

## **Civil War Correspondent**

### **George Townsend Describes the Wounded on the Peninsula**

George Alfred Townsend was only twenty when he began to report the Civil War for the *New York Herald*, but he quickly established himself as one of the most brilliant of all the many war correspondents. There are few more graphic accounts of wounds, disease and death than those from his gifted pen.

*Commager - "The Blue and The Gray"*

It was evening, as I hitched my horse to a stake near-by, and pressed Up to the receptacle for the unfortunates. Sentries enclosed the pen, walking to-and-fro with loaded muskets; a throng of officers and soldiers had assembled to gratify their curiosity; and new detachments of captives came in hourly, encircled by sabremen, the Southerners being disarmed and on foot.

The scene within the area was ludicrously moving. It reminded me of the witch-scene in Macbeth, or pictures of brigands or Bohemian gypsies at rendezvous, not less than five hundred men, in motley, ragged costumes, with long hair, and lean, wild, haggard faces, were gathered in groups or in pairs, around some [ ] fires. In the growing darkness their expressions were imperfectly visible; but I could see that most of them were weary, and hungry, and all were depressed and ashamed. Some were wrapped in blankets of ragcarpet, and others wore shoes of rough, untanned hide. Others were without either shoes or jackets, and their heads were bound with red handkerchiefs. Some appeared in red shirts; some in stiff beaver hats; some were attired in shreds and patches of cloths and a few wore the soiled garments of citizen gentlemen; but the mass adhered to homespun suits of gray, or "butternut," and the coarse blue kersey common to slaves. In places I caught glimpses of red Zouave breeches and leggings; blue Federal caps, Federal buttons, or Federal blouses; these were the spoils of anterior battles, and had been stripped from the slain. Most of the captives were of the appearances denominated "scraggy" or "knotty." They were brown, brawny, and wiry, and their countenances were intense, fierce, and animal. They came from North Carolina, the poorest and least enterprising Southern State, and ignorance, with its attendant virtues, were the common facial manifestations. Some lay on the bare ground, fast asleep; others chatted nervously as if doubtful of their future treatment; a few were boisterous, and anxious to beg tobacco or coffee from idle Federals; the rest-and they comprehended the, greater number-were silent, sullen, and vindictive. They met curiosity with scorn, and spite with imprecations.

A child-not more than four years of age, I think-sat sleeping in a corner upon an older comrades's lap. A gray-bearded pard was staunching a gash the tail of his coat. A fine-looking young fellow sat with face in his hands, as if his heart were far off, and he wished to shut out this bitter scene. In a corner, lying morosely apart, were a Major, three Captains, and three Lieutenants,-young athletic fellows, dressed in rich gray cassimere, trimmed with black, and wearing soft black hats adorned with black ostrich-feathers. Their spurs were strapped upon elegantly fitting boots, and they looked as far above the needy, seedy privates, as lords above their vassals....

I rode across the fields to the Hogan, Curtis, and Gaines mansions; for sonic of the wounded had meantime been deposited in each of them. All the cow-houses, wagon-sheds, hay-barracks, hen-coops, Negro cabins, and barns were turned into hospitals. The floors were littered with "corn-shucks" and fodder; and the maimcd, gashed, and dying lay confusedly together. A few, slightly wounded, stood at windows, relating incidents of the battle; but at the doors sentries

stood with crossed muskets, to keep out idlers and gossips. The mention of my vocation was an "open sesame," and I went unrestrained, into all the largest hospitals. In the first of these an amputation was being performed, and at the door lay a little heap of human fingers, feet, legs, and arms. I shall not soon forget the bare-armed surgeons, with bloody instruments, that leaned over the rigid and insensible figure, while the comrades of the subject looked horrifiedly at the scene.

The grating of the murderous saw drove me into the open air, but in the second hospital which I visited, a wounded man had just expired, and I encountered his body at the threshold. Within, the sickening smell of mortality was almost insupportable, but by degrees I became accustomed to it. The lanterns hanging around the room streamed fitfully upon the red eyes, and half-naked figures. All were looking up, and saying, in pleading monotone: "Is that you, doctor?" Men with their arms in slings went restlessly up and down, smarting with fever. Those who were wounded in the lower extremities, body, or head, lay upon their backs, tossing even in sleep. They listened peevishly to the wind whistling through the chinks of the barn. They followed one with their rolling eyes. They turned away from the lantern, for it seemed to sear them. Soldiers sat by the severely wounded, laving their sores with water. In many wounds the balls still remained, and the discolored flesh was swollen unnaturally. There were some who had been shot in the bowels, and now and then they were frightfully convulsed, breaking into shrieks and shouts. Some of them iterated a single word, as, "doctor," or "help," or "God," or "oh!" commencing with a loud spasmodic cry, and continuing the same word till it died away in cadence. The act of calling seemed to lull the pain. Many were unconscious and lethargic, moving their finger, and lips mechanically, but never more to open their eyes upon the light; they were already going through the valley and the shadow.

I think, still, with a shudder, of the faces of those who were told mercifully that they could not live. The unutterable agony; the plea for somebody on whom to call; the longing eyes that poured out prayers; the looking on mortal as if its resources were infinite; the fearful looking to the immortal as if it were so far off, so implacable, that the dying appeal would be in vain; the open lips, through which one could almost look at the quaking heart below; the ghastliness of brow and tangled hair; the closing pangs; the awful *quietus*. I thought of Parrhasius, in the poem, as I looked at these things:-

"Gods!  
Could I but paint a dying groan-"

And how the keen eye of West would have turned from the reeking cockpit of the *Victory*, or the tomb of the Dead Man Restored, to this old barn, peopled with horrors. I rambled in and out, learning to look at death, studying the manifestations of pain,-quivering and sickening at times, but plying my avocation, and jotting the names for my column of mortalities....

Ambulances, it may be said, incidentally, are either two-wheeled or four-wheeled. Two-wheeled ambulances are commonly called "hop, step, and jumps." They are so constructed that the forepart is either very high or very low, and may be both at intervals. The wounded occupants may be compelled to ride for hours in these carriages, with their heels elevated above their heads, and may finally be shaken out, or have their bones broken by the terrible jolting. The four-wheeled ambulances are built in shelves, or compartments, but the wounded are in danger of being smothered in them.

