

Feverish Duty: Mysterious Ailments, Medical Innovations Emerged During The War

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Review

FEVERISH DUTY

Mysterious ailments, medical innovations emerged during the war

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Freemon, Frank R. *Gangrene and Glory: Medical Care During the American Civil War*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, ISBN 838637531

With a degree in medicine and a doctorate in American history, Frank Freemon brings a unique perspective to the topic of Civil War medicine, as he earlier demonstrated in *Microbes and Minie Balls: An Annotated Bibliography of Civil War Medicine*.

His new work, **Gangrene and Glory**, covers a broad topic in an easy-to-read style that any Civil War medical layman can understand. It is a superb work. The reader receives enough in-depth information to receive a clear understanding, without an overload of detail, of what occurred medically during this era. Thus the book will appeal to those who have a background in Civil War medicine and those who do not.

Structurally, the book intersperses narration with series of anecdotes and analyses. Freemon, who believes that things happen in a parallel rather than in a linear fashion, has written each chapter from a different viewpoint. For example, the chapter on Gettysburg is presented from the perspective of the wounded soldier, while the chapter on the Vicksburg campaign is written as if it were a scientific paper, analyzing the causes of illness using medical knowledge of the period.

Incorporated into the text are events that marked the growth, development, and trials of the Union and Confederate medical organizations designed to improve the health of the soldier and aid the wounded.

Gangrene and Glory uses information that was available to the doctors of the era, avoiding what the author considers to be the most common defect of

medical history -- judgment of historical individuals by later standards. Even readers without a medical background can appreciate the work as a series of medical mysteries. How did yellow fever spread from a ship in harbor to afflict people on shore when no one left the ship? What horrible new disease, never seen before by any doctor in the area, took a man from normal at breakfast to feverish at noon, prostrate with spots all over his body by supper, and dead by nightfall?

Freemon uses excellent tables, illustrations, and seldom seen photographs to enhance his readable text. One table shows all the medical schools in America in 1860, including their proper names, locations, and number of faculty members and students. Another lists the military medical officers who left the United States Army and joined the Confederate States Army. The book also includes sections on Navy medicine and the hospital ship system which are either briefly mentioned in other works or entirely omitted.

Even those familiar with the two Civil War medical explanatory classics *Doctors in Blue* and *Doctors in Gray* should not make the assumption that they have no need to read this book. A wonderful adjunct to these two classics and deserving shelf space next to them, **Gangrene and Glory** demonstrates how medical thought and institutions changed over the course of the war. The book is a story of imperfect human beings who struggled to save lives while supporting their respective causes and contending against the enemy, their superiors, and strange afflictions that defied understanding.

JaNeen M. Smith has been executive director of the National Museum of Civil War Medicine, located in Frederick, Maryland, since September 1996. She has 17 years of museum experience with a primary interest in American history.