
Reviewed by Kathryn Angelica (University of Connecticut)
Published on H-Sci-Med-Tech (July, 2022)
Commissioned by Penelope K. Hardy (University of Wisconsin-La Crosse)

James Gindlesperger’s *Bullets and Bandages* provides an alternative picture of the Battle of Gettysburg by focusing on the consequences of war, the struggle for survival, and the harrowing reality of mass death. A microcosm of the medical operations of the Civil War, the book explores both the formal and informal hospital sites on the fringes of combat. Gindlesperger encourages the reader to reconceptualize military spaces and hospital sites to include the haphazard structures and front parlors that served as refuge for the wounded. This impressive resource on military administration, voluntary labor, medicine, and combat will bolster future studies on the Civil War front lines.

A Pennsylvania native, Gindlesperger has written several books about the Civil War, including *Seed Corn of the Confederacy* (1997), *Fire on the Water* (2003), and *So You Think You Know Gettysburg?* (2010). His latest book builds on previous work to systematically map the field hospitals of Gettysburg. Hospital sites include any place officially established by regiments possessing a surgeon and multiple wounded soldiers. Gindlesperger’s book can be read straight through or selectively, and it will complement projects seeking to understand the liminal spaces between the front lines and the home front.

*Bullets and Bandages* is organized geographically by chapter, dissecting the battlefield of Gettysburg and the hospital sites that developed in its vicinity. Detailed descriptions of each site provide snapshots of families, businesses, and public land transformed by the war. Gindlesperger consulted genealogical, property, and newspaper records to bring these spaces to life. Meticulous geographic mapping sheds light on the totality of war as well as the many people responsible for the care of soldiers, construction of shelter, transport of supplies, organization of hospital operations, and burial of the dead. Maps and full-color photographs accompany every chapter, at times including GPS coordinates. Two helpful appendices provide a glossary of medical terms and a monetary conversion table. Thus, *Bullets and Bandages* serves as both a useful guidebook and intriguing perspective of the aftermath of the Battle of Gettysburg.

Gindlesperger details the process through which military hospital systems become professionalized during war, as well as relaying a series of micro-historical accounts of the front lines. In addition to outlining common medical practices, Gindlesperger conveys the dismal truth of the Civil War hospital. Burdened by disease, disorganization, understaffing, underfunding, and the threat of attack, field hospitals were traumatic
spaces. Even the countless volunteers sent to the front lines by organizations like the US Sanitary Commission, the US Christian Commission, and the US Bureau of Nurses could not assuage the need for medical labor. The establishment of treatment, triage, and ambulance corps systems made treatment more efficient but did little to mask the stench of death. Gindlesperger describes the risk undertaken by volunteers who ventured onto the battlefield to retrieve wounded soldiers. Valiant efforts to save the wounded frequently failed, adding to the already insurmountable task of burying the dead.

In addition to exhaustively plotting the hospital sites of Gettysburg, this book offers a valuable glimpse into the lives of the people thrust into the roles of soldiers, nurses, and caretakers. Gindlesperger demonstrates how confrontation with combat shaped the lives of ordinary families in inspiring, heartbreaking, and surprising ways. Children like Anna Hollinger became so desensitized to violence that they handled amputated limbs. Fannie Bueller returned home to find her family’s front porch littered with wounded men. Churches, libraries, stores, and farms transformed into hospitals and mass gravesites. Claims for damages reflect homes destroyed by artillery shells and the putrefaction of amputations. These intimate accounts of the overwhelming experience of war reframe our understanding of the Civil War home front.

By providing a detailed account of propertied Pennsylvanians, this book paves the way for others to uncover the lives of unpropertied citizens—namely, domestic servants, tradesmen, and farm hands—living in these spaces. Perhaps because this is a guidebook and not a monograph, Gindlesperger does not address the relationship between race, slavery, and the Battle of Gettysburg. The threat of reenslavement inevitably accompanied Confederate invasion of Northern territory. Gindlesperger identifies two instances of Black workers in census records, the kidnapping and escape of Black domestic worker Elizabeth Butler from Confederate troops, and hospital sites that previously served as stops on the Underground Railroad. However, a closer examination of abolitionism and spaces of resistance through these records is needed to expand our understanding of Gettysburg. Future work might investigate how the upheaval of battle influenced conflicts over race, class, and slavery in homes, working farms, and community centers. In addition, new techniques in archaeological excavation and forensic exploration could be leveraged to learn more about the Civil War. Fieldwork focused on examining architectural features, mapping landscapes, and cataloguing gravesites will recover history thought to be lost.
If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
https://networks.h-net.org/h-sci-med-tech


URL: https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=58071

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.