

“A Good Place to Focus on the Human Cost and Agony”: The Interpretation of Violence  
and Trauma at Gettysburg National Military Park

by

Jack Pittenger

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Approved November 2013 by the  
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Brooks Simpson, Chair  
Calvin Schermerhorn  
Nancy Dallett

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2013

© 2013 Jack Pittenger

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the evolution of the interpretation of the battle of Gettysburg, as well as how the analysis and presentation of the battle by multiple stakeholders have affected the public's understanding of the violence of the engagement and subsequently its understanding of the war's repercussions. While multiple components of the visitor experience are examined throughout this thesis, the majority of analysis focuses on the interpretive wayside signs that dot the landscape throughout the Gettysburg National Military Park. These wayside signs are the creation of the Park Service, and while they are not strictly interpretive in nature, they remain an extremely visible component of the visitor's park experience. As such, they are an important reflection of the interpretive priorities of the Park Service, an agency which is likely the dominant public history entity shaping understanding of the American Civil War.

Memory at Gettysburg in the first decades after the battle largely sought to focus on celebratory accounts of the clash that praised the valor of all white combatants as a means of bringing about resolution between the two sides. By focusing on triumphant memories of martial valor in a conflict fought over ambiguous reasons, veterans and the public at large neglected unsettling and difficult conversations. These avoided discussions primarily concerned what the war had really accomplished aside from preserving the Union, as white Americans appeared unwilling to confront the war's abolitionist legacy. Additionally, they avoided discussion of the horrific levels of violence that the war had truly required of its combatants. Reconciliationist memories of the conflict that did not discuss the violence and trauma of combat were thus incorporated into early interpretations of Civil War battlefields, and continued to hinder understanding of the true savagery of combat into the present. This thesis focuses on the presence (or lack thereof) of violence and trauma in the wayside interpretive signage at

Gettysburg, and argues that a more active interpretation of the war's remarkably violent and traumatic legacies can assist in dislodging a faulty legacy of reconciliationist remembrance that continues to permeate public memory of the Civil War.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Moving to Arizona and working towards my graduate degree was a hugely gratifying adventure, and I would not have succeeded in this undertaking without the support of many. My parents and sister were nothing but encouraging throughout my time in graduate school, and their love and support was and is appreciated beyond words. Thank you. I would also like to thank my wonderful and loving girlfriend Sandra, whose frequent visits from Boston to “the desert” helped me to stay dedicated and balanced, especially when school could seem overwhelming. Her dedication and positivity were constant throughout my studies.

I would also like to thank my committee, whose guidance was immeasurable. Their feedback and advice throughout this entire process was greatly appreciated, and I know that my work has come a long way thanks to their help. Brooks Simpson’s knowledge of the subject matter was truly a boon to my research, and his insightful feedback on my early ideas and rough chapter drafts were extremely helpful as well. I would also like to thank Calvin Schermerhorn for his insight, especially as I was going through the arduous process of simply working out exactly what my paper would become. Finally, Nancy Dallett has been a constant source of support and assistance, both on this thesis as well as throughout my entire time in the Public History program, and I am extremely grateful for her zeal in all endeavors. I would also like to thank Jannelle Warren-Findley, who offered insight into my topic in addition to her role as the outstanding director of the Public History program.

Additionally, I would like to thank the folks at the Gettysburg National Military Park, who answered incessant emails and were nothing but accommodating in allowing access to their archival materials. Scott Hartwig, Greg Goodell, and Andrew Newman were particularly helpful, and their knowledge of the park and its history was invaluable.

Additionally, conversations with John Hennessy at the Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park offered great insight into the National Park Service's interpretive approach. Finally, I would like to thank all of my fellow Public History students, whose roles as editors, coaches, cheerleaders, and friends were greatly appreciated. Without their friendship and help, this paper would have been an impossibility. Thank you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		Page
1	“THE SHATTERED LANDSCAPE AND SHATTERED PEOPLE”: THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CIVIL WAR COMBAT TRAUMA INTERPRETATION.....	1
2	“THE HUMAN COST AND AGONY”: A HISTORY OF BATTLEFIELD INTERPRETATION AT GETTYSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK.....	33
3	“A GOOD CHANCE AT REVEALING THE COST IN HUMAN LIVES”: THE EVOLUTION OF NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SIGNAGE AT GETTYSBURG.....	68
4	“MAKE SENSE OF THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE CARNAGE OF THE WAR”: VIOLENCE AND BATTLEFIELD TRAUMA IN WAYSIDE SIGNAGE AT GETTYSBURG.....	93
5	“TO FORGET ITS HORROR”: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE INTERPRETATION OF TRAUMA AT GETTYSBURG.....	119
	REFERENCES.....	130

## CHAPTER 1

### “The Shattered Landscape and Shattered People”<sup>1</sup>: The Historiography of Civil War Combat Trauma Interpretation

The trauma of Civil War combat is a relatively underexplored component of what is almost certainly the most studied period in American history. Sweeping battle narratives and biographies of generals continue to fly off bookstore shelves in the present day, leading one to wonder if there could truly be any stone left unturned in the study of America’s most important conflict. National memory of the war has focused on both what had supposedly been accomplished for the country as a whole, and a solemn appreciation of the assured heroism of all white soldiers, both Union and Confederate. A focus on the beneficial, mutually agreeable resulting effects of the war led to an environment where unpleasant topics, including racial repercussions of the war and the miserable daily lives of the soldiers on the march and in combat, were marginalized in favor of more sanguine narratives. Namely, a patriotic narrative that sought to lionize all white combatants while simultaneously emphasizing reconciliation between the two warring sides emerged in the wake of the war. This was at the expense of both recently freed slaves as well as soldiers who still grappled with the traumatic effects that combat had rendered.

This reconciliatory theme is apparent in the study of the interpretive strategy of the National Park Service (NPS). As the largest public history agency in the country, the NPS presents an interpretation of the Civil War to American visitors that is virtually unequalled in its reach. While many Americans likely gain what they believe to be an understanding of the war via popular culture, the NPS represents the dominant interpretive narrative of the Civil War as constructed by professional public historians.

---

<sup>1</sup> Edward Tabor Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 91.



As such, it carries a tremendous responsibility to present a holistic and open account of all aspects of the war. The interpreted facets of the war that have interested the public have changed over time, however, and NPS interpretation has mirrored those changes. Veterans, followed by the the War Department, controlled early interpretation of Civil War battlefield sites including Gettysburg National Military Park (GNMP), and as such they presented a version of the war that focused primarily on the glory of individual regiments as well as the mundane details of warfare, such as troop strengths and tactical maneuvers.