It was in one of these latter that I rode, sitting with the driver. We had four horses, but were

thrice "swamped" on the road, and had to take out the wounded men once, till we could start the wheels. Two of these men were wounded in the face, one of them having his nose completely severed, and the other having a fragment of his jaw knocked out. A third had received a ball among the thews and muscles behind his knee, and his whole body appeared to be paralyzed. Two were wounded in the shoulders, and the sixth was shot in the breast, and was believed to be injured inwardly, as he spat blood, and suffered almost the pain of death.

The ride with these men, over twenty miles of hilly, woody country, was like one of Dante's excursions into the Shades. In the awful stillness of the dark pines, their screams frightened the hooting owls, and the whirring insects in the leaves and tree-tops quieted their songs. They heard the gurgle of the rills, and called aloud for water to quench their insatiate thirst. One of them sang a shrill, fierce, fiendish ballad, in an interval of relief, but plunged, at a sudden relapse, in prayers and curses. We heard them groaning to themselves, as we sat in front, and one man, it seemed, was quite out of his mind. These were the outward manifestations; but what chords trembled and smarted within, we could only guess. What regrets for good resolves unfulfilled, and remorse for years misspent, made hideous these sore and panting hearts? The moonlight pierced through the thick foliage of the wood, and streamed into our faces, like invitations to a better life. But the crippled and bleeding could not see or feel it, -buried in the shelves of the ambulance.

*Townsend, "Campaigns of a Non-Combatant"*

## **The Sanitary Commission**

### **The Sanitary Commission To The Rescue**

*The United States Sanitary Commission, the leading private relief organization of the Civil War period, was created-against strong opposition in the army-in June 1861. A distinguished Unitarian divine, the Reverend Henry W. Bellows, was President; the famous landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, was Secretary; and the Commission enlisted scores of physicians and literally hundreds of public-spirited men and women. Its object, wrote Mary Livermore, "was to do what the Government could not." The "could" here is, of course, relative; it was merely that governments had not yet conceived it their responsibility to take care of the health, comfort, and general welfare of soldiers.*

*The Commission did a little bit of everything. Its inspectors looked into the sanitary arrangements in camps-hence its name-and brought about reforms. It reviewed matters of diet, cooking, clothing; provided private aid to soldiers and to their dependents; took care of fugitives; collected and forwarded boxes of food to the soldiers-a combination, as we have said elsewhere, of YMCA, Red Cross, and USO-and helped out even with nursing and hospital care.*

"WILSON SMALL," 5 June, 1862

Dear Mother:

I finished my last letter on the afternoon of the day when we took eighty men on the *Small*, and transferred them to the *Webster*.

We had just washed and dressed, and were writing letters when Captain Sawtelle came on board to say that several hundred wounded men were lying at the landing; that the *Daniel Webster No. 2* had been taken possession of by the medical officers, and was already half full of men, and that the surplus was being carried across her to the *Vanderbilt*; that the confusion was terrible; that there were no stores on board the *Daniel Webster No. 2* (she having been seized the moment she reached the landing on her return from Yorktown, without communicating with the Commission), nor were there any stores or preparations, not even mattresses, on board the *Vanderbilt*.

Of course the best in our power had to be done. Mrs. Griffin and I begged Mr. Olmsted not to refrain from sending us, merely because we had been up all night. He said he wouldn't send us, but if we chose to offer our services to the United States surgeon, he thought it would be merciful. Our offer was seized. We went on board; and such a scene as we entered and lived in for two days I trust never to see again. Men in every condition of horror, shattered and shrieking, were being brought in on stretchers borne by "contrabands," who dumped them anywhere, banged the stretchers against pillars and posts, and walked over the men without compassion. There was no one to direct what ward or what bed they were to go into. Men shattered in the thigh, and even cases of amputation, were shovelled into top berths without thought or mercy. The men had mostly been without food for three days. but there was *nothing* on board either boat for them; and if there had been, the cooks were only engaged to cook for the ship, and not for the hospital.

We began to do what we could. The first thing wanted by wounded men is something to drink (with the sick, stimulants are the first thing). Fortunately we had plenty of lemons, ice, and

sherry on board the *Small*, and these were available at once. Dr. Ware discovered a barrel of molasses, which, with vinegar, ice, and water, made a most refreshing drink. After that we gave them crackers and milk, or tea and bread. It was hopeless to try to get them into bed; indeed, there were no mattresses on the *Vanderbilt*. All we could do at first was to try to calm the confusion, to stop some agony, to revive the fainting lives, to snatch, if possible, from immediate death with food and stimulants. Imagine a great river or Sound steamer filled on every deck, - every berth and every square inch of room covered with wounded men; even the stairs and gangways and guards filled with those who are less badly wounded; and then imagine fifty well men, on every kind of errand, rushing to and fro over them, every touch bringing agony to the poor fellows, while stretcher after stretcher came along, hoping to find an empty place; and then imagine what it was to keep calm ourselves, and make sure that every man on both those boats was properly refreshed and fed. We got through about 1 A.M., Mrs. M. and Georgy having come off other duty and reinforced us.

We were sitting for a few moments, resting and talking it over, and bitterly asking why a Government so lavish and perfect in its other arrangements should leave its wounded almost literally to take care of themselves, when a message came that one hundred and fifty men were just arriving by the cars. It was raining in torrents, and both boats were full. We went on shore again: the same scene repeated. The wretched *Vanderbilt* was slipped out, the *Kennebec* brought up, and the hundred and fifty men carried across the *Daniel Webster No. 2* to her, with the exception of some fearfully wounded ones, who could not be touched in the darkness and rain, and were therefore made as comfortable as they could be in the cars. We gave refreshment and food to all, Miss Whetten and a detail of young men from the *Spaulding* coming up in time to assist, and the officers of the *Sebagoj* who had seen how hard pressed we were in the afternoon, volunteering for the nightwatch. Add to this sundry Members of Congress, who, if they talked much, at least worked well. One of them, the Hon. Moscs F. Odell, proposed to Mr. Olmsted that on his return to Washington he should move that the thanks of Congress be returned to us! Mr. Olmsted, mindful of our feelings, promptly declined.

