

Civil War Surgery

Medicine was very different in 1861. The existence of microbes and germs hadn't been accepted. Operating methods were primitive and very unsanitary in most cases. The often crude surgery performed on the injured during the war led to amputation that would be considered butchery by today's standards. Gangrene became a silent killer of amputees, since it was hardly understood by the doctors treating the wounds. (See website for more information from a hospital report dated Jan. 1, 1865)

<http://www.civilwarhome.com/andersonvillegangrene.htm>

Other websites:

<http://www.powerweb.net/bbock/war/start.html>

<http://www.civilwarhome.com/medicinehistory.htm>

<http://geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/7899/medicine.html>

(This website has photos of hospitals, surgical tools and 2-wheeled ambulances used during the war.)

Scientific Inquiry Question

What was "soldier's disease"? How did it affect the health of the soldiers during and after the Civil War?

(This relates to opiate addiction.)

A Picture Book of Robert E. Lee

The following is an excerpt from the book:

August 14, 1861

The 16th Tennessee left a trail of sick wherever it moved, mostly suffering from malaria and typhoid fever. The 1st Tennessee filled hotels with its sick and dying. Rations were very short and the regiment was reduced to eating local cattle (with little salt) and picking local blackberries. The incessant rain didn't help matters much, reducing communication and movement of the sick to places where they could be cared for properly. By the 23rd of the month, the camp looked like "a Tennessee hog pen." Gen. Lee wrote about the conditions:

We have a great deal of sickness among the soldiers, and now those on the sick list would form an army. The measles is still among them, though I hope

it is dying out. But it is a disease which though light in childhood is severe in manhood, and prepared the system for other attacks. The constant rains, with no shelter but tents, have aggravated it. All these drawbacks, with impassible roads, have paralyzed our efforts.