

Ambulances in the Civil War

SUBJECT

American Studies
Unit: Civil War
Lesson: Ambulances

TEACHER

NMCWM

GRADE

08

DATE

Drafted: 4/1/2020

TIME REQUIRED

30/45 Minutes

OVERVIEW

The Civil War was an era of unprecedented suffering. Perhaps more than a million people died, over 700,000 of them soldiers. The three-day long Battle of Gettysburg alone resulted in 46,000-51,000 casualties, or roughly as many casualties as America sustained over the entire nine years of the Revolutionary War.

For the first time, Americans had to cope with mass casualty events regularly. Prior to 1861, the evacuation and treatment of the wounded was an afterthought. During the war itself, the Confederacy and the United States took different approaches to medical evacuation which had a profound impact on the care of their respective soldiers.

Confederate leaders like General P.G.T. Beauregard continued to prioritize military victory over the care of their wounded soldiers, just as the United States had done before the war.

The North's focus on a more innovative and comprehensive system (invented by Dr. Jonathan Letterman through Special Orders No. 147) both increased the survivability of their soldiers and led directly to the first civilian evacuation systems in our nation's history. It is this legacy that directly benefits us to this day as the first civilian ambulances were established by former Union army surgeons.

This activity is designed to allow students to examine and analyze primary sources. Students will then utilize those primary sources to craft an argument and weigh the validity of secondary sources.

PHASES

8TH GRADE

<p>CURRICULAR STANDARDS</p>	<p>SS.DL.10.01 Evaluate a variety of sources by identifying and defining the type, origin and authority of a source, examining the historical context and assessing the corroborative value of a source.</p> <p>SS.DL.20.01 Communicate and critique conclusions by constructing well organized arguments containing multipart theses supported by a variety of sources, utilizing historical reasoning skills and addressing opposing points of view/counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.</p> <p>SS.AS1.80.02 Compare and contrast the goals, resources, key figures, and strategies of the North and South.</p> <p>SS.AS1.80.05 Explain how the Civil War caused technological change and medical advancements in America.</p>
<p>OBJECTIVE</p>	<p>Students will explore, explain and identify the Civil War ambulance system using primary and secondary sources to gain a better understanding of how the system impacts us today.</p>
<p>INFORMATION REQUIRED</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr. Jonathan Letterman 2. General P.G.T. Beauregard 3. General Orders No. 147 4. Casualties of the Civil War 5. Ambulances in the Reconstruction Era
<p>ACTIVITY</p>	<p>Engagement: (Appx. C)</p> <p>Share images of early civilian ambulances and captions about their direct link to the Civil War and the direct link of their legacy to this day. (Appx. C) What is one similarity and one difference you see between Civil War ambulances and modern ones?</p> <p>Exploration: (Appx. A)</p>

PHASES

8TH GRADE

	<p>Distribute primary source quotations about the work of the Civil War ambulance corps for students to read. (Appx. A)</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <p>Have students craft an argument through a writing assignment to answer the following prompt: Based on these primary sources: what were the differences between the North and the South in medical evacuation? Why do you think they were different?</p> <p>Elaboration: (Appx. B)</p> <p>Read the secondary sources quotations in Appx. B. What were the differences between ambulance services in the North and South and why were they different? Do you agree with the secondary source statements by later historians? (Appx. B) Why or why not?</p>
EVALUATION/ CLOSING	How do we benefit from the changes made during the Civil War today?

REQUIREMENTS

- This can be adapted to student needs as necessary

MATERIALS

NOTES

This lesson can be done digitally in Microsoft Word or Google Docs. Students can use this same lesson to answer manually. This can be modified so that students can use creative writing techniques or answer and meet certain requirements.

Appendix A:

Direct quotations about medical evacuation from the period:

- “Before the engagement, infirmiry detachments will...be detailed and organized of three (the least effective under arms) from each company...This corps will go into the field, unarmed...the members will be provided with one litter for every two men, and each with a badge, by which he can easily be distinguished from the rest of the command...The surest way to protect our wounded is to drive the enemy from the field; the most pressing, highest duty is to win the victory.” - Confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard, 1861
- “We were drawn up in line of battle about one mile south of town, and a little to the left of the Lutheran Seminary. We then advanced to the enemy's line of battle in double quick time. We had not gotten more than 50 paces when Norman of our company fell dead by my side. Katz was going to pick him up. I stopped him, as it is strictly forbidden for anyone to help take the dead or wounded off the field except the ambulance corps.” - Private Louis Leon, Confederate soldier in the 1st North Carolina, 1863
- “In September, 1864, we made a raid into North Alabama and Middle Tennessee, fording the Tennessee River at Colbert Shoals. Before we started on that raid six or eight men were selected from each regiment as the infirmiry corps for that raid, and I was one of the crowd detailed for that business...The cannon balls and shells would sometimes hit the ground in front of us and bounce over, and maybe the next one would pass over us and hit the ground behind. The bullets were also spatting around us...the word passed down the line for the infirmiry corps to come at once. I got up and went about one hundred yards up the line and found Captain Shaw, of Haywood County, with a place as big as my hand knocked from the side of his hip...We had no litters on which to carry the dead and wounded, so we often had a hard job taking them off of the field to where the ambulances could get them.” - Private A.C. McCleary, Confederate trooper of the 12th Tennessee Cavalry
- “One surgeon told me he saw eight men carrying off one wounded soldier! Four were bearers – and four were intended for 'relief' – and were walking by the hill, doing nothing. Few if any of these men returned to their posts.” - Dr. Henry Bowditch, civilian physician from the North, 1861
- “Special Orders No. 147 – Regulations for Organization of the Ambulance Corps...The captain is the commander of all the ambulances and transport carts in the Army Corps...he will pay special attention to the condition of the ambulances...[and] make a personal inspection of once a week...He will institute a drill in his corps, instructing his men in the most easy and expeditious of putting men in and taking them out of the ambulances. The detail for this corps will be made with care by the Commanders...and no officer or man will be detailed for this duty except those known to be active and efficient.” - Union General George B. McClellan and Dr. Jonathan Letterman, Medical Director of the Army of the Potomac, 1862