We went to bed at daylight with *breakfast* on our minds, and at six o'clock we were all on board the *Daniel Webster No. 2*, and the breakfast of six hundred men was got through with in good time. Captain Sawtelle kindly sent us a large wall-tent, twelve caldrons and camp-kettles, two cooks, and a detail of six men. The tent was put up at once, Dr. Ware giving to its preparation the only hour when he might have rested during that long nightmare. We began to use it that (Tuesday) morning. It is filled with our stores; there we have cooked not only the sick-food, but all the food needed on the Government boats. It was hard to get it in sufficient quantity; but when everything else gave out, we broke up "hard-tack" into buckets full of hot milk and water a little sweetened, - "bread and milk" the men called it. Oh, that precious condensed milk, more precious to us at that moment than beef essence!

Tuesday was very much a repetition of Monday night. The men were cleared from the main-deck and gangways of the *Daniel Webster No. 2* onto the *Kennebec*. The feeding business was almost as hard to manage as before. But still it was done, and we got to bed at 1 A.M. Mrs. M. and I were to attend to the breakfast at 6 next morning. By some accident Mrs. M., who was ready quite as soon as I was, was carried off by the *Small*, which started suddenly to run down to the *Spaulding*. I had, therefore, to get the breakfast alone. I accomplished it, and then went ashore and fed some men who were just arriving in the cars, and others who were in tents near the landing. The horrors of that morning are too great to speak of. The men in the cars were brought on board the *Daniel Webster No. 2* and laid about the vacant maindeck and guards and

on the deck of a scow that lay alongside. I must not, I ought not to tell you of the horrors of that morning. One of the least was that I saw a "contraband" step on the amputated stump of a wretched man. I took him by the arm and walked him into the tent, where I ordered them to give him other work, and forbade that he should come upon the ships again. I felt white with anger, and dared not trust myself to speak to *him*. While those awful sights pass before me I have comparatively no feeling, except the anxiety to alleviate as much as possible. I do not suffer under the sights; but oh! the sounds, the screams of men. It is when I think of it afterwards' that it is so dreadful....

About nine hundred wounded remain to be brought down. Mr. Olmsted says our boats have transported one thousand seven hundred and fifty-six since Sunday; the Government and Pennsylvania boats together about three thousand. Mr. Clement Barclay was with us on Monday night on the *Vanderbilt*. I believe he went with her to Fortress Monroe. He was working hard, with the deepest interest and skill. I went with him to attend to a little "Secesh" boy, wounded in the thigh; also to a Southern colonel, a splendid looking man, who died, saying to Mr. Barclay, with raised hand: "Write to my wife and tell her I die penitent for the part I have taken in this war." I try to be just and kind to the Southern men. One of our men stopped me, saying: "*He's a rebel; give that to me.*" I said: "But a wounded man is our brother!" (rather an obvious sentiment, if there is anything in Christianity); and they both touched their caps. The Southerners are constantly expressing surprise at one thing or another, and they are shy, but not surly, at receiving kindness. Our men are a noble set of fellows, so cheerful, uncomplaining, and generous.

Remember that in all that I have written, I have told you only about ourselves-the women. What the gentlemen have been, those of our party, those: of the *Spaulding* and of the other vessels, is beyond my power to relate. Some of them fainted from time to time.

Last night, shining over blood and agony, I saw a lunar rainbow; and in the afternoon a peculiarly beautiful effect of rainbow and stormy sunset,-it flashed upon my eyes as I passed an operating-table, and raised them to avoid seeing anything V I passed.

WORMELEY, "*The Other Side of War*"

## Surgeons

### The Ghastly Work Of The Field Surgeons

*Here are three descriptions of the work of the surgeons, all of them tending to bear out the complaints of the Baroness von Oinhausen. These descriptions of heartlessness could be matched in letter after letter, diary after diary, North and South.*

#### A. THE HEARTLESSNESS OF THE SURGEONS

Hd. Qtrs- 37th Regiment Mass. Vols.  
Camp near Stafford Court House  
Nov. 23rd 1862

My Dear Cousin Phebe:

As yet only four of our number have died and some six have been discharged, two of the latter of whom were officers. Lieut. Eli T. Blackmer, a son of the Blackmer that moved from Hodges Corner in Warren, is discharged and has gone to his home in Chicopee. His health is much impaired, and his discharge was merited. Everything here concerning sickness and its management seems so repulsive that the thought of being sick or of having one of your friends in the Hospital, is filled with gloom. I will relate an instance. It is probably an instance more censurable to those having charge than usually occurs; but if the whole history of this war were brought to light more such facts would be revealed, in my mind, than would be pleasing to men (no, brutes) whose duty it is to look after the physical health of the soldier.

In our regiment was a man, private of course, who came under my notice while we were at New Baltimore, a little over one week since. He was emaciated and almost spiritless. He, to be sure, was not as cleanly as he should have been; but I know that it requires much exertion where water is scarce (and it always is in the vicinity of an army like ours) to keep decent. He looked as though he had been sick for some time. He like many others had acquired a dislike to reporting himself to the surgeons, as they have an idea the surgeons are destitute of feeling and unjust. I will not say how far this feeling is just. He at length came with those of his company who reported sick that day to the Surgeon's office within a few steps of where I sleep. I stood at the mouth of my tent and saw and heard the treatment each patient received. This fellow was treated as the rest. He took his turn and came to the front of the Doctor's tent, and received the customary question, "What's the matter with you?" (pretty question for a doctor). "What are you here for? Let's see your tongue. Shall return you to duty."