When the NPS took control of the largest and most influential Civil War battlefields (including Gettysburg) in 1933 at the behest of the Roosevelt administration, a long process began where the agency gradually attempted to unravel these distorted previous understandings of battles and the war at large. It would take decades before the NPS would make strides such as agreeing to point to slavery as the primary cause of the war, which was not made official federal policy until 2000. There was resistance at every step from those who wished to remember the Civil War as a war of purely incompatible ideologies, abstract tariff squabbles, or simply the loaded term of “states’ rights,” rather than a war begun by the desire of one side to keep a race in bondage, and its refusal to stay in a Union that would not allow it to do so. Despite these changes in the interpretation of the cause of the war, there still remains work to be done where the trauma of combat and its aftereffects are concerned. Ample evidence exists of the brutal physical and psychological effects that combat had on Civil War soldiers, yet this information still rarely makes its way into outdoor interpretive signage at parks. While NPS representations of the war at sites like the new Gettysburg Visitor Center have incorporated material that more faithfully portrays the horror of battle and its repercussions, the outdoor wayside signage still comes up short in interpreting aspects of

the war that do not fit into a tidy narrative of heroism and reconciliation. A study of the literature regarding both combat trauma and the evolution of the NPS's interpretive approach to the Civil War can help the understanding of the current state of the agency's approach to the subject.

Civil War memory was of course already forming during and immediately after the conflict, as veterans and politicians promptly began appropriating the conflict for their own purposes. The recollections of soldiers that were written during the war are thus a sterling resource for researchers seeking to understand how these men processed the horrific violence and trauma of warfare. Letters home are also valuable resources, though understandably a degree of self-censorship can likely be expected when a soldier is writing to a correspondent that he does not wish to upset or worry.

However, plenty of letters sent home graphically depict the ordeal of combat and its physical and psychological repercussions. John W. Chase of the 1<sup>st</sup> Massachusetts Light Artillery, for example, wrote to his brother to tell him about not just battlefield violence, but about his own changing mental state. Combat so horrified and changed his mind that when his brother wrote to him informing him of the death of Chase's six year old daughter, Chase could only muster the strength to say that "[your letter] was hard news to me but I have long since given up the idea that death is the worst thing to happen to mortals."<sup>2</sup> Chase also noted that once he and his comrades had experienced combat, approaching battles meant that the surgeons were overwhelmed with men who had come down with a bad case of "bullet fever... [and are] lingering between hope and fear," and rather than scorning these men who could no longer face combat, he instead

---

<sup>2</sup> John S. Collier and Bonnie B. Collier, *Yours for the Union: The Civil War Letters of John W. Chase, First Massachusetts Light Artillery* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 309. Throughout this work, I have stayed faithful to original language and spelling that the soldiers themselves used in their writings.

expressed sympathy for their plight.<sup>3</sup> Chase's letters, and others like his, indicate that the correspondence of Civil War soldiers is an invaluable resource when seeking to explore how those men processed and interpreted the horror and gore of combat, and also indicates that these soldiers were well aware of the psychological repercussions of the fighting, even if medical science had not yet caught up with these reactions and taught them terminology that would be instantly recognizable to a modern audience.

Regimental histories written by Union regiments emerged in droves, though these were mostly written by members of the unit itself, and thus were chiefly romanticized depictions of the war. While they still mentioned the deaths of comrades that all the men of the regiment had known, the horror of combat and its aftereffects were largely understated or ignored altogether. The 12<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts had participated in the utter annihilation of a Confederate brigade at Gettysburg on July 1, 1863, slaughtering hundreds of Rebels from behind the cover of a stone wall as the result of stunning incompetence by Confederate officers. However, the regiment's official history barely mentions the actual act of killing, noting only that the regiment assisted in "the capture of what was left of [General Alfred] Iverson's North-Carolina brigade."<sup>4</sup> Though the author of the history admits that the regiment fired on Iverson's men, he declines to admit the effects that the regiment's fire had on their targets, choosing instead to simply imply that they had inflicted horrific casualties with careful word choice, as he and his comrades captured "what was left" of the Confederate men.

Other regimental histories did make some mention of the devastation of war, however. Andrew J. Boies recalled how his regiment, the 33<sup>rd</sup> Massachusetts, fought in the horrifying Battle of Wauhatchie, waged entirely at night in late October of 1863. He

---

<sup>3</sup> Collier and Collier, eds. *Yours for the Union*, 154.

<sup>4</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Benjamin F. Cook, *History of the Twelfth Massachusetts Volunteers (Webster Regiment)*, (Boston: Franklin Press (Rand, Avery, and Company), 1882), 100-1.

wrote how he and his comrades had climbed a steep incline to even reach the Confederate lines, at which point a vicious hand to hand struggle erupted in the darkness. As the Union men surged into the Confederate lines, “then commenced a scene of heroism and bravery seldom equaled in this war...charging with the bayonet, dealing each other blows over the head with the musket, slashing and cutting with swords...” until the entire battle had devolved into little more than a vicious brawl.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the trauma of wartime violence was not completely absent from regimental histories written decades after the war, but it was by no means a commonplace occurrence in those pages. Many regimental historians simply preferred to focus on the heroism and sacrifice of individual soldiers or the regiment as a whole rather than recalling past instances of terror and horrific deeds, let alone mentioning the very real and appalling sufferings of their wounded and dead comrades.

In addition to these regimental histories in the aftermath of the war, Confederate officers immediately began a movement that would soon be known as the “Lost Cause,” which sought to assure white southerners that their defeat had been the result of the overwhelming and inevitable crush of an industrialized North that knew nothing of honor or martial skill. Rather, the Confederacy’s defeat was a valiant defense of a glamorous, aristocratic society ruled by gentlemen, and their war effort was romantically doomed from the beginning in the face of overwhelming numerical superiority. Confederate General Robert E. Lee, who had created much of this numerical imbalance through his almost rashly aggressive tactics, was quickly lionized as the chivalrous leader of this quixotic defeat.

Confederate Lieutenant General Jubal Early was one of the first and most notable to publish memoirs that trumpeted this viewpoint, and his posthumously published *War*

---

<sup>5</sup> Andrew J. Boies, *Record of the Thirty-Third Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry from Aug. 1862 to Aug. 1865* (Fitchburg, MA: Sentinel Printing Company, 1880), 48.

*Memoirs: Autobiographical Sketch and Narrative of the War Between the States* (1912)

represented a larger, published effort of a narrative that Early had been pushing in speeches and articles since the war ended: that the Confederacy's defeat could be left at the feet of key scapegoats (most notably Confederate Lieutenant General James Longstreet, for his perceived poor performance at Gettysburg), while most of the Confederacy could accept its defeat with pride, as they had fought valiantly before being crushed by a seemingly inevitable Federal tsunami. Early was not the only Confederate general to immediately begin espousing this point of view, but he is regarded as one of the first and loudest proponents of the Lost Cause narrative.