- “When I think of them now, there were many unpleasant scenes on that little battlefield-some sad and pathetic, some horrible; but we got so used to such sights those days, that we became calloused and indifferent often taking but slight notice of very serious affairs.” - R.M. Peck, Union ambulance driver of the 1st Division, Army of the Frontier, 1864
- “The...more a Man is under fire the less he dreads it. I don't dread it half as bad as I did back at the Wilderness. You let a regiment of old soldiers go into a fight and they won't lose half the men a raw regiment will in the same place. They cover themselves more. Raw recruits don't understand it. It is just like learning a trade.” - Private William A. Leonard, Union ambulance driver of the 16th Massachusetts Volunteers, 1864

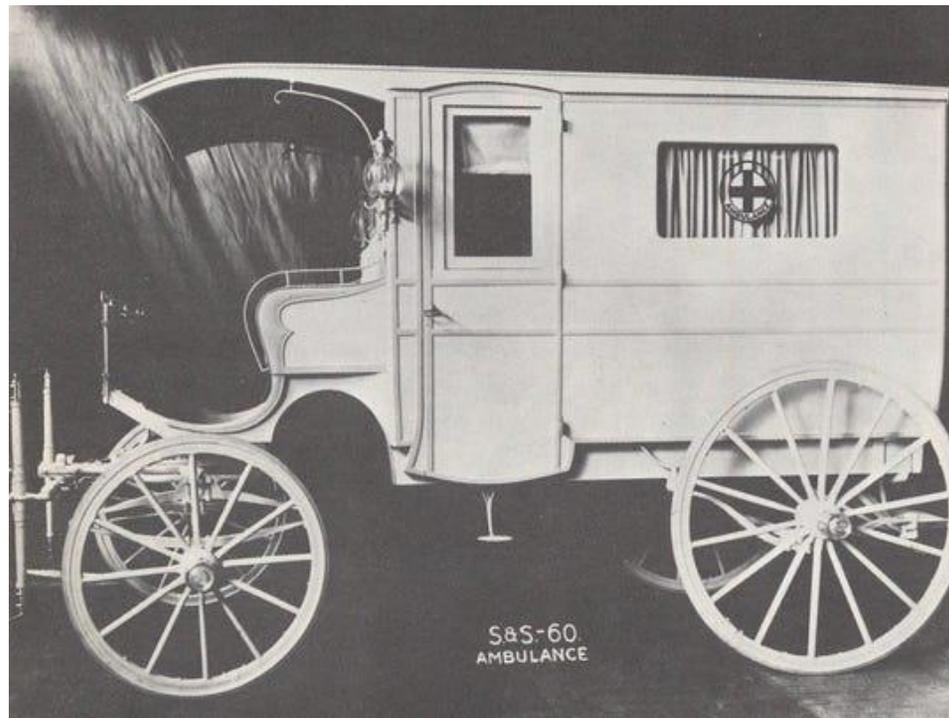
Appendix B

Secondary source quotations:

- “It has been said that Hunter Holmes McGuire, medical director of Stonewall Jackson's commands, perfected” the ambulance or infirmary corps in the spring of 1862.” [*Doctors in Gray: The Confederate Medical Service*, Horace Herndon Cunningham, page 114.]
- Do you see any evidence of Dr. McGuire's role in the sources above? Do you think the Confederate ambulance service was perfected? Why might a historian make this argument?
- “In the space of a single order, Letterman redefined battlefield evacuation from a post-battle scavenger hunt to one marked by military discipline.” [*Surgeon in Blue*, Scott McGaugh, page 89]
- Do you see any evidence of Dr. Letterman's role in the sources above? Do you think the Union ambulance service was marked by military discipline?

Appendix C

Modern Relevance:



The first civilian ambulance was instituted in Cincinnati immediately after the war in 1865 by former Union surgeon Dr. Roberts Bartholow. The Military Hospital of Cincinnati was converted into a civilian hospital at the end of the war but retained many of the innovations created by the Union military.



New York City's first civilian ambulance was also created by an army surgeon named Dr. Edward Dalton in 1869. Dr. Dalton was trained in the Union Ambulance Corps under Dr. Letterman.



New York's Bellevue Hospital is now NYC Health + Hospitals / Bellevue, home to FDNY EMS Station 8. Both are on the frontlines of today's epidemic. FDNY ambulances are a direct descendant of the system created by Dr. Letterman in the Civil War, and the people of New York have benefitted from these innovations from 9/11 through the Coronavirus.

Sources:

<https://ohioambulance.com/who-were-the-first-emts-and-what-can-we-learn/>

<https://essentialhospitals.org/about-americas-essential-hospitals/history-of-public-hospitals-in-the-united-states/first-hospital-ambulance-service/>

Additional Resources from the National Museum of Civil War Medicine:

- [Virtual Q&A about Ambulances and Stretcher Bearers](#) – Membership and Development Coordinator Kyle Dalton talks about Civil War ambulances and stretcher bearers while taking questions from the audience in this virtual Q&A session
- [African Americans and Medical Evacuation](#) – This blog post details the history of African Americans and medical evacuations
- [Primary Sources Related to Medical Evacuation](#) – Look through this compiled list of primary sources relating to Letterman, the ambulance corps, and emergency medicine

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