He was returned to duty. He refused to do duty and as punishment was sentenced to stand on the barrel (a very severe punishment), and added to this, to hold a heavy stone in his hand, two hours on and two off. This was the Doctor's work and not the Colonel's. I admit that it was the Colonel's duty to stop an unjust punishment if he saw one being exacted, but he would probably refer the whole case to the Doctor. To continue my story: after this I watched that young man. All energy seemed absent from him, and he acted as if he was unable to stir. I went to him and advised him to go to the Surgeon again, knowing that by tiring out the M.D. he might receive attention. I could not induce him. I saw during my conversation that he was really sick; and I was anxious to find out what ailed him, knowing if I did, I could find him medicine. I went

to another regiment to get a doctor with whom I was acquainted to come and see him; but the regiment had moved that morning, and so I let the matter go for the time being. Two mornings after I saw him again at the Doctor's tent. With the usual flourishes he was reported for duty, and the next morning he was brought to the Hospital to die almost immediately. The same day he was buried with soldier's honors; and with the last volleys fired over his grave died all feelings of remissness or regret, if any such feelings were entertained.

-UNDERHILL, ed., *"Your Soldier Boy Samuel"*

#### **B. CARL SCHURZ WATCHES THE SURGEONS AT WORK AFTER GETTYSBURG**

To look after the wounded of my command, I visited the places where the surgeons were at work. At Bull Run, I had seen only on a very small scale what I was now to behold. At Gettysburg the wounded-many thousands of them-were carried to the farmsteads behind our lines. The houses, the barns, the sheds, and the open barnyards were crowded with the moaning and waiting human beings, and still an unceasing procession of stretchers and ambulances was coming in from all sides to augment the number of the sufferers. A heavy rain set in during the day-the usual rain after a battle and large numbers had to remain unprotected in the open, there being no room left under roof. I saw long rows of men lying under the eaves of the buildings, the water pouring down upon their bodies in streams. Most of the operating tables were placed in the open where the light was best, some of them partially protected against the rain by tarpaulins or blankets stretched upon poles.

There stood the surgeons, their sleeves rolled up to the elbows, their bare arms as well as their linen aprons smeared with blood, their knives not seldom held between their teeth, while they were helping a patient on or off the table, or had their hands otherwise occupied; around them pools of blood and amputated arms or legs in heaps, sometimes more than man-high. Antiseptic methods were still unknown at that time. As a wounded man was lifted on the table, often shrieking with pain as the attendants handled him, the surgeon quickly examined the wound and resolved upon cutting off the injured limb. Some ether was administered and the body put in position in a moment. The surgeon snatched his knife from between his teeth, where it had been while his hands were busy, wiped it rapidly once or twice across his blood-stained apron, and the cutting began. The operation accomplished, the surgeon would look around with a deep sigh, and then-"Next!"

And so it went on, hour after hour, while the number of expectant patients seemed hardly to diminish. Now and then one of the wounded men, would call attention to the fact that his neighbor lying on the ground had given up the ghost while waiting for his turn, and the dead body was then quietly removed. Or a surgeon, having been long at work, would put down his knife, exclaiming that his hand had grown unsteady, and that this was too much for human endurance-not seldom hysterical tears streaming down his face. Many of the wounded men suffered with silent fortitude, fierce determination in the knitting of their brows and the steady gaze of their bloodshot eyes. Some would even force themselves to a grim jest about their situation or about the "skedaddling of the rebels." But there were, too, heart-rending groans and shrill cries of pain piercing the air, and despairing exclamations, "Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!" or "Let me die!" or softer murmurings in which the words "mother" or "father" or "home" were often heard.

I saw many of my command among the sufferers, whose faces I well remembered, and who greeted me with a look or even a painful smile of recognition, and usually with the question what



I thought of their chances of life, or whether I could do anything for them, sometimes, also, whether I thought the enemy were well beaten. I was sadly conscious that many of the words of cheer and encouragement I gave them were mere hollow sound, but they might be at least some solace for the moment.

-BANCROFT AND DUNNING, eds., *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz*

### C. THE HORRORS OF THE WILDERNESS

Tuesday, May 10th [1864]. Heavy cannonading from 8 A.M. to 1 P.M. The Pontoon train has been sent back to Fredericksburg, apparently to get it out of the way, and the army horses are put on half-rations, that is, five pounds of food. Ambulances and army wagons with two tiers of flooring, loaded with wounded and drawn by four and six mule teams, pass along the plank, or rather, corduroy road to Fredericksburg, the teamsters lashing their teams to keep up with the train, and the wounded screaming with pain as the wagons go jolting over the corduroy. Many of the wounds are full of maggots. I saw one man with an arm off at the shoulder, with maggots half an inch long crawling in the sloughing flesh, and several poor fellows were holding stumps of legs and arms straight up in the air so as to ease the pain the rough road and the heartless drivers subjected them to. These men had been suffering in temporary field hospitals, as no opportunity had been afforded to send them to the rear until we got within reach of the road running to Fredericksburg.

And this reminds me of a scene I witnessed a day or two since which seemed to me to cap the climax of the horrors of war. Passing along a little in the rear of the lines when a battle was raging in which in battalion was not engaged, I came upon a field-hospital to which the stretcher-bearers were bringing the men wounded in the conflict. Under three large "tent flies," the center one the largest of all, stood three heavy wooden tables, around which were grouped a number of surgeons and their assistants, the former bareheaded and clad in long linen dusters reaching nearly to the ground, which 'were covered with blood from top to bottom and had the arms cut off or rolled to the shoulders. The stretcher-bearers deposited their ghastly freight side by side in a winrow on the ground in front of the table under the first tent fly. Here a number of assistants took charge of the poor fellows, and as some of them lifted a man on to the first table others moved up the winrow so that no time nor space should be lost. Then some of the surgeons administered an anaesthetic to the groaning and writhing patient, exposed his wound and passed him to the center table. There the surgeons who were operating made a hasty examination and determined what was to be done and did it, and more often than not, in a very few moments an arm or a leg or some other portion of the subject's anatomy was flung out upon a pile of similar fragments behind the hospital, which was then more than six feet wide and three feet high, and what remained of the man was passed on to the third table, where other surgeons finished the bandaging, resuscitated him and posted him off with others in an ambulance. Heaven forbid that I should ever again witness such a sight!