Early's role in the early development of the Lost Cause mythology is still studied in the present day by historians such as Gary Gallagher, whose 1995 lecture "Jubal Early, the Lost Cause, and Civil War History: A Persistent Legacy," represents such an undertaking. In his talk, Gallagher argues that because of the earnestness and persistence of Early's writings, Early can essentially be called one of the true fathers of American Civil War memory. Gallagher laments this warped remembrance:

As much as anyone else, then, Jubal Early constructed the image of the Civil War that many Americans North and South still find congenial... [as a result of Early's Lost Cause arguments], the ultimate goals of Union and freedom for which more than a third of a million northern soldiers perished often have figured only marginally in the popular understanding of the conflict.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, Early's quest to create a memory of the war that emphasized the chivalric nature of at least one side (while simultaneously deemphasizing that side's true cause) in turn helped lead to the creation of a reconciliationist memory of the war that many Americans found to be comforting. This was at the expense of not just remembering the violence of

---

<sup>6</sup> Gary W. Gallagher, "Jubal A. Early, The Lost Cause, and Civil War History: A Persistent Legacy: Frank L. Clement Lecture, Alternative Views of the Sectional Conflict." (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1996), 41.

the conflict, but also grasping the larger racial implications of a war that had been fought to eradicate the scourge of slavery.

Martin Griffin's 2009 analysis of postbellum literature (*Ashes of the Mind: War and Memory in Northern Literature, 1865-1900*) yields similar findings in its study of Civil War era writing. Griffin contends that Northern fictional publications in the wake of the war mostly attempted to focus on heroism and the idea of reconciliatory brotherhood. While not directly correlated to the portrayal of Civil War trauma at cultural institutions like Gettysburg, Griffin's analysis of contemporary literature offers insight into the state of Civil War memory within the realm of popular culture, thus representing an important piece of the historiography of the portrayal of Civil War combat trauma.

The scholarship concerning combat trauma did not begin to emerge in any large amount until about 50 years after the Civil War ended, when the "shell-shocked" casualties of the First World War streaming home from the unimaginable butchery of trench warfare prompted study. However, little of the study during this time period involved or prompted much significant written scholarship, but by the time World War II began, interest in the subject was renewed. American society was overwhelmed with millions of men returning from active duty in the largest war in history, and as such, civilians were desperate to understand what their loved ones had experienced, and how they could help.

Willard Waller's *The Veteran Comes Back* (1944) offered an explanation of what returning World War II veterans were experiencing, and in turn hoped to provide some degree of comfort and comprehension to their loved ones struggling to understand these experiences. Waller makes some mention of earlier wars, but his work stands chiefly as an examination on the effects of World War II on American soldiers. His notions of

dissociation and the acceptability of killing in combat environments are examined more by later authors, but Waller's work is notable in that it stands at the beginning of a timeframe where it was starting to become popular to scrutinize the effects of war on men due to the sheer number of veterans returning home from the largest conflict ever.

Dixon Wecter's *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, also released in 1944, offered a perspective centered on the Civil War. His primary focus is on the sheer logistics of how so many demobilized men got home after Appomattox, from collecting back pay to the return of their arms. However, Wecter also offers brief insight into the psychological aftermath of the war, as "the huge retrospective shape of the war remained, on the horizon of their minds, forever. For most, it was one soul-shaking experience. [Unlike other wars where most soldiers were in rear support positions], the majority of Civil War soldiers...had actually been in battle."<sup>7</sup> The acknowledgement of psychological trauma in Civil War soldiers put Wecter ahead of many of his contemporaries. It can be suggested that this willingness to discuss the trauma of a war long since fought can also possibly be attributed to a desire to better understand the tribulations of soldiers returning from battlefields in Europe and the Pacific.

Wecter also touches on several key points regarding Civil War veterans in particular:

To show their scars to family and the cracker-box circle at the village store was an act of diffident pride; other things, not visible, eluded even the power of words...[s]hell-shock had not yet been heard of, but families recognized that [a veteran] might come home and seem queer for a while. The warp of battle might remain in him a long time.<sup>8</sup>

Wecter's assertion that men exuded a sense of pride, even diffident pride, at their accomplishments in the war was a claim that was later challenged by other historians

---

<sup>7</sup> Dixon Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1944), 154.

<sup>8</sup> Wecter, *Johnny Comes Marching Home*, 154-5.

who used his seminal work as a stepping stone to draw their own conclusions. However, his point that families of soldiers noticed that something was not quite right in their men may seem obvious in a modern context, but represented a channel of thinking regarding Civil War veterans that had not previously been explored.

Wecter also notes how some men seemed to lose a sense of idealism after their return from their front. In doing so, he invokes undertones of World War I's "lost generation" by emphasizing the experiences of men like future Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., who had taken delight in meeting with Ralph Waldo Emerson before the war and discussing grand philosophical ideas. Immediately after the war when the two men finally had the chance to reunite, Holmes found that Emerson "had ceased to be a magician and become rather a bore," as "the threshold of reality he had never crossed" like Holmes and his battle-scarred comrades had done.<sup>9</sup> This type of disillusionment seems out of step with Civil War historiography (including regimental histories) up to that point, most of which had failed to recognize the true psychological costs of the conflict and instead had focused on larger themes of grand battles and reconciliatory tones rather than inner turmoil and disenchantment within veterans.

Thomas C. Leonard's *Above the Battle: War-Making in America from Appomattox to Versailles* (1978) also emphasizes the presence of overly sanitized memories of the war within veterans. "In their memoirs the veterans of the Civil War insisted that they had fought an orderly and humane war. They remembered the form of combat, not the disorientation or terror... [they spoke of] the benefits of war, not the lasting wounds."<sup>10</sup> This argument differs from Wecter's argument that Civil War veterans discussed their experiences with pride, and instead claims that they only discussed

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas C. Leonard, *Above the Battle: War-Making in America from Appomattox to Versailles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 3.



glamorized aspects of their experiences while carefully scrubbing out the unpleasant, traumatic memories. Thus, if the public were to rely solely on the words of aged veterans when interpreting the experience of the war (as they did when veterans were entrusted with the interpretation of Gettysburg specifically), they would likely be receiving a version of events that omitted much of the traumatic components of their service.

Leonard argues that if veterans did speak proudly of their service, they were reluctant to describe the true sights and sounds that they had experienced, as “[i]n their desire for reconciliation between North and South, they offered an outline of the action that made the war seem comprehensible, humane, and efficacious,” and that “there remained a hidden war, one the veterans had not forgotten, but one that even the realists found so mysterious that they could not fully describe it.”<sup>11</sup> The implications of this are that civilians could not hope to ever fully understand what the men had experienced, and that the soldiers deliberately sanitized their memoirs in an attempt to accelerate reconciliation with a previously bitter adversary. Leonard also notes that “[s]oldiers did not speak of the blood and terror simply because literary conventions and squeamish civilians stood in their way.”<sup>12</sup> This highlights a serious impediment to the decompression and healing processes of soldiers, as societal norms likely prevented them from fully discussing their experiences. This presents an additional challenge to researchers, as many of these primary accounts written by veterans can in turn prove to be elusive sources due to this deliberate shielding of the unsettling reality of their experiences.

