of wounded.

At that time, doctors did not have antibiotics to stop infection. They did not even know that germs caused infection or that cleanliness helped prevent infection. The surgeons' unwashed hands and dirty medical instruments infected wounds. Inflamed, pus-filled wounds were so common that doctors thought pus was a sign of healing instead of a warning sign of infection. Many wounds developed gangrene (the death of tissues due to blood loss), which eventually killed the patient. So although amputation was the soldier's nightmare, removing the limb often saved the patient's life.

Surgeons at field hospitals worked under dangerous conditions without proper medical supplies. Often the hospital was in an army tent, barn, church, or large house close to the battle, located near a road for transporting supplies and the wounded, and with a well or creek for water. Frequently cannon balls landed around the surgeons as they operated on tables, boards, or a barn door on barrels. Sometimes surgeons and stewards worked under fire in fields or clumps of trees on the edge of the battlefield.

Surgeons had no control over their equipment and supplies. Often medical instruments, bandages, medicines, and ambulances were still miles away on crowded dirt roads, stuck behind many other wagons and men.

Surgeons and hospital stewards wore green armbands to identify them as medics. They were often in harm's way. In May 1862, Confederate General Stonewall Jackson captured a Union field hospital. He allowed the doctors to continue their work, saying that because surgeons did not make war, they should not be killed, wounded, or taken as prisoners.

There were never enough surgeons. There was only one doctor for every 500 wounded or sick soldiers. Each Confederate surgeon had two or three times that many patients. The surgeons on both sides worked long, tiring hours without rest or proper food. Many became sick themselves and died of disease, exhaustion, and wounds.

There were only a few female doctors during the Civil War. At that time, being a doctor was not considered acceptable work for a woman. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman doctor in the United States, graduated from medical school just twelve years before the war. Women doctors were not accepted by the army or the male surgeons. Many, like Mary Edwards Walker, swallowed their pride and worked as nurses or as assistants. Esther Hill Hawkes was refused work both as a surgeon and as a government nurse because she was a young, attractive woman. She served the Union by teaching in a school for freed slaves and finally, as a doctor for the 54th Massachusetts, the first African American regiment in the Civil War.

Anesthesia

Have you ever heard the phrase, "biting the bullet"? Today, these words mean doing something we have to do that will cause us pain, distress, or fear. But originally the words meant actually biting a real bullet. Before the modern use of anesthesia, persons were fully conscious during surgery. Sometimes the patient was given a piece of wood or, in the case of soldiers, a bullet to bite on during the operation. This practice kept the person from biting through his tongue in pain.

During the Civil War, surgeons did not operate on wounded soldiers without medicine to deaden the pain. Soldiers did not bite on a bullet or scream while surgeons cut off their legs. True, many soldiers suffered from great pain and horrible wounds, but operations were performed with the use of anesthesia. Anesthesia causes the body to lose all sensation, including pain.



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Surgeons prepare for an amputation in a hospital tent

Today, the use of anesthesia is a common surgical practice. But in 1861 anesthesia was a new development. Anesthesia was first used about fifteen years before the Civil War. Before that time, operations were performed without anything to deaden the pain except a drink of whiskey.

When the Civil War began, many doctors were still not convinced that anesthesia was a good idea. However, the Civil War surgeons soon discovered that the pain of surgery, added to the shock of the operation and the original injury, could kill a patient. Taking away the pain of the operation gave the patient a better chance of survival.

Anesthesia was used in over 80,000 Civil War operations. Surgeons had two types of anesthesia: ether and chloroform. Ether caught fire easily, and because operations were often performed by candle or lantern light, the surgeons did not like to use ether. Chloroform did not catch fire, but when used in a closed room its fumes could be dangerous. Because most operations were in medical tents, barns, or in the open air, chloroform was safer than ether and so was used three times more frequently.

The wounded soldier was placed on the operating table, which might be a house or barn door on barrels. The surgeon then probed the wound with his finger to see if he could locate the minie ball, shattered bits of bone, or the torn pieces of the soldier's dirty uniform. If an amputation was necessary, an assistant administered chloroform or ether. A piece of cloth or paper was folded to make a cone shape. A small piece of sponge was placed in the point of the cone. Chloroform was dripped on the sponge, and the cone was gradually brought closer and closer to the patient's face. The patient breathed deeply and fell asleep.