## **Nurses – Dorthea Dix**

## **Nurses -- South**

### **Susan Blackford Nurses The Wounded At Lynchburg**

The South had no organization comparable to the Sanitary Commission, but a Women's Relief Society dedicated itself to collecting money to help sick and wounded soldiers, and thousands of Southern women volunteered for, nursing duty. Mrs. Arthur Hopkins for example not only contributed some \$200,000 to hospital work but went to the front and was wounded at Seven Pines; others, like Mrs. Ella Newsom and Miss Kate Cumming, worked indefatigably in the makeshift hospitals of the Confederacy; Mrs. Phoebe Yates Pember, superintendent of a division of the vast Chimborazo Hospital in Richmond, was tireless in hospital and nursing home and even at the front.

Mrs. Blackford was a member of one of Virginia's first families, wife to the distinguished Charles Blackford, judge advocate under Longstreet.

May 7, 1864. The wounded soldiers commenced arriving on Saturday, and just as soon as I heard of it, which was before breakfast, I went to see Mrs. Spence to know what I could do for them. She said the ladies had been so shamefully treated by the surgeons that she was afraid to take any move in the matter. I told her I would go and see Dr. Randolph and ask him if we could not do something. I went down and did so at once and asked him what we could do. He said we might do anything we pleased in the way of attention to them; send or carry anything to them we wished and he would be glad of our help. As soon as I reported to Mrs. Spence what he said she started messengers in every direction to let it be known and I went to eleven places myself. We then determined to divide our provisions into two divisions: the bread, meat, and coffee to be sent to the depot, the delicacies to the hospitals. The reception of wounded soldiers here has been most hospitable. You would not believe there were so many provisions in town as have been sent to them.

On Saturday evening I went up to Burton's factory, where most of the wounded were taken, and found the committee of ladies who had been selected, of whom I was one, just going in with the supper. I went in with them. We had bountiful supplies of soup, buttermilk, tea, coffee, and loaf bread, biscuits, crackers, and wafers. It did my heart good to see how the poor men enjoyed such things. I went around and talked to them all. One man had his arm taken off just below the elbow and he was also wounded through the body, and his drawers were saturated with blood. I fixed his pillow comfortably and stroked his poor swelled and burning arm. Another I found with his hand wounded and his nose bleeding. I poured water over his face and neck, and after the blood ceased to flow wiped his pale face and wounded hand which was black from blood and powder. They were very grateful and urged us to come and see them again.

On Sunday evening news came that six hundred more would arrive and Mrs. Spence sent me word to try and do something. The servants were away and I went into the kitchen and made four quarts of flour into biscuits and two gallons of coffee, and Mrs. Spence gave me as much more barley, so I made, by mixing them, a great deal of coffee. I am very tired.

May 12th. My writing desk has been open all day, yet I have just found time to write to you. Mrs. Spence came after me just as I was about to begin this morning and said she had just heard that the Taliaferro's factory was full of soldiers in a deplorable condition. I went down there with a bucket of rice milk, a basin, towel, soap, etc. to see what I could do. I found the house filled with wounded men and not one thing provided for them. They were lying about the floor on a

little straw. Some had been there since Tuesday . and had not seen a surgeon. I washed and dressed the wounds of about fifty and poured water over the wounds of many more. The town is crowded with the poor creatures, and there is really no preparations for such a number. If it had not been for the ladies many of them would have starved to death. The poor creatures are very grateful, and it is a great pleasure to us to help them in any way. I have been hard at work ever since the wounded commenced coming. I went to the depot twice to see what I could do. I have had the cutting and distribution of twelve hundred yards of cotton cloth for bandages, and sent over three bushels of rolls of bandages, and as many more yesterday. I have never worked so hard in all my life and I would rather do that than anything else in the world. I hope no more wounded are sent here as I really do not think they could be sheltered. The doctors, of course, are doing much, and some are doing their full duty, but the majority are not. They have free access to the hospital stores and deem their own health demands that they drink up most the brandy and whiskey in stock, and, being fired up most the time, display a cruel and brutal indifference to the needs of the suffering which is a disgrace to their profession and to humanity.

## **The Baroness Von Olnhausen Nurses At Alexandria**

One of the women who responded to Dorothea Dix's call for volunteers was Mary Phinney, who had married a German emigre, Baron Gustav von Olnhausen. On her husband's death she moved to Illinois, and from there went to nurse at the Mansion House Hospital in Alexandria. After the war she traveled in Germany, then returned to a nursing career. Her picture of conditions in the hospitals is doubtless exaggerated, yet that many of the doctors were incompetent and corrupt and that the regular medical service looked with disdain on women nurses is abundantly clear.

Miss Dix, who had been appointed by the President head of the army nurses, took me from Washington to Alexandria to the Mansion House Hospital. She told me on the journey that the surgeon in charge was determined to give her no foothold in any hospital where he reigned, and that I was to take no notice of anything that might occur, and was to make no complaint whatever might happen. She was a stern woman of few words.

There seemed to be much confusion about the Mansion House-which before the war was a famous hotel-and every part of it was crowded. She left me in the office and went in search of Dr. S. The sight of the wounded continuously carried through on stretchers, or led in as they arrived from the boats that lay at the foot of the street on which the hospital stood (this was just after that awful Cedar Mountain battle [August 1862), seemed more than I could bear, and I thought Miss Dix would never come. At last she appeared, with Dr. S., who eyed me keenly and, it seemed to me, very savagely, and gave me in charge of an orderly to show me to the surgical ward, as it was called. It consisted of many small rooms, with a broad corridor, every room so full of cots that it was only barely possible to pass between them. Such a sorrowful sight; the men had just been taken off the battle-field, some of them had been lying three or four days almost without clothing, their wounds never dressed, so dirty and wretched. Some one gave me my charges as to what I was to do; it seemed such a hopeless task to do anything to help them that I wanted to throw myself down and give it up. Miss Dix left me, and soon the doctors came and ordered me to follow them while they examined and dressed the wounds. They seemed to me then, and afterwards I found they were, the most brutal men I ever saw. They were both volunteers, and one was a converted Jew who was constantly proclaiming it.