Gerald F. Linderman’s *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (1987) also helped to establish the social constraints on the

---

<sup>11</sup> Leonard, *Above the Battle*, “in...efficacious,” 11 and “there...describe it,” 24.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

memories of Civil War veterans. He emphasizes that the Civil War soldiers he studies “were imbued with an American-Victorian morality”<sup>13</sup> and his work centers on their evolving perceptions of courage throughout the conflict. Linderman’s arguments echo those of Leonard, as he argues that “returned soldiers felt impelled to turn rapidly from the war” and this “reticence paid its own dividend: families and friends considered it heroic modesty.”<sup>14</sup> This rapid dissociation from the true memories of the war probably cost the soldiers psychologically, as the encouraged and rewarded silence could only further internalize the experiences that many veterans of the war perhaps wanted to discuss. Linderman also states that membership in the Grand Army of the Republic and other veterans organization increased only several decades after the war,<sup>15</sup> seemingly indicating that the men had needed time to process their memories before deciding to settle on the idea of reconciliatory, cleansed memory of their traumatic experiences. Linderman also argues how attitudes changed over the war as soldiers felt more and more helpless as the carnage intensified, and “the [soldier] felt that he had become less an actor in war than an object caught in a process moving forward in ways that would inexorably encompass his own disaster.”<sup>16</sup> This dehumanization of soldiers again suggests both the brutality of World War I and the idea of an industrialized society just on the horizon, ready to strip men of their individuality and render them little more than a mass of pawns in the public memory of that conflict.

Linderman is also one of the first historians to emphasize the corporeal strains of the war, stating that “many returned in precarious physical condition” which contributed

---

<sup>13</sup> Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 268.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

to their difficulties in readjusting to postwar life as they were susceptible to illness and often unable to work consistently.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, he explicitly addresses trauma, both to accentuate how positive wartime experiences could mollify traumatic memories,<sup>18</sup> as well as invoking an idea suggestive of World War I cultural impact (like Wecter had done decades earlier with his Holmes vignette) with statements like “an equally profound impact of the war was that its trauma created a receptivity to the notion that war was life itself, or at least that war was the apt metaphor for the processes of life.”<sup>19</sup> These arguments of how the soldiers dealt with trauma on a personal level are crucial to a better overall understanding of the historiography, and are critical to understanding the idea that, for many, war represented a glamorous and natural passage into manhood.

Reid Mitchell published *Civil War Soldiers* in 1988, which demonstrated a beginning of a school of thought that Civil War soldiers were not that different from veterans of other wars. He argues that “Civil War soldiers were no more immune to disillusionment than soldiers of any other war.”<sup>20</sup> Part of this was an awareness of trauma, as “men feared the very psychological transformation they had to undergo to continue to live [in combat]” and worried that they would render themselves virtually inhuman by the violence required of them on such a consistent basis.<sup>21</sup> Mitchell’s notions seem to reflect a shift in historians’ thinking about the experiences of individual soldiers, as his research indicates an awareness by the soldiers themselves of psychological ramifications that no other historian had explicitly addressed to that point.

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>20</sup> Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 56.

<sup>21</sup> Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers*, 57.

Finally, Mitchell was one of the first Civil War historians to explore how the soldiers actually felt about the killing of their fellow man, and can only conclude that “different men felt very differently about the bloodshed of the Civil War” with some becoming hardened to the idea and others reluctant to “give way to impulses that society had long demanded be kept under strict self-restraint.”<sup>22</sup> Mitchell’s work furthered the scholarship on how soldiers reconciled killing with their Victorian ideals, and thus how these conclusions affected their perceptions of traumatic experiences.

In 1994, Jonathan Shay published *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. A psychiatrist who treated Vietnam veterans, Shay wished to accomplish multiple goals. Not only did he want to indicate the timelessness of psychological combat trauma through the writings of the ancient poet Homer, but also wished to reveal what Homer had written about the subject “that we in psychiatry and psychology have more or less missed.”<sup>23</sup> Shay’s work is impressive and intricate, and its true value is his convincing assertion that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an eternal concern that is as old as war, and will continue as long as trauma exists. It is crucial to not confuse its status as a relatively recent official diagnosis with it being a new problem among veterans, and Shay’s work stands out as an exemplary reminder.

The examination of killing on the battlefield underwent a rigorous examination in 1995 with Lt. Col. Dave Grossman’s *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*. While largely a broad view of humanity’s capacity and willingness to kill, Grossman does focus on the Civil War specifically at points throughout the work. In one instance, he notes how the vast majority of rifles found at Gettysburg after the battle were loaded. This is significant in that they should have only

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Atheneum, 1994), xiii.

been loaded for a fraction of the time on the battlefield due to the length of time and number of steps needed to load them, compared with how quickly they could be emptied with a trigger pull. While this can be conceivably attributed to a variety of factors (men killed while marching into position or while being ordered to hold their fire, etc.), Grossman ventures that this preponderance of seemingly unfired weaponry indicates a reluctance to kill by the men.<sup>24</sup> Whether this aversion to killing was a product of Victorian sensibilities or poor training requires further study, but Grossman's work still offers valuable insight into the process of killing and offers a stepping stone to an examination of how such acts could affect the psyche of veterans.

Eric T. Dean, a doctoral student at Yale University in the early 1990s, was the first scholar to take on psychological trauma in the Civil War as his devoted topic. Through the production of two articles written while researching his dissertation (eventually published as *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (1997)), Dean forged a path explicitly focused on psychological effects that no other Civil War historian had attempted. He drew some criticism from critics who felt he overtly politicized the perceived struggles of Vietnam veterans, but his work on Civil War veterans still represents a hugely valuable contribution. He uses their experiences to indicate that the psychological trauma that Vietnam veterans experienced was not unique, and that all soldiers through history experienced severe strain and trauma. Dean emphasizes the physical strain of war, including extreme temperatures, rampant illness, and incredible marching distances as a major contribution to the stress that eventually contributed to psychological strain and breakdown.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1996), 22.

<sup>25</sup> Eric T. Dean, Jr., *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 47.

Dean's methodology for his final product of a book consisted of examining the pension records of 219 Indiana veterans who were committed to state insane asylums at some point in their lives. He used these records to examine the reasons as to why they or their loved ones were seeking to claim disability for them, as well as why they wished to institutionalize them.<sup>26</sup> Through this work he was able to discern patterns in the language of the time that indicate modern recognized symptoms of PTSD.<sup>27</sup> Throughout his body of work he also cites the debate over predisposition (i.e., pondering whether some soldiers more inclined to adverse psychological effects than others) as a potential contributing factor to trauma.<sup>28</sup> He also emphasizes the medical benefits that Civil War trauma provided, namely how "neurology received a boost in studying the Civil War's many...wound cases, and the post-war medical category of 'neurasthenia' does display a certain similarity to PTSD."<sup>29</sup> Dean's work is vital because it presents the challenge of retroactive diagnosis that can potentially plague a researcher of medical conditions throughout history, and it becomes clear through his conclusions that historians in these cases must use an abundance of qualifying language while implying, more so than overtly stating, their findings.

