

“Too Much for Human Endurance”: The George Spangler Farm Hospitals and the Battle of Gettysburg

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Review

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Kirkwood, Ronald D. *"Too Much for Human Endurance": The George Spangler Farm Hospitals and the Battle of Gettysburg.* Savas Beatie, 2019. \$34.95 ISBN 9781611214512

"Too Much for Human Endurance" is the story of George Spangler, his family, and their farm during and after the 3-day Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863. What makes this volume so valuable is that it not only establishes the strategic importance of the property, but introduces the readers to the untold stories of the Spanglers, the soldiers who were brought there wounded and dying, and the medical personnel who labored to save their lives.

Ronald Kirkwood has been a docent at the George Spangler Farm Civil War Hospital Site since it opened in 2013. He has an intimate knowledge of the site and the people who lived and worked there. Using firsthand accounts, the author brings to life the huge XI Corps hospital and the people who lived and worked there.

The author also notes a number of important personages who spent some time there. These included, but were not limited to, George G. Meade, Henry Hunt, Francis Barlow, and Lewis Armistead. Kirkwood also includes stories of the First Division, II Corps hospital at the Spanglers' Granite Schoolhouse.

Kirkwood brings to life the horrors of Civil War field hospitals and the sacrifices that, not only the Spangler family made, but also those of the doctors and nurses who tended to the sick, wounded, and dying. The diaries and memoirs of the soldiers enables the author to bring great accuracy and detail to this little-known story. The maps, photos and drawings only enhance the telling of this story. Each chapter includes a "Spangler Farm Short Story," a vignette about the Spanglers, and many army personnel who were at the farm during and after the battle.

Six appendices add much valuable information to this story. Presented here are biographies of the surgeons known to have served at Spanglers' facilities; the command structure of the XI Corps at Gettysburg; one of the most comprehensive lists of hospital wounded and a list of the dead buried on the farm. An extensive bibliography completes this volume's excellent reference material.

As the author states in the Introduction, "The Spangler story is the rare important Gettysburg tale that

has never been told in its entirety. . . .In an effort to rectify this, “*Too Much for Human Endurance*” emphasizes the family, their farm, the hospitals, the Union medical staff established there, and the people who lived, camped, worked, suffered, and died there.” (p. ix).

“*Too Much for Human Endurance*”: *The George Spangler Farm Hospitals and the Battle of Gettysburg* is a must for any medical historian, Gettysburg buff, or medical reenactor/living historian.

Peter J. D’Onofrio, Ph. D. is the president of the Society of Civil War Surgeons, Inc., the largest non-profit, international educational organization dedicated to the study and preservation of Civil War era medicine, surgery, and those who practiced the healing arts. He is also the editor/publisher of the Society’s quarterly publication, The Journal of Civil War Medicine. For more information on the Society, please visit www.civilwarsurgeons.org.