So I began my work, I might say night and day. The surgeon told me he had no room for me, and a nurse told me he said he would make the house so hot for me I would not stay long.

When I told Miss Dix I could not remain without a room to sleep in, she, knowing the plan of driving me out, said, "My child" (I was nearly as old as herself), "you will stay where I have placed you." In the mean time McClellan's army was being landed below us from the Peninsula. Night and day the rumbling of heavy cannon, the marching of soldiers, the groaning of the sick and wounded were constantly heard; and yet in all that time I never once looked from the windows, I was so busy with the men.

One of the rooms of the ward was the operating-room, and the passing in and out of those who were to be operated upon, and the coming and going of the surgeons added so much to the general confusion. I doubt if at any time during the war there was ever such confusion as at this time. The insufficient help, the unskilful surgeons, and a general want of organization were very distressing; but I was too busy then and too tired for want of proper sleep to half realize it. Though I slept at the bedsides of the men or in a corner of the rooms, I was afraid to complain lest I be discharged. I was horribly ignorant, of course, and could only try to make the men comfortable; but the staff doctors were very friendly and occasionally helped me, and some one occasionally showed me about bandaging, so by degrees I began to do better. The worst doctor had been discharged, much to my joy, but the other one, despite his drinking habits, stayed on. After the morning visit it was no use calling upon him for anything, and I had to rely on the officer of the day if I needed help. I know now that many a life could have been saved if there had been a competent surgeon in the ward.

At this time the ward was full of very sick men and sometimes two would be dying at the same time, and both begging me to stay with them, so I got little sleep or rest. Moreover, I had no room of my own. Occasionally a nurse would extend the hospitality of the floor in hers, and I would have a straw bed dragged in on which to get a few hours' sleep. This, with a hurried bath and fresh clothes, was my only rest for weeks. It was no use to complain. The surgeon simply stormed at me and said there was no room; while Miss Dix would say, "You can bear it awhile, my child; I have placed you here and you must stay." I was at that time her only nurse in the Mansion House. Later she succeeded in getting rid of all the others and replacing them With her own.

## **Nurses - North**

### **Cornelia Hancock Nurses Soldiers And Contrabands**

Of the many nursing narratives this is probably the best. Cornelia Hancock was a young lady of twenty-three when she responded to the call of her brother-in-law, Dr. Henry Child of Philadelphia, to help out as a nurse. A New Jersey Quaker, she found in nursing her vocation; after the war she worked with Southern Negroes and among the Philadelphia poor.

Her letters, covering her nursing and hospital experience from Gettysburg to the Wilderness and beyond, are simple, vivid and sincere.

Gettysburg, July 8th, 1863

My Dear Sister,

We have been two days on the field; go out about eight and come in about six-go in ambulances or army buggies. The surgeons of the Second Corps had one put at our disposal. I feel assured I shall never feel horrified at anything that may happen to me hereafter. There is a great want of surgeons here; there are hundreds of brave fellows, who have not had their wounds dressed since the battle. Brave is not the word; more, more Christian fortitude never was witnessed than they exhibit, always say-"Help my neighbor first he is worse." The Second Corps did the heaviest fighting, and, of course, all who were badly wounded, were in the thickest of the fight, and, therefore, we deal with the very best class of the men-that is the bravest. My name is particularly grateful to them because it is Hancock. General Hancock is 'very popular with his men. The reason why they suffer more in this battle is because our army is victorious and marching on after Lee, leaving the wounded for citizens and a very few surgeons. The citizens are stripped of everything they have, so you must see the exhausting state of affairs. The Second Army Corps alone had two thousand men wounded, this I had from the Surgeon's head quarters.

I cannot write more. There is no mail that comes in, we send letters out: I believe the Government has possession of the road. I hope you will write. It would be very pleasant to have letters to read in the evening, for I am so tired I cannot write them. Get the Penn Relief to send clothing here; there re many men without anything but a shirt lying in poor shelter tents, calling on God to take them from this world of suffering; in fact the air is rent with petitions to deliver them from their sufferings....

I do not know when I shall go home-it will be according to how long this hospital stays here and whether another battle comes soon. I can go. right in an ambulance without being any expense to myself. The Christian Committee support us and when they get tired the Sanitary is on hand. Uncle Sam is very rich, but very slow, and if it was not for the Sanitary, much suffering would ensue. We give the men toast and eggs for breakfast, beef tea at ten o'clock, ham and bread for dinner, and jelly and bread for supper. Dried rusk would be nice if they were only here. Old sheets we would give much for. Bandages are plenty but sheets very scarce. We have plenty of woolen blankets now, in fact the hospital is well supplied, but for about five days after the battle, the men had no blankets nor scarce any shelter.

It took nearly five days for some three hundred surgeons to perform the amputations that occurred here, during which time the rebels lay in a dying condition without their wounds being dressed or scarcely any food. If the rebels did not get severely punished for this battle, then I am no judge. We have but one rebel in our camp now; he says he never fired his gun if he could help

it, and, therefore, we treat him first rate. One man died this morning. I fixed him up as nicely as the place will allow; he will be buried this afternoon. We are becoming somewhat civilized here now and the men are cared for well.

On reading the news of the copperhead performance, in a tent where eight men lay with nothing but stumps (they call a leg cut off above the knee a "stump") they said if they held on a little longer they would form a stump brigade and go and fight them. We have some plucky boys in the hospital, but they suffer awfully. One had his leg cut off yesterday, and some of the ladies, newcomers, were up to see him. I told them if they had seen as many as I had they would not go far to see the sight again. I could stand by and see a man's head taken off I believe-you get so used to it here. I should be perfectly contented if I could receive my letters. I have the cooking all on my mind pretty much. I have torn almost all my clothes off of me, and Uncle Sam has given me a new suit. William says I am very popular here as I *am* such a contrast to some of the office-seeking women who swarm around hospitals. I am black as an Indian and dirty as a pig and as well as I ever was in my life-have a nice bunk and tent about twelve feet square. I have a bed that is made of four crotch sticks and some sticks laid across and pine boughs laid on that with blankets on top. It is equal to any mattress ever made. The tent is open at night and sometimes I have laid in the damp all night long, and got up all right in the morning.