Also in 1997, Earl J. Hess' *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* presented a stunning examination of the actual combat and its many physical traumas that probably precipitated most of the psychological issues that Civil War veterans experienced, namely through appalling descriptions of the carnage witnessed

---

<sup>26</sup> Dean, *Shook Over Hell*, 100-114.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>28</sup> Eric T. Dean, Jr. "A Scene of Surpassing Terror and Awful Grandeur': The Paradoxes of Military Service in the American Civil War" *Michigan Historical Review* Vol. 21, No. 2 (1995): 39.

<sup>29</sup> Eric T. Dean, Jr. "'We Will All Be Lost and Destroyed': Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the Civil War," *Civil War History* Vol. 37, No. 2 (1991): 153.

and the coping mechanisms (“touch of elbow” in the firing line, etc.)<sup>30</sup> that soldiers relied upon when called on to do horrifyingly unnatural things. Hess also emphasizes that soldiers took the shaping of the memory of the war as their most vital task,<sup>31</sup> but, like other historians, explains that they were somewhat reluctant to do so initially as they struggled to come to terms with their experiences. This initial reluctance was followed by a deluge of romantic and sanitized histories in the 1880s and beyond, which further clouded their true experiences.<sup>32</sup> However, Hess also argues that “the evidence is overwhelming that most soldiers adjusted to the experience of battle” and that the youthful malleability of troops was a key reason as to why they were able to “adjust,” contentions that other historians would surely dispute.<sup>33</sup>

Namely, Anthony Babington would disagree with Hess’ findings, as he argues that doctors of the time frequently complained about being presented with shattered young soldiers not yet psychologically mature enough to withstand the stress of battle.<sup>34</sup> Babington thus contends that the youth of the soldiers made them all the more susceptible to psychological maladies.

The early 2000s also saw additional works, including medical studies, devoted to the effects of combat on the psychological and physical states of Civil War soldiers. Hess’s 2002 work, “Tell Me What the Sensations Are”: The Northern Home Front Learns About Combat,” a chapter in a larger compilation, was one such work. Hess again delves into the visceral sensory overloads that Civil War soldiers endured during combat, with

---

<sup>30</sup> Earl J. Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1997), 111.

<sup>31</sup> Hess, *The Union Soldier*, 167-8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Babington, *Shell-Shock: A History of the Changing Attitudes to War Neurosis* (London: Leo Cooper, 1997), 13.

some expansion on his previous works. Tellingly, he indicates that correspondence to the home front was how most civilians learned about the experiences of combat. Hess notes that many soldiers simply recommended that their friends and family should read a newspaper if they wished to know of combat. Those who advised this, Hess contends, in fact did their comrades a disservice, as journalists consistently failed to inform the home front about the true nature of combat.”<sup>35</sup>

Hess also contends that soldiers felt that corresponding about the bloody realities of the fighting with those they left behind actually helped make them feel connected to their homes.<sup>36</sup> He concludes that all of those on the home front who had been exposed to the traumas of combat basically had no uniform reaction to that knowledge. “Each individual who caught a glimpse of what soldiers called ‘seeing the elephant’ used the experience for whatever purpose was important to their personal lives.”<sup>37</sup> He contrasts this relatively detached engagement of civilians with combat trauma to later generations of Americans (civilians and soldiers) who were so traumatized by wartime experiences (namely World War I’s “Lost Generation) that they made concerted efforts to attempt to eliminate warfare forever.<sup>38</sup>

2003’s *Ripples of Battle: How Wars of the Past Still Determine How We Fight, How We Live, and How We Think* is Victor Davis Hanson’s study of the far-reaching cultural impacts of battles. He discusses the trauma of conflict, stating that violent deaths are more difficult to process for those that are left behind as “men, not gods, are deliberately responsible for the dead of battle...in time we can come to accept the deaths

---

<sup>35</sup> Earl J. Hess, ““Tell Me What the Sensations Are”: The Northern Home Front Learns About Combat,” in *Union Soldiers and the Home Front: Wartime Experiences, Postwar Adjustments* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 125.

<sup>36</sup> Hess, “Tell Me What the Sensations Are,” 124.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.



of loved ones if they fall into chasms or die of infection—less so when we know that their youthful bodies were torn apart by angry humans.”<sup>39</sup> Hanson also coins a term when he notes that “battles...are the wildfires of history” that have far-reaching effects beyond casualty lists and immediate martial effects, as “battles...alter history for centuries in a way other events cannot. And we should remember that lesson both when we go to war and try to make sense of the peace that follows.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, Hanson’s work argues that the trauma of battle impacts human history in ways that few other events can, and not just for the combatants themselves. Consequently, we would be wise to remember how far-reaching these impacts are when pondering whether or not conflict is justified.

Also in 2003, Brent Nosworthy’s *The Bloody Crucible of Courage: Fighting Methods and Combat Experience of the Civil War* sought to more accurately describe the sensations of Civil War combat. Filled with much practical knowledge about weaponry (what artillery ammunition was effective at particular ranges, etc.), Nosworthy’s work also probes into the sensory experiences of combat. He specifically notes that his work stands in contrast to previous works like Hess and Linderman’s in that his own volume seeks to link the visceral experiences of combat with the actual methods (tactics, arms) at the fingertips of the men. In this sense, the work stands as a useful addition to the historiography, though his exploration of the internal experiences of soldiers is not quite as thorough as those of the historians that he seeks to counter.

Charles F. Wooley’s work on the impact of “irritable heart” syndrome and its accompanying palpitations that affected so many soldiers indicate that these physical maladies and stress greatly added to psychological strain, as did the youth of many of the

---

<sup>39</sup> Victor Davis Hanson, *Ripples of Battle: How Wars of the Past Still Determine How We Fight, How We Live, and How We Think* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 13.

<sup>40</sup> Hanson, *Ripples of Battle*, 16-17.

soldiers.<sup>41</sup> Judith Pizarro and her research partners arrived at similar conclusions in her extensive quantitative medical study of pension records which concluded that “the Civil War was the beginning of mental health problems caused by war, labeled ‘irritable heart syndrome’” in an enormous number of veterans.<sup>42</sup> The research of Pizarro and her associates indicates that not only were mental and physical issues present in Civil War soldiers; they were commonplace. Additionally, Pizarro argues that Civil War soldiers, due to their extreme youth in many cases, were in fact more susceptible to the effects of psychological trauma which could manifest itself physically, leading to illness and early death in many instances for veterans.<sup>43</sup> These types of findings stand in stark contrast to the arguments of historians like Hess, who contend that most soldiers simply adjusted to the requirements of the war with few repercussions, and that their youth was an asset, rather than a liability, in the face of trauma.

Edgar Jones’ 2006 article on disorders resulting from war notes that “post-combat syndromes...have proved notoriously difficult to treat largely because veterans and their physicians were often in disagreement about causation.”<sup>44</sup> This also stands as a noteworthy potential impediment for researchers, as not only were the disorders hard to identify during the Civil War, but many times there was uncertainty over whether or not they even existed. Judith Anderson produced an article in 2009 espousing similar views, exploring the notion that the Civil War is generally regarded as “the initial recognition of

---

<sup>41</sup> Charles F. Wooley, *The Irritable Heart of Soldiers and the Origins of Anglo-American Cardiology: The Civil War (1861) to World War I (1918)* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 13-15.

