

History 225

Re: Notes from Patterson, Debris of Battle (1997)

CTF
(Hist. 20)

Introduction:

The battle took place over 25square-mile area.

The wounded among Union ranks about 14,500 and the Rebs left behind some 5,500 men.

There were dead men everywhere. Some 7,000 dead. In additon there were more then 3,000 dead horses and mules.

When the battle was over and the armies departed the government was not ready to come up with any assistance in dealing with the debris of the battle. Help came from volunteers who were themselves without any overall organization.

It was not until November 20 when Lincoln came to Gettysburg that all of the wounded were finally removed from the battlefield.

Chapter One "Without Proper Means"

General meade's initial blunder that made the situation virtually untenable at the outset.

Learning that Lee's army was ahead of him at G'Burg, Meade order all ambulance services and wagons carrying medical supplies sent to the rear; they were not on the field because Meade feared they would be lost to the enemy (Shows his great respect or fear of Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia.)

That included tents that were in the supply wagons left in the rear. Meant many of the wounded were forced to lay on the ground without shelter.

July 5th it rained heavily.

Surgical tools and other instruments for treating wounds were left in the supply wagons.

Food was short.

The churches, court house, and the college were full of the wounded. They were the lucky ones since many were tended in the open.

Chapter Two "God Pity Us"

Anticipating another battle very soon, when Meade left G'burg on July 6th he took with him most of the surgeons and medical needs for for the Army of the Potomac now on the march after Lee. Of the 650 doctors assigned to the Army of the Potomace, Meade left only 106 behind at G'burg to deal with the 14,000 Union wounded (That was only 15%; while 85% left G'burg with the Army of the Potomac.)

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The Union Medical Director for the Army of the Potomac (Dr. Jonathan Letterman) agreed w/ Meade's decision to take the great bulk of the Army's medical supply and ambulances with him when he left G'Burg. (This was Letterman's worst day.) No indication that Letterman ever notified Washington of the potential medical disaster back in G'burg. Many men were simply forgotten to death.

In the Third Corps Hospital there were only 8 medical officers to care for 800 patients. The 2nd Coprs Hospital had 13 medical men to attend 3,400 wounded.

There was room for wounded in Union hospitols in Philadelphia but no means to get them into the beds. Meade had taken most of the transport with him. And the Surgeon General informed of the plioight of the desperately overtaxed medical teams left in G'burg made no effort to find transport to G'Burg--typical bureaucratic screwup that defies understanding.

Those wounded who could walk hit the road for Westminister where they could hitch a ride to Philadelphia for medical attention.

(Notes that the German farmers in the area were not very helpful.)

The situation was not helped by the crowds of people who had come to the area to gawk at the sights, to stroll over the grounds, and gawk and gape at the dead and wounded. (The first American rubberneekers.)

Union doctors and medical staffers did take care of Confederate wounded but it was a triage situation--they had to wait until the Union wounded were first attended to. That meant that many Johnnies with wounds waited a week or loger before they recieved their first medical attention.

Add to all this the heat of July and the flies. It must have been a nightmare of gargantuan proportions. Some of the Union surgeons who were left behind abandoned the scene because it was too gruesome even for them.

Chapter Three "A Great Outpouring"

The work of G'burg women. The Sanitary Commission . The Daughters of Charity from Emmitsburg, and the Christian Commission. They made a difference once they were allowed into G'burg. Right after the battle the military blocked off all roads t G'burg prohibiting civilian travel.

Note: When Meade left G'burg he never sent any supplies, medical staff, or ambulances back to the battlefield. When he was finished

at G'burg he was finished. It was as though he blotted the 3-days

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of carnage out of his mind.

Train service to G'burg was restored on July 11

Chapter "A Second Invasion"

Once the train service was restored those administering to the wounded no longer felt totally cut off. But there was a dark side to this. Withn the train service restored came the influx of people who came to gawk, to look for souveneirs and items that could be hawked for profit--guns, bayonets,--grave robbers, and families of men who were missing or believed wounded and needed attention.

The problem of the looters and grave robbers. Union calvalry had to be used to police the battlefield.

The stripping of the battlefield by Meade of almost all medical personnel, medical supplies, and ambulances probably cost more men their lives than in any frontal assault the Union Army engaged in during the duration of the war. The terrible fact was that Meade's advance after Lee was so cautious that he the Army of the potomac never locked up in combat with Lee after G'burg. Lee was able to get his army back over the Potomac without another battle that summer.

In another age, Meade and Letterman would have been proper canidayes for court martial. But Lincoln could not lower the boom on Meade without throwing a shadow on the Union's great, decisive battle at G'burg.