The suffering we get used to and the nurses and doctors, stewards, etc., are very jolly and sometimes we have a good time. It is very pleasant weather now. There is all in getting to do what you want to do and I am doing that....

Pads are terribly needed here. Bandages and lint are plenty. I would like to see seven barrels of dried rusk here. I do not know the day of the week or anything else. Business is slackening a little though-order is beginning to things will be right. One poor fellow is hollow-wounding fearfully now while his wounds are being dressed.

There is no more imporpriety in a *young* person being here provided they are sensible than a sexagenarian. Most polite and obliging are all the soldiers to me.

It is a very good place to meet celebrities; they come here from all parts of the United States to see their wounded. Senator Wilson, Mr. Washburn, and one of the Minnesota Senators have been here. I get beef tenderloin for dinner.-Ladies who work are favored but the dress-up palaverers are passed by on the other side. I tell you I have lost my memory almost entirely, but it is gradually returning. Dr. Child has done very good service here. All is well with me; we do not know much war news, but I know I am doing all I can, so I do not concern further. Kill the copperheads. Write everything, however trifling, it is all interest here.

From thy affectionate  
C. Hancock

Contraband Hospital, Washington, Nov. 5th, 1863

My dear Sister:

I shall depict our wants in true but ardent words, hoping to affect you to some action. Here are gathered the sick from the contraband camps in the northern part of Washington. If I were to describe this hospital it would not be believed. North of Washington, in an open, muddy mire, are gathered all the colored people who have been made free by the progress of our Army. Sickness is inevitable, and to meet it these rude hospitals, only rough wooden barracks, are in

use-a place where there is so much to be done you need not remain idle. We average here one birth per day, and have no baby clothes except as we wrap them up in an old piece of muslin, *that* even being scarce. Now the Army is advancing it is not uncommon to see from 40 to 50 arrivals in one day. They go at first to the Camp but many of them being *sick from* exhaustion soon come to us. They have nothing that any one, in the North would call clothing. I always see them as soon as they arrive, as they come here to be vaccinated; about 25 a day are vaccinated.

This hospital is the reservoir for all cripples, diseased, aged, wounded, infirm, from whatsoever cause; all accidents happening to colored people in all employs around Washington are brought here. It is not uncommon for a colored driver to be pounded nearly to death by some of the white soldiers. We had a dreadful case of Hernia brought in today. A woman was brought here with three children by her side; said she had been on the road for some time; a more forlorn, worn out looking creature I never beheld. Her four eldest children are still in Slavery, her husband is dead. When I first saw her she laid on the floor, leaning against a bed, her children crying around her. One child died almost immediately, the other two are still sick. She seemed to need most, food and rest, and those two comforts we gave her, but clothes she still wants. I think the women are more trouble than the men. One of the white guards called to me today and asked me if I got any pay. I told him no. He said he was going to be paid soon and he would give me 5 dollars. I do not know what was running through his mind as he made no other remark. I ask for clothing for women and children, both boys and girls. Two little boys, one 3 years old, had his leg amputated above the knee the cause being his mother not being allowed to ride inside, became dizzy and had dropped him. The other had his leg broken from the same cause. This hospital consists of all the lame, halt, and blind escaped from slavery. We have a man & woman here without any feet, theirs being frozen so they had to be amputated. Almost all have scars of some description and many have very weak eyes.

There were two very fine looking slaves arrived here from -Louisiana, one of them had his master's name branded on his forehead, and with him he brought all the instruments of torture that he wore at different times during 39 years of very hard slavery. I will try to send you a Photograph of him he wore an iron collar with 3 prongs standing up so he could not lay down his head; then a contrivance to render one leg entirely stiff and a chain clanking behind him with a bar weighing 50 lbs. This he wore and worked all the time hard. At night they hung a little bell upon the prongs above his head so that if he hid in any bushes it would tinkle and tell his whereabouts. The baton that was used to whip them he also had. It is so constructed that a little child could whip them till the blood streamed down their backs. This system of proceeding has been stopped in New Orleans and may God grant that it may cease all over this boasted free land, but you may readily imagine what development such a system of treatment would bring them to. With *this* class of beings, those who wish to do good to the contrabands must labor. Their standard of morality is very low.

## **Surgeons and Gangrene**

**Report on gangrene by A. Thornburgh, Assistant Surgeon, Provisional Army, C. S.,  
C. S. military prison hospital, Andersonville, Ga.**

**UNION AND CONFEDERATE CORRESPONDENCE, ORDERS, ETC., RELATING TO PRISONERS OF  
WAR AND STATE FROM JANUARY 1, 1865, TO THE END.--#26  
O.R.--SERIES II--VOLUME VIII [S# 121]**

*C. S. MILITARY PRISON HOSPITAL.*

Surg. JOSEPH JONES, *Provisional Army, C. S., Augusta, Ga.:*

SIR: It was our original intention to give you in this report a description of the stockade, its location and general condition, but we learn you have it already drawn up by abler hands than ours. We will therefore, after stating some of the most prevalent diseases among the prisoners, confine our remarks principally to the subject of ulcers and gangrene. As we will have to rely altogether on our notes and observations, taken for the most part within the last few months, drawn up under the most unfavorable circumstances imaginable, we fear, therefore, our remarks will prove both dry and uninteresting. The constant interference of an overdemand for our services as medical officers has prevented us from writing, except at irregular and uncertain intervals, therefore this report will present many deficiencies, both in arrangement and accuracy of detail.

When first we promised to contribute our mite to the subject before us we must confess we thought the task much easier than it has since proved to be. On looking over our notes we find them incomplete in many important particulars, and as we have but little time to investigate the subject in so scientific a manner as its importance demands, we are almost tempted to at once desist and confess our inability to do justice to the subject. But as our promise is out, and this paper is for your use, and not for public criticism, we will make the effort, hoping you will judge its merits with "Christian charity," and correct us in any errors we may make through ignorance or inexperience, and give us such information as you may deem necessary for our benefit in the future.