<sup>42</sup> Judith Pizarro et. al., “Physical and Mental Health Costs of Traumatic War Experiences Among Civil War Veterans,” *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 63 (2006): 199.

<sup>43</sup> Pizarro et. al., “Physical and Mental Health Costs,” 193.

<sup>44</sup> Edgar Jones, “Historical Approaches to Post-Combat Disorders,” *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 361 (2006): 541.

how mental health is influenced by war trauma”<sup>45</sup> due to the sheer carnage that was experienced by such a vast number of men so that trauma was rendered unavoidable. Additionally, Anderson notes how public stigma throughout history has helped to stymie discussion of combat trauma, especially post-combat psychological trauma in the form of what would now be recognized as PTSD. She notes that in most instances throughout history, these types of adverse reactions to the effects of combat were almost universally regarded as cowardice, rather than an uncontrollable psychological phenomenon.

Drew Gilpin Faust’s 2008 book, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, represents a sweeping overview of what death meant to Victorian Americans, and how the Civil War changed those perceptions irrevocably. Americans had never seen death on such a scale, and they were stunned by the indecencies visited upon a ritual that they had held to be a sacred rite shared by friends and family. The idea of dying anonymously, far from loved ones, revolted those back home, as well as many of those who were risking this kind of death by soldiering. Faust’s book is vital to an exploration of combat trauma in that the effects of psychological turmoil can easily be extrapolated from her research, as the mental turmoil of veterans was surely only exacerbated by their fears that they might not experience what was recognized throughout pre-war America as a “good death.”

In recent years there have been other works seeking to explore the idea of Civil War trauma, as through Dennis W. Brandt’s 2010 volume that followed the journey of one particular combat veteran as he wound his way from raw recruit to eventual suicide once he was discharged for mental issues, offering enlightening insight into the period’s

---

<sup>45</sup> Judith Anderson, “Haunted Minds’ : The Impact of Combat Exposure on the Mental and Physical Health of Civil War Volunteers,” in *Years of Change and Suffering: Modern Perspectives on Civil War Medicine*, James M. Schmidt and Guy R. Hasegawa, eds. (Roseville, MN: Edinborough Press, 2009), 149.

perceptions of combat and mental health.<sup>46</sup> Brandt's book offers a key contribution in its humanization of the topic its focus on one particular subject and the effects of trauma that he simply cannot endure. By using the correspondence of Private Angelo Crapsey, his comrades, his family, and his physicians, it is possible to see the psychological struggles of a Civil War soldier unfold before ending in dreadful fashion.

Lorien Foote's 2010 volume, *The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Manhood, Honor, and Violence in the Union Army*, focuses on manhood and violence in the war, and offers a bold new research approach. She sought to prove that Civil War camaraderie was more complicated than previously thought, and that soldiers were not 'purified' by their experiences. Her work utilized court-martial records, which offered unrefined testimony that stood in contrast to the often-sterile accounts that were found in correspondence or journals.<sup>47</sup> This approach offers a useful piece of advice for future researchers seeking a more raw approach to soldiers' accounts of their experiences.

Christopher H. Hammer's 2011 study of American soldiers through three wars concludes:

The similarity of symptoms suffered by both nineteenth-century Civil War soldiers and the twentieth-century veterans of very different kinds of combat (in many cases, the physical manifestations of the trauma appeared nearly identical) suggests another important continuity in the way that individuals responded to the stress of battle, regardless of the specifics of the experiences.<sup>48</sup>

This present-day perspective perhaps indicates how far the field has progressed. Modern interpretations of the Civil War tend to present it as a struggle of differing ideologies, devoid of physical and psychological trauma. Its repeated portrayals in twentieth-century pop culture and traditional historiography interpret the war as a conflict with

---

<sup>46</sup> Dennis W. Brandt, *Pathway to Hell: A Tragedy of the American Civil War* (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> Lorien Foote, *The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Manhood, Honor, and Violence in the Union Army* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>48</sup> Christopher H. Hammer, *Enduring Battle: American Soldiers in Three Wars, 1776-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 219.

much death and little gore, and soldiers who came home to quietly return to their stabilized civilian lives, confident that all white soldiers had shown equal manly heroism in the face of danger. However, this assertion is simply not true.

In addition to these works regarding the trauma of combat, much has been written about the evolution of Civil War interpretation in general, as well as the various role of Gettysburg in American culture. The battlefield has grown to be the physical centerpiece of American Civil War memory, and as such, its importance has been analyzed by a wide range of authors and historians. Despite the focus on Gettysburg, interpretation of the war as a whole (primarily at National Park Service sites) is also of course a crucial research subject in order to better contextualize changing ideas and theories over time.

NPS sites typically maintain large collections of documents that are a boon to researchers wishing to delve into their histories. The administrative history of Gettysburg National Military Park was published in 1991 and represents a formalized example of this type of internal document. Written by Harlan Unrau, it reads as a straightforward account of the park's development over time, from its infancy with the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association through the days when the NPS took it over up until the years leading up to the publishing of Unrau's work. The administrative history delves into issues of land management and funding while briefly touching on interpretive authority questions that have challenged the park from its days as a privately owned enterprise through its current days as a holding of the federal government. Any time an institution publishes its own history, care must be taken in analyzing the potential biases of that work, but the GNMP publication offers a good starting point for a researcher hoping for a brief overview of the organizational history of the park.

Additionally, the GNMP archives and library maintains a large collection of documents related largely to interpretive questions. The wayside signage at Gettysburg, especially the current incarnation, was discussed extensively by various park authorities, and their correspondence is preserved in large numbers at Gettysburg's archives. These memos and notes on drafts of prospective signage text offer compelling insight into the many interpretive and logistical challenges that come along with determining new interpretive signage, including concerns over content and word space. Moreover, they incorporated a vetting process with a number of historians, which ensures that all information that does eventually make it into the signage is of sound scholarship.

Edward Tabor Linenthal's *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (1991) sought to explore the relationships that the American public feels with a number of storied sites of conflict, including Gettysburg. His work focuses primarily on the evolving trends of interpretation at sites like the Gettysburg National Military Park, and emphasizes that the NPS essentially needs to act as an intermediary between a large number of constantly evolving stakeholders, all hoping for their interpretive opinion to be the dominant theme at the national park.

Additionally, Linenthal takes special care to note that Gettysburg is a unique setting that can truly seem to captivate people, wrapping them in "the golden mist of American valor" at a place where "contending perceptions of war and martial sacrifice can be ritually expressed."<sup>49</sup> However, he also notes that many Civil War veterans were uncomfortable with the effortless healing that led to reconciliatory tones in the interpretation of the war, and bemoaned the fact that these overtones could make it "all too easy for Northern veterans to accept Southern claims that the war was *really* about arcane constitutional issues such as states [sic] rights, rather than about the moral issue

---

<sup>49</sup> Linenthal, *Sacred Ground*, 118.

of slavery.”<sup>50</sup> These examples point to an American public that is intensely interested in its national parks, as well as a public that has at least a general understanding of how interpretive themes can change and alter as new research or trends become prevalent. However, this public is often simply content to feel a comfortable aura of heroic American masculinity at sites like Gettysburg, rather than delving deeper into their meanings.

