

THE SENTINEL

Injuries in the War: Perception vs. Reality

The Civil War resulted in cataclysmic changes in almost every aspect of American life, from government, arms and munitions, to photography, medicine, and more. The list is long and varied, but no area was more impacted than the way that the carnage of the war on the human element was perceived and dealt with, both during the war and in the half-century or so after it ended. No event in the history of the republic had produced the level of simple human damage that resulted from the four years of 1861-1865.

Guest presenter John Kinder, a Indiana University professor who has done extensive research on this topic brought his findings to share with the group. The starting point to understanding Civil war injuries is to differentiate between the two visions that the public had over the years. The first is the romantic vision of a war injury as a “sacred marker” of sacrifice and heroism. This vision masked the actual slaughter and frames a devastating injury as a badge of a soldier’s moral character. The second vision to comprehend is the rationalist one, where wounds were no longer a “red badge of courage” but examples of the horrors of war.

There were 620,000 deaths caused directly by battle or later by disease from the war. But these casualties were final and could no longer speak to the aftermath of war. There were at least a million non-lethal but severe injuries from the conflict that included everything from amputations and bodily wounds that would never heal in a man’s lifetime to the more subtle but just as real harm that alcoholism, paranoia, depression and what we would call today post traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) could do to the veteran after the war.

The romantic vision of war before 1865 was largely that battle was a noble and wonderful

service that a man could do, far from home, and provides the basis of a lifetime of honor and nobility if survived, and a death full of glory if that was the outcome. This was a product of the fact that mass warfare had not been, for the most part, a part of the American consciousness at that point, and what fighting and dying that had occurred was in a far off place and was masked by the time and distance from the carnage. This kept the reality of war from the eyes and ears of those back home and relegated it to the stuff of romantic chivalry.

Photography, and the telegraph, which put rapid communication to the forefront, and even a higher literacy rate, which greatly increased correspondence with those back home—none of these things had really come to fruition as they did during the war years. Rationalists, on the other hand, began to be heard during and after the war years, and re-evaluated the place of a soldier’s body in the waging of war. Now the carnage of war, especially for those who did not die, but were terribly disfigured, brought home the actual horror of war. The dead tell no tales, after all, while those who survived served as continuing examples. And the advent of photography of the dead on the battlefields was, perhaps, one of the most singular things to change the public perception of war. As it was quoted by Lincoln of Brady’s early work, “if he did not bring the dead and dying and lay them at our doorstep, he did something very like it.”

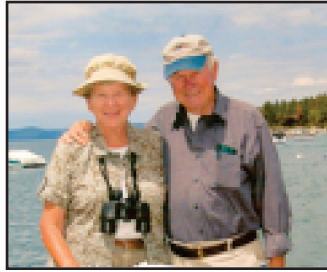
Immediately after the war, the reaction by the romantics was to try to take war wounds, no matter how grotesque and debilitating, and make them examples to others to be stirred to bravery and to volunteer if and when needed. Teddy Roosevelt was so enamored of wounded soldiers at one point that he ached for a wound to be proud of! But as the century changed, and World War I approached, the rationalists began to take hold and the wounded soldier came to be looked on as a burden to be avoided, not an icon to strive for. People began to understand that injuries did not happen to individuals in idyllic settings, but to masses of men in horrific surroundings of death and carnage. In the end, the attempt to try to minimize these horrors led to the rise of the science of rehabilitation. The rehabilitation

movement is primarily 20th century thing that is, at its zenith today in the 21st century, with the wounded of Iraq and Afghanistan.



The Bill Overlease “Rolling Library” Dedicated

As was reported in the December *Sentinel*, one of our most loyal and active members passed away unexpectedly on the last day of November, 2007. Bill Overlease was a three time program presenter at the roundtable and an enthusiastic Civil War buff for most of his 82 years. To memorialize his friendship and loyalty, a new “rolling library” was introduced and dedicated in his honor at the May meeting. The concept is to provide the members with a place to both donate items that would be of interest to their fellow members and to be able to check out those that might interest them. Books, magazines, journals, music, photos—virtually anything of interest to the Civil War aficionado will be there so that members can share.



Bill's wife of 52 years, Edy, was on hand to share in the unveiling and to tell the admiring crowd a little about her husband, a man she related was multi-talented with interests in other areas, including as a naturalist for the State of Indiana and the author of books on the topic, especially birds. She also made the first significant book donation to the library, passing on some of Bill's favorite Civil War volumes for others to use for research or pleasure. While Edy readily admitted that the Civil War was “Bill's thing,” she understood and supported his endeavors, even being the “technical support staff” that operated a phonograph while Bill gave his first presentation in 2005.

Anyone wishing to make a non-returnable donation to the new library should simply bring their items to a meeting, where they will be logged in and placed in the unit for use. Those wanting to use them can check them out at the meetings or can contact any member of the Executive Board to arrange to get them at other times. The Monroe County History Center will *not* have access to the bookcase without special arrangements, so call someone before going.

Encampment Coming in June

The second annual Civil War Encampment on the lawn of the 42nd Indiana Infantry is set for the weekend of June 7-8 on the lawn of the Monroe County History center in Bloomington. Cooking demos, weapon firings, medical procedures, camp life and more will be on display. The Roundtable is a co-sponsor of this event and we will need volunteers to work at our information booth in two hour shifts from 10 am until 4 pm on Saturday. Call a board member to sign up!

Civil War Weekend at Spring Mill

On May 24, 25 and 26, Civil War days will take place at Spring Mill State Park near Mitchell, Indiana. Both Union and Confederate soldiers, and their families in many cases, will be in the village. Special events will include a Memorial Service at 1:30 on Monday, May 26, at the Hamer Cemetery, beginning with a parade from the Donaldson cave parking lot to the cemetery. In addition, at 3:00 pm on the same day, the Victorian Dancers will give a dancing demonstration in the village.

Memorial Day Dedication

On Memorial Day, May 26, at 11:00 a.m., the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW) will dedicate a plaque at the Gosport Cemetery, marking the final resting place of the twelve new recruits in the 59th Indiana Volunteers who died while at Camp Hughes, southwest of Gosport, during the winter of 1861-1862.

Five were buried in graves marked “unknown,” but now, through the efforts of the SUVCW, all have been identified.

Present at the dedication will be members of the Ben Harrison Camp 356 of the Sons of Union Veterans, the Sons of Veterans Reserve Honor Guard, Company D of the 27th Indiana, a contingent of Post 7850 Veterans of Foreign Wars, as well as re-enactors of the 11th Indiana Reenactment Group.

Pictured above is the rough stone memorial, installed in 1923, with the new plaque attached. In addition to the plaque dedication, the VFW will raise a new 33-star replica of a Civil War flag

Ceremonies will begin at the VFW Post memorial at the northern end of the cemetery and will repair to the 59th Volunteers Memorial at the southern end for the dedication.



Next Month

Join presenter Deborah K. Cronin for “**MIDWEST JANACONDA: Grant Seizes the Rivers.**” Come and journey with General U.S. Grant to Fort Henry, Fort Donelson, Shiloh, and Vicksburg on the way to securing the South's river ports and the Corinth, Mississippi, railhead in 1862-1863. Take a closer look at the *Cairo*, the U.S.S. gunboat salvaged from Yazoo River bed. Find out how places like Cairo, Illinois, Island #10, and New Madrid played a role in the western campaign of the Civil War. The program will be, as always, at 7:00 pm on Tuesday, June 10th, in the Monroe County History Center at 202 E. 6th St. in Bloomington.

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