In order to show you the kind of material we have to work on it will be necessary to first give you a list of the most prevalent diseases among the prisoners, consequent on great mental and nervous depression, from long confinement in overcrowded and badly arranged prisons, seclusion from society, long-deferred hope, a lack of cleanliness, insufficient supply of nourishing food, a want of proper exercise of both body and mind, and from breathing an atmosphere so much vitiated by idio miasma as to be insufficient to produce the proper degree of oxygenation of the blood, a condition so necessary to both mental and bodily soundness. This depraved blood then affords an imperfect stimulus to the brain and nervous system, and as a result we have languor and inactivity of the mental and nervous functions, with a tendency to headache, syncope, hypochondriasis, and hemeralopia. The diseases most commonly met with are diarrhea, dysentery, intermittent and remittent fever, with continued, or camp, fever, as many term it. We also have catarrhal affections, with occasional pneumonia, and pleuritis, and, above all, scorbutus.

As it so rarely happens in the course of a long experience of the medical practitioner or surgeon that he has an opportunity of witnessing this most formidable and loathsome disease in



all its aggravated forms, it might not be amiss to introduce in this place a detailed account of that fearful disease, as it has prevailed and is still prevailing in this prison. But as that would be a work of supererogation and lead us too far from our subject, we will not attempt the task. Out of 30,000 prisoners who have been confined at this place during the past spring and summer, perhaps not less than one-half have suffered from this disease in some of its various forms.

As a sequel to the above-named diseases we have œdema, anasarca, ascites, hydrothorax, anaemia, and ulcers of nearly every variety and form. These ulcers are produced from the slightest causes imaginable. A pin scratch, a prick of a splinter, a pustula, an abrasion, or even a mosquito bite are sufficient causes for their production. The phagedenic ulcer is the most common variety met with among the prisoners, and usually commences from some of the causes enumerated above, or from wounds or injuries of a more serious nature. When from any of these causes an ulcer forms, it speedily assumes a phagedenic appearance and extends over a large extent of surface, and presents irritable, jagged, and everted edges, and slowly destroys the deep tissues down to the bone. The surface presents a large ash-colored or greenish-yellow slough and emits a very offensive odor. After the slough is removed by appropriate treatment the parts beneath show but little tendency to granulate. Occasionally, however, apparently healthy granulations spring up and progress finely for a time, and again fall into sloughing, and thus, by an alternate process of sloughing and phagedenic ulceration, large portions of the affected member or large masses of the body are destroyed. In this condition gangrene usually sets in, and if not speedily arrested soon puts an end to the poor sufferer's existence.

Gangrene first made its appearance in the stockade in the latter part of April or first of May last. The first that came under our observation was the result of frostbite. These cases (three or four in number) occurred among the prisoners who had been imprisoned on Belle Island last winter, where they received the injury. The parts attacked from this cause were usually the toes. The treatment was cold-water dressing, and the whole affected member enveloped in cloths spread with simple cerate, with tonics to support the system. This treatment usually succeeded, with the loss, perhaps, of one or more of the affected toes.

Early in the spring smallpox made its appearance in the prison, and as a prophylactic measure we were ordered to vaccinate "all who could not show a healthy scar." Consequently we went to work, and in a week or ten days 2,000 or 3,000 were vaccinated. Out of these nearly every man who happened to be affected with scurvy was attacked with ulceration of the pustule. These small ulcers soon began to slough and extend over a large extent of surface. These sloughs would become detached, the parts beneath suppurate, as in the case of other ulcers in a sloughy condition, until at last the ulcer would become phagedenic and destroy every structure in its track for a considerable extent. In this condition gangrene would set in, and if the disease be not speedily arrested by powerful escharotics, emollient poultices, and the proper vegetable diet, amputation became necessary, or the poor wretch would sink under the irritation; diarrhea or dysentery would supervene and speedily destroy the patient. The next and most common form of ulcers with us are what we call the scorbutic ulcer.

In severe cases of scurvy we have the upper and lower extremities covered with blue or livid spots, varying from the size of a millet seed to three or four inches in diameter, or the whole leg may be of a dark livid or copper color. These blotches become painful, open and ulcerate. This condition continues for a time, and finally slough, destroying whole toes, feet, and even arms and legs, apparently without there being sufficient energy or vitality in the system to set up inflammatory action. In this lamentable condition gangrene sets in and exhibits a more striking example of hospital gangrene than any other form of gangrene with which we have had to

contend. The most prominent symptoms of this kind of gangrene are a weak and small pulse, great prostration of the already enfeebled vital powers, a dry, glazed tongue, great anxiety of countenance, with a foul grayish slough all over the surface of the wound or ulcer, which discharges a large quantity of filthy and very offensive sanies, destroying muscles and everything before it down to the bone. If an operation be not resorted to, we have hemorrhage, caused by the destruction of the blood vessels of the part. We have operated on perhaps twenty or thirty cases in this condition, and we do not recollect of a single case where the gangrene did not reappear in the stump and speedily destroy the patient. In the other forms of gangrene, however, we have had much better success. Out of perhaps a hundred operations twenty or thirty are well and as many others apparently doing well. We think the above a fair estimate of all the capital operations performed in this hospital during the spring and summer.

The treatment adopted in all forms of the disease (when we have it) is tonics, such as quinine, tincture of iron, *salix alba*, *eupatorium perfoliatum*, and such other indigenous remedies as we can obtain from the woods. We are now making some experiments with a decoction of the *baptisia tinctoria*, which grows abundantly around the hospital. As local applications we use pure nitric acid, nitrate of silver, tincture of iodine, *oleum terebinthinæ*, and Darby's prophylactic fluid, followed by emollient poultices made of pulverized lini, or a common mush poultice made by thickening a strong decoction of *quercus rubra* with corn-meal.

We will give you a tabular statement of the patients received into and treated in our ward alone for the past three months, with the result. We regret not being able to do the same for the whole hospital.

In the month of August we had in the fifth ward twenty-one operations of all kinds. Out of these cases we had ten deaths, mostly attributed to either diarrhea or dysentery, while only two or three were caused by recurrence of the gangrene in the stump.

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