Released in 1992, John Bodnar’s book *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* offered a fascinating look at the changing ideas of who wishes to preserve the American past, and how they decide to do so, eventually arguing that official interpretation and ‘vernacular’ memory of the public combines to form public memory. Additionally, he provides the beginnings of a framework for later research by David Blight (*Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, 2001) by asserting that universal praise for the valor of white troops unfortunately shifted the focus of public memory of the Civil War from the new challenges of emancipation to a more comfortable recollection that also negated any discussion of the Confederacy’s desire to protect the institution of slavery.

In 2000, the NPS met at a symposium known as “Rally on the High Ground,” which sought to reorient the Park Service’s thinking on its interpretation of the Civil War. An illustrious roster of speakers participated, and predominant in their discussions was concern over the discussion of slavery at NPS battlefields, as well as how these sites failed to adequately contextualize their respective battles within the larger milieu of the war. The symposium represented a shift in the orientation of the Park Service’s interpretive philosophy, and it revealed a willingness by the agency to change in the face of incomplete analysis of historical events. While the symposium dealt primarily with slavery, larger questions about the reconciliatory tone were raised by multiple speakers,

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 91.

including Blight. While this was chiefly utilized in the context of understanding the war's true cause and conveying that notion to visitors, this idea can be extrapolated to a potential willingness on the part of the NPS to explore other controversial narratives that would interfere with an uncomplicated memory of the war, namely the horrendous violence of the combat itself.

Jim Weeks' *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine* (2003) delves into how the town of Gettysburg (and many outsiders) have been profiting off of the idea and name of "Gettysburg" from the time that the battle actually occurred through the present. Ironically, most would recoil at any intimation of commercializing such hallowed ground, but Weeks puts together a convincing case that this is precisely what has been done to the battlefield and town since the end of the battle. Weeks acknowledges that visitors still very much recognize the solemn nature of the site, but does away with any pretenses that Gettysburg is a place free of commercial intrusion. Weeks also explores the evolving ideas that have dictated acceptable use of the park, from those who felt any type of recreation on sacred ground was vulgar and crass, to those who later despised the presence of reenactors.<sup>51</sup>

However, Weeks crucially argues that previous interpreters of the Gettysburg battlefield appropriated standards that arrogantly sought "to guide visitors in the manner of remembering the great event. At first, memorial devices such as urns...and other abstractions masked war's carnage with classical symbols of heroism and sacrifice."<sup>52</sup> However, curiosity about war itself is a powerful draw for visitors to Gettysburg, and as a result, the usage of combat trauma in interpretive efforts can perhaps be viewed as a vital draw to visitors unable to suppress the natural human

---

<sup>51</sup> Jim Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 220-221.

<sup>52</sup> Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 221.



curiosity in what can be perceived as macabre. Though the usage of the horrors of war and its aftermath must be interpreted in a manner that is sound in scholarship, based on Weeks' assertions it can plausibly be used as a pragmatic allure that draws in visitors to engage with that place in a number of ways.

Also published in 2003 was Thomas Desjardin's *These Honored Dead: How the Story of Gettysburg Shaped American Memory*. Desjardin's work deals primarily with how various stakeholders over the years have grappled for control of the memory of Gettysburg, much like Weeks does in his research. Desjardin, however, emphasizes that this work on the part of the veterans to remember heroism and valor often rendered the battle confusing for a large number of visitors, who were unable to decipher what "really" happened given the cacophony of veterans' groups each claiming the importance of their own contributions. Desjardin's volume is useful in its exploration of how unpleasant aspects of history can often be repressed so easily in exchange for more comfortable narratives, and how this can only contribute to confusion over an event and its legacy, while also hampering interpretive efforts that attempt to correct these types of misunderstandings.

Robert Cook's *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965* (2007) sought to explore how the National Park Service utilized the Civil War's centennial as an interpretive opportunity, but largely missed the mark in doing so. Also building on Blight's earlier work regarding reconciliation superseding the effects of abolition and its racial implications, along with any real mentions of sectional strife, Cook explores how a similar problem plagued the centennial celebration. The Park Service had an ideal opportunity to revive discussion of the racial implications of the war, given the centennial's timing at the height of the civil rights movement. However, commemorative exercises were largely centered on the comfortable themes of white

reconciliation and battlefield heroism, and Cook argues that a golden opportunity to explore more complicated legacies of the war was lost. While battlefield trauma and racial consequences of the war are two distinctly different concepts, Cook's work does unfortunately indicate how willing Americans are to accept uncomplicated versions of the Civil War's existence in collective memory.

J. Christian Spielvogel's 2013 work *Interpreting Sacred Ground: The Rhetoric of National Civil War Parks and Battlefields* is the most recent work that explores in large part the interpretive questions related to violence at national parks. Spielvogel asserts that the NPS is the dominant interpreter of the Civil War in the eyes of the American public, and as such, bears a tremendous responsibility to present a faithful and trustworthy interpretation. He explores several parks during his research, seeking to determine how they handle questions of violence and race. His work reveals that, in his opinion, Gettysburg's outdoor signage too easily succumbs to reconciliationist and/or Lost Cause traditions. These interpretive signs, in turn, offer a limited perspective of Civil War combat that serves to downplay the violence and horror of the fighting. While Spielvogel acknowledges that complete objectiveness is likely impossible due to ideologies that have been embedded for generations, battlefields still stand as sites where battle can be deromanticized through interpretive efforts on the part of the NPS.

The historiographies of both Civil War trauma and the history of interpretation at national battlefields, specifically Gettysburg, are extensive and varied. Acknowledging the fear and trauma that Civil War soldiers experienced is a relatively recent development in discipline, long suppressed or ignored in favor of reconciliatory narratives that instead focused on a dramatic portrayal of war as a test of personal growth and Victorian manhood. However, one only has to read the accounts of the soldiers themselves to realize that they were horrified by detached limbs and dying

friends just as much as men in any other war have been. Additionally, their works express the type of mental strain that modern American audiences typically associate only with wars that have been “unsuccessful,” or unpopular, such as the conflicts in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Civil War soldiers admit to breaking down into tears and having what amount to flashbacks, which modern audiences can easily connect to the experiences of modern soldiers.

The purpose of this work is to put forward the notion that the National Park Service, while open to ideas of change, can still make improvements in the realm of portraying the narrative of the trauma of combat, namely in wayside signage, as a means of dispelling an entrenched reconciliationist memory of the Civil War. While wayside signage at Gettysburg largely exists to simply orient a visitor and give him or her the barest of facts on what occurred at a particular spot on the battlefield, I contend that there exists an opportunity to still accomplish this while also incorporating elements of battlefield trauma into interpretive efforts. As noted above, one needs simply to read the accounts of the soldiers themselves to deduce how their battlefield experiences impacted them. The deaths of friends and the horrific sights, sounds, and smells of the battlefield would have lasting effects on nearly all who witnessed them. The words of the soldiers themselves are one of our most powerful records when exploring the trauma of battle, and will thus serve as an invaluable reference throughout this work.

