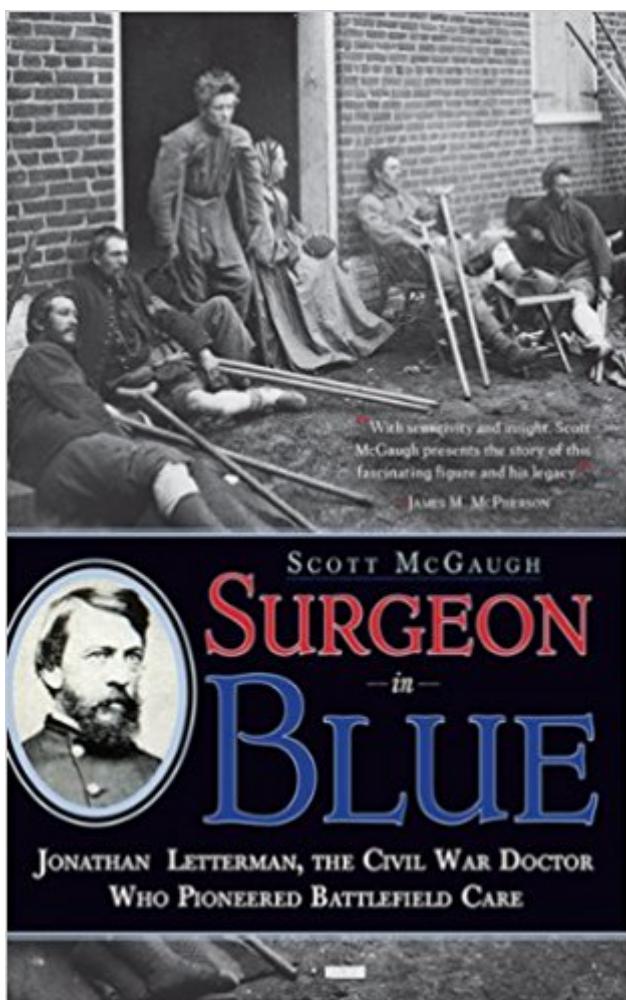


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Surgeon In Blue: Jonathan Letterman, The Civil War Doctor Who Pioneered Battlefield Care



Synopsis

Jonathan Letterman was an outpost medical officer serving in Indian country in the years before the Civil War, responsible for the care of just hundreds of men. But when he was appointed the chief medical officer for the Army of the Potomac, he revolutionized combat medicine over the course of four major battles—Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg—that produced unprecedented numbers of casualties. He made battlefield survival possible by creating the first organized ambulance corps and a more effective field hospital system. He imposed medical professionalism on a chaotic battlefield. Where before 20 percent of the men were unfit to fight because of disease, squalid conditions, and poor nutrition, he improved health and combat readiness by pioneering hygiene and diet standards. Based on original research, and with stirring accounts of battle and the struggle to invent and supply adequate care during impossible conditions, this new biography recounts Letterman’s life from his small-town Pennsylvania beginnings to his trailblazing wartime years and his subsequent life as a wildcatter and the medical examiner of San Francisco. At last, here is the missing portrait of a key figure of Civil War history and military medicine. His principles of battlefield care continue to be taught to military commanders and first responders.

Book Information

File Size: 947 KB

Print Length: 369 pages

Publisher: Arcade Publishing; 1 edition (July 1, 2013)

Publication Date: July 1, 2013

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00L0M4K1W

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #59,383 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #6

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Customer Reviews

This is a fascinating biography of Jonathan Letterman who revolutionized military medical care during the Civil War. He incorporated insights from European experience that helped the Army of the Potomac stay healthy and enabled timely medical care and evacuation from the battlefield. Some of it is riveting, both as a biography and as Civil War history. The only reason for not giving five stars is that it becomes repetitive at the end. Overall, a great read.

This book was very enlightening. If you choose to read this book you will learn so much about how the Civil War soldiers endured their wounds and were cared for until Jonathan Letterman began to organize the medical corps so soldiers wounds could be treated more quickly and with better care. He was an amazing doctor and with his skills of organization was able to improve the nursing care for the soldiers. It is a must read book.

I read the book because I love Civil War history and medical history and because, as a docent at the San Francisco Presidio, I have been researching Letterman Hospital history. Letterman Hospital, a large and famous Army general hospital, was named after Dr. Letterman in 1911. My docent research question was, Who was Jonathan Letterman? Author Scott McGaugh answered my question in his brilliant biography of Letterman. The book is a fascinating account not only of Dr. Letterman, but also of the history and evolution of battlefield medicine, and an account of the major battles in the Civil War. I got to know about the various generals and their military approaches as they worked alongside Dr. Letterman to save as many lives of seriously wounded soldiers as possible. The book is also a tragic love story of Letterman and his young wife who spent their last years as dedicated public servants in San Francisco where Letterman was elected to the position of County Medical Examiner. I highly recommend that you read about this heroic young surgeon and learn of his impact on battlefield medicine. It's a good read.

This is an informative book for those who are interested in details of the US Civil War or students of medical history. It tells the life story of Jonathan Letterman, who, along with only one or two other men who supported his efforts, was responsible for radically changing the quality of care of the

Union soldiers both on and off the battlefield. He was responsible for keeping the staggering casualty rates from being much, much higher during the last half of the war. Reading about the horrifying conditions isn't pleasant, but this book fills in another piece of the puzzle for history buffs. The last quarter of the book, which details Letterman's life after the war, is somewhat less interesting and I had to discipline myself to finish it. We do see how the war affected his life and brought about his death years later. I recommend it for the narrow audience who are avid for more information about the Civil War.

I'm a CW buff and a civilian (non-medical) who has worked in military medicine for nearly 20 years. I've heard of Letterman from Army docs but didn't know anything about his accomplishments and contributions to military medicine. This book was a great introduction to Letterman. I've spent the last months researching my own genealogy only to learn that an ancestor came to the U.S. And promptly joined the Union army at the onset of the war. He was wounded at some point (leg). Perhaps I have Letterman to thank for his survival as he not only recovered well enough to serve for the remainder of the war, he didn't lose the leg and went home to rather 12 children. I'm sure I owe Letterman gratitude for organizing and establishing best practices in the daily health of the troops as well as combat casualty medicine.

Outstanding insight into Civil War battle and the vagaries of the armies positioning themselves. Outstanding portrayal of a military doctor who serves and lives from coast to coast - before, during, and after the Civil War. The reader will be amazed at the courage and perseverance of the men fighting and Dr. Letterman's impact on the appalling conditions and "medical treatment" of military men, before, during, and after battle. Outstanding documentation and "Telling" of a surgeon in the Civil War -- a man who surmounts situations and men in power who counter him!

Fascinating discussion of the unique medical needs of the American civil war and how they were met. Interesting historical context of the changes in warfare and the devastating results on the battlefield and the difficulties posed to the surgical staff. These crucial problems were complicated by political intrigue and power struggles. Amazing to see the genius of resolving the difficulties as well as the lasting effects of the period.

I heard book reviewed on NPR and found it so interesting that I ordered it immediately. The history of today's modern medicine's practices which are still in use, was fascinating and very enlightening.

The struggles of early day doctors to implement life-savng procedures that we now take for granted make a wonderful read. The sad thing is that after being introduced, it took so long for the new ideas to become reality once again after the war was over. This wonderful book shows us not to forget new ways of medicine and what might be done for us if we will just look and listen right now, and not forget what we have learned while people are dying because of neglect and superstition.

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