By the end of the Civil War, the doctors recognized the value of anesthesia for surgery. The war provided the medical evidence needed to convince skeptical doctors of its use. As the Confederate surgeon Edward Warren said, "The discovery of the anesthetic effects of Chloroform is the great surgical achievement of the age. Under its soothing influence operations have been performed which otherwise would have been impossible."

Field Hospitals

Many Civil War soldiers feared being wounded more than being killed. Often wounded soldiers lay on the battlefield for days or until the battle was over. When wounded, a soldier tried to walk or crawl to the rear of the action. Although commanders discouraged it, fellow soldiers helped many wounded comrades to the aid station. Later in the war stretcher-bearers, hospital stewards, or assistant surgeons went onto the field during the battle to search for the wounded. These men wore medical corps badges or green armbands to show that they were neutral medics. They carried no guns.

At an aid station, located in a grassy or wooded area on the edge of the battlefield, the medics began emergency medical care. This procedure, begun during the Civil War, is still used today in the case of accidents or emergencies. First, the medic examined the wound and stopped the bleeding using a field tourniquet, torn strips of cloth, or the soldier's belt. Because a wounded soldier had a raging thirst, the medic gave him a drink of water from a canteen. Next, to dull the pain and stimulate the soldier, the medic gave him a drink of brandy. At that time, doctors believed that alcohol stimulated the heart, strengthened the muscles, and prevented shock, so doctors used wine, brandy, and whiskey as medicines. Today we know that liquor does not prevent shock and does not stimulate. Alcohol is, in fact, a depressant and harmful to an injured person. Usually the medic also gave the soldier an opium pill to stop pain.

Next, stretcher-bearers transported the soldier from the battlefield or aid station in a horse-drawn ambulance to the field hospital. The field hospital was located one or two miles behind the fighting in a house, church, barn, or army tent. The field hospital was close to a stream or a well for water and next to a road for transporting the wounded men and medical supplies. There the wounded soldier was placed on a makeshift operating table, such as barn doors placed on barrels.



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Field hospital for wounded soldiers

The field hospital, often in a dirty barn or tent, was the worst part of the medical system. Blood and amputated arms and legs littered the ground. The stink of unwashed bodies with open, festering

wounds filled the air. Surgeons often did not have needed medicine, bandages, or instruments because they were still in the last wagons on the march. There were never enough surgeons or helpers to treat the huge numbers of wounded during and after the battle. Nevertheless, the doctors tried to do all they could for the wounded.

An assistant surgeon examined the wounded soldier to see if he could be helped. He divided the wounded men into three groups: soldiers with minor wounds were bandaged; soldiers with more serious wounds were made as comfortable as possible to await surgery; soldiers with mortal wounds were given an opium pill or whiskey, laid on a blanket out of the way, and left to die. Soldiers with stomach or lower belly wounds could not be saved because the doctors could not stop the spread of infection from the wound. Many upper chest and head wounds were also not treatable. Usually there was no comfortable place for the wounded, so they lay on the ground in the blistering sun or the pouring rain until it was their turn on the operating table or until they died.

When his turn came, the soldier was carried to the operating table where a surgeon used his finger to probe the wound for the bullet, broken pieces of bone, and any pieces of the uniform which had been carried into the wound by the bullet. If the wounded soldier required surgery or an amputation, an assistant would administer chloroform or ether to deaden pain and put the wounded man to sleep. With anesthesia, the wounded did not bite on bullets or remain awake during surgery.

As soon as possible following the operation, the wounded soldier was transported to a general hospital for further care. The soldiers were moved by horse-drawn ambulances or wagons, or by railroad. Sometimes the railroad cars were special cars with suspended stretchers to ease the jolting ride. More often the men were transported in cattle cars or on passenger trains.

In some areas along the Mississippi River and the eastern coast, special steam boats were turned into hospital ships. A man who worked for the Sanitary Commission to provide food for the wounded described how fast and frantic it was to work on a hospital ship. "After a battle, men were brought in so rapidly that they have to be piled in almost without reference to their being human beings, and everyone raving for drink first and then nourishment, it requires strong nerves to be able to tend to them properly."

It took strong nerves and hard work to care for wounded whether they were on hospital ships, in field hospitals, or in general hospitals. The true horror of the war was the vast numbers of shattered, suffering soldiers, and the true bravery was in the dedicated men and women who tried to ease that suffering.

Nurses

After the first terrible battles of the Civil War, it became obvious that the armies could not care for the vast numbers of sick and wounded men. There were not enough army surgeons or army nurses. At that time, army nurses were soldiers who themselves were recovering from illnesses or wounds. Often drummer boys and “skulkers” (cowards) were ordered to work as nurses. None of these people were good nurses. So for the first time, the army accepted women as nurses.

Many of the first women nurses were volunteers—wives, mothers, or sisters of the soldiers. They came to nurse their own sick or wounded, and stayed to help any soldier who needed them. Women, especially in the South, became unpaid nurses when battles were fought close to their homes. Many girls as young as twelve years old washed wounds, fed soldiers, and baked bread. At that time the only trained nurses were Catholic nuns. The nuns were such good nurses that surgeons requested their help in the hospitals.

Soon more nurses were needed. In the North, during the second year of the war, Congress passed a law to provide better care for the sick and wounded. Each general hospital hired matrons. These older women supervised the work in the hospitals to provide better care, which included tasty, nourishing, well-prepared food; proper medicines; and clean hospital clothes, bedding, and rooms. These matrons and nurses, in both the North and the South, were paid \$11 a month by their governments.

The United States government accepted the offer of Dorthea Dix to serve as Superintendent of Nurses for the Army, without pay. Miss Dix was famous for her work with the mentally ill, who at that time were treated like criminals. Miss Dix had pioneered kind, caring treatment for the insane. Now she turned her attention to organizing the government nurse program.

Dorthea Dix decided who would be government nurses and what their jobs would be. She believed that suitable nurses had to be over thirty years old, plain looking, and dress in black or brown. Government nurses could not wear the popular fashions of the time such as hoops, bows, ruffles, jewelry, or curls. Miss Dix wanted only serious women dedicated to the care of the sick and wounded. Her rules eliminated many young, attractive women who sought nursing work elsewhere. Many of these women became independent nurses, Sanitary Commission nurses, state nurses, or unpaid volunteer nurses.

Civil War nurses washed wounds and changed bandages. They gave medicine and “stimulants” (drinks containing alcohol were thought to be

good medicine). The women washed the hands and faces of the wounded and kept their beds clean and the hospital tidy. Many distributed special foods sent by families and soldier relief organizations. The nurses cooked puddings, boiled eggs, brewed teas, and made soups, broths, and gruels for the men, so the convalescing soldiers did not have to eat the army hardtack and salt pork.

They performed many duties that we would not consider the work of a nurse today. They wrote letters for the wounded who had lost arms or hands, and for the dying who wanted to send a last message to loved ones. They read newspapers, letters, and books, especially the Bible, to the convalescents. They cheered the men with conversation and turned their thoughts from their terrible injuries. Because music was an important part of soldier life, nurses sang hymns and the latest popular songs to the sick and wounded. Many prayed with a soldier and held his hand as he breathed his last. Many of these women realized that their work was needed and important and that they could serve their country, Union or Confederate, by caring for the soldiers.

Although most women nursed in general hospitals, a few such as Clara Barton and Mary Ann Bickerdyke, became famous for serving in the field. Clara Barton was an independent, influential woman who raised money and collected supplies. She would arrive at a battlefield, sometimes before the battle was over, with a wagon full of food and medical supplies, and begin immediately to help the wounded. Once a minie ball passed through the sleeve of her dress, killing a wounded man to whom she was giving a drink of water. Mary Ann Bickerdyke took supplies from her church to the front and stayed until the war ended to help "her boys." When challenged by army officers she answered, "I have received my authority from the Lord God Almighty; have you anything that ranks higher than that?" Once she was arrested for burning fences owned



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A nurse tends wounded soldiers

by the army to keep her boys warm. Her response: "Fine, I'm arrested, now get out of my way for I have work to do." The soldiers loved her because she cared for them, and they called her Mother Bickerdyke.

In the South, Sally Tompkins opened a hospital of twenty-two beds in Richmond and paid all the expenses from her own money to keep it operating until the end of the war. Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy, was so grateful for her work that he awarded her the rank of captain. Sally Tompkins was the only female Confederate officer in the war. Other Southern women became nurses whenever the war came near their homes, and many turned their homes into hospitals.

Although the nearly four thousand women who served as nurses during the Civil War carried the images of suffering with them for the rest of their lives, they also gained a sense of freedom and pride in serving their country.



Library of Congress

Loading stretchers onto an ambulance

Voices From the Medical War

"Many of the wounds made at the battle of the Wilderness were of a very painful nature; the balls often striking against trees, and becoming flattened, glanced, and then, entering the flesh, tore their way with ragged edge sometimes leaving in the wounds bits of bark or moss."

Hannah L. Palmer
Union Army Nurse

"In the heat of it (the battle) we can see men sitting under trees or lying in agony having crawled to some shady spot to a brookside or ravine where they may bathe their fevered wounds or quench their thirst, while waiting their turn to be removed in ambulances to the hospital."

William Howell Reed

"I was wounded near Spotsylvania. I passed to the hospital, where the doctor examined my wounds. When asked if amputation was necessary, he said, 'Not just now.' The operating table was a barn door on two trestles, When on the table, chloroform was administered, and it was reported that while the doctor performed the operation, the patient sang the 'Bonnie Blue Flag.' "

James B. Roden
7th Louisiana Infantry

Aboard the hospital transport ship *Vanderbilt*: *"Imagine a steamer of immense size, crowded from stern to stern and from hold to hurricane deck with sick and wounded... Passageways, staterooms, etc., all more than filled; some on mattresses, some on blankets, others on straw, some in the death struggle, others nearing it, some already beyond human sympathy and help; some in their blood as they had been brought from the battle-field... and all hungry and thirst, not having anything to eat or drink, except hard crackers, for twenty-four hours...."*

Ellen Orbison Harris
Union soldier relief worker

"I was called upon to comfort a broken-hearted wife...who staggered into our tent, speechless and pale with anguish, having just arrived...to learn that her husband...had ceased to live but a few hours before. We comforted her as best we might."

Ellen Orbison Harris
Union relief worker

Voices From the Medical War

"We worked until dark and far into the night. We fed six thousand men including those brought in by ambulances, with their drivers and attendants. In the afternoon it rained without ceasing. The rain descended in torrents. The wounded lay upon the ground surrounding us by thousands; some under bushes for shelter; others without shelter except for blankets; more with no covering of any kind.... Often when passing from one to another I have heard a grateful 'God bless you.' Often I passed a soldier laying in the mud and rain with his leg or arm off or a wound in his body he would say in answer to my inquiry, if he had had tea or coffee: 'Yes, I've done well. Thank you. But you lady will get your death in this rain. How can you go through this mud to wait on us?' Their cheerfulness to me was surprising."

Elmira Keeler Spencer
Matron with the 147th New York

"Observing that the (next) man...had left his meal untouched, I offered (to feed him)...but he shook his head.

'Thank you, ma'am; I don't think I'll ever eat again, for I'm shot in the stomach. But, I'd like a drink of water, if you ain't too busy.'

I rushed away, but the water pails were gone to be refilled, and it was some time before they reappeared. I did not forget my patient patient, meanwhile, and, with the first mugful, hurried back to him. He seemed asleep; but something in the dried white face caused me to listen at his lips for a breath. None came. I touched his forehead, it was cold; and then I knew that, while he waited, a better nurse than I had given him a cooler draught, and healed him with a touch. I laid the sheet over the quiet sleeper, whom no noise could now disturb; and, half an hour later, the bed was empty."

Louisa May Alcott, author of *Little Women*
Nurse at the Union Hospital in Washington

"Samuel Watson, 5th Texas Regt. Lost his right arm. One of the most attractive boys I ever saw. Very ill. But little hope of his recovery but hope for the best. Better today, decidedly. Again, poor fellow.

9th. Much better today. Strong hope of his recovery.

Died Sept. 13th, Sundown Sunday afternoon, 1863. Buried in grave no. 3 commencing at the right. 8th Section.

My poor lost darling. Would to God I could have died to save you, but all is over, worldly sufferings are ended. If tears or love could have availed, I had not been left to weep by his graveside."

From the "hospital book" of Euphemia Mary Goldsborough