Furthermore, the work of Eric T. Dean particularly offers compelling evidence that long-term psychological trauma within veterans was widespread, in addition to the more immediate acute effects that soldier would describe in their letters and diaries. His work, along with Jonathan Shay’s methods exploring parallels between antiquity and the present where battle trauma is concerned, offers the most convincing evidence that psychological trauma in war is timeless. As such, this work stands as the basis for

suggested interpretive paths that the NPS can conceivably take that would successfully incorporate this aspect of the Civil War soldier's experience.

Additionally, J. Christian Spielvogel's book stands as a work that had a tremendous influence on this study. Spielvogel's contention that the NPS has embraced reconciliationist and Lost Cause themes throughout its interpretive signage, namely at Gettysburg, does not necessarily put sole blame for this on the Park Service. Rather, Spielvogel lends an air of inevitability to the proliferation of these faulty narratives, as if the Park Service were simply carrying out the interpretive wishes of the American public. However, in certain points through his work, he does attempt to ascribe intent to the actions of the Park Service, with little documentation, and it is there where his arguments seem to veer off course.

The chapters to follow will present an outline of how Gettysburg's interpretive signage has come to be. First, the history of Gettysburg National Military Park will be explored in some depth. A significant cultural site such as Gettysburg will always have a unique history that touches on a number of themes, though the interpretive history of the park itself will be explored in the most depth. The park's initial formation as a private enterprise, funded and backed largely by veterans, influenced its interpretation for years to come, as veterans were free to write their own histories of the battle in a sense. As Blight has argued in great depth, these veterans were largely concerned with reconciliation and a comfortable war memory that ensured that all future Americans would remember the Civil War as a conflict over differing ideals, fought with unquestionable mutual heroism by all white participants.

As a result, early interpretive history at Gettysburg was influenced by this mollifying idea, though wayside interpretive signs were still some years off. Instead, tours of the battlefield by unregulated guides were just one example of the mediums

available as a means of perpetuating these interpretive traditions. The interpretation at Gettysburg underwent a multitude of changes over the years, namely via its acquisition by the federal government during the New Deal, and while these did show a Park Service that was willing to alter its approach and address different narratives and points of emphasis, this history does still indicate an agency that remains largely influenced by outdated reconciliationist traditions that can overshadow uncomfortable memories such as the trauma of the battlefield. This chapter heavily incorporates the administrative history of the Park Service itself, while also utilizing the work of Weeks as a source for exploring how Gettysburg has always been a vessel ripe for commercial exploitation, which in turn renders it a space that is can easily have its spot in popular memory manipulated by any number of stakeholders.

In the following chapter, the history of Gettysburg's wayside signage specifically is addressed. Using the previously addressed literature that delves into the reconciliatory nature of postwar memory, the chapter explores how this attitude eventually worked its way into the official interpretation of the war. Additionally, this chapter includes extensive usage of primary source material as a means of conveying the specific instances of trauma that soldiers experienced. Using the words of the soldiers themselves, coupled with modern analysis, allows for a researcher to determine how similar the men's experiences were to those veterans of more modern wars where trauma was more readily recognized and acknowledged. Furthermore, their experiences are contextualized into the times that they lived in by utilizing the research of scholars, most listed above, who have delved extensively into Victorian mentalities on suffering and death. Finally, the chapter will address how the Park Service was essentially complicit in the perpetuation of reconciliationist memory in its early years as an interpretive force at Gettysburg, and how these early missteps are still being corrected through the current day. All of these

techniques will be used to better determine the current state of wayside signage at Gettysburg, and better understand its successes and shortcomings.

In the chapter following this discussion of the evolution of signage at Gettysburg, four specific instances of wayside signage at the park will be examined as a means of exploring to what extent their interpretive text appears to embrace a reconciliationist narrative. Signage already exists at three of these four sites, with the fourth presenting an interpretive opportunity. These particular incidents were chosen for their relevance to a number of traumatic themes, including the anonymity of death, psychological trauma, the assignment of agency to violence, and the physical agony of a soldier's death. These descriptions will benefit from first-person witness accounts, as well as secondary literature, that detail the nature of Civil War combat. Additionally, alternative signage will be proposed at some of these sites that could conceivably still convey the same original message that the Park Service hoped for while still conveying traumatic narratives. All told, this section will present alternatives to the NPS that can still accomplish the original wayside goals of orienting visitors while also introducing them to the realities of combat and its effects on individual soldiers.

The body of work that has been written on the interpretive efforts at national parks shows a Park Service that is willing to change and incorporate new interpretation as updated scholarship becomes available. At Gettysburg specifically, the history of that institution indicates a park that has always been a source of endless fascination to the American people. While it can be argued that this has largely resulted in a relatively crass commercialization of the park dating back to the days after the battle, there still exists an allure that draws Americans to it in droves, wrapping them in its troublesome "golden mist of American valor." As a result, Gettysburg has become something of a case study that the rest of the national battlefields can look to for interpretive cues. Accordingly, the

NPS at Gettysburg has an exemplary opportunity to present an interpretation of the Civil War that attempts to largely do away with implicit reconciliationist traditions that downplay the horror of combat.

The Gettysburg National Military Park can continue to build on the bold new interpretations proposed at “Rally on the High Ground” and persist in furthering an interpretive effort that attempts to present a holistic portrait of the war and all of the harsh realities that were rendered upon its combatants. This would accomplish several objectives, namely honoring the soldiers who fought in the war itself by presenting a more faithful and honest depiction of their experiences and helping to dislodge a faulty reconciliationist memory of the war that persists in American public memory. Additionally, this approach would allow visitors to the park to understand on a deeply personal level that warfare always means that real human beings, mostly young men, are called upon to both kill, and to die horrifically, in all wars. This could in turn veer visitors towards more nuanced thinking on the subject of the United States becoming involved in future conflicts. A deconstruction of the prevailing romanticization of the Civil War via the Park Service’s interpretive signage would ideally lead to an environment where these types of issues, among others, could be discussed in an open and engaging environment.

## CHAPTER 2

### “The Human Cost and Agony”: A History of Battlefield Interpretation at Gettysburg National Military Park

Gettysburg occupies a unique space in the collective American memory. The small Pennsylvania farm town exists as a site of near-universal recognition among Americans. If an American does not know much about the battle that happened there, then surely they know of the Gettysburg Address, regarded as one of the finest and most important speeches in American history. However, Gettysburg also stands as a site of the American Civil War that is of exceeding importance to those who study the war and its memory. As one of the most-visited national military parks under the management of the National Park Service, Gettysburg National Military Park represents a space where many Americans will receive perhaps their only exposure to NPS historic interpretation of the Civil War.

As a result, Gettysburg National Military Park’s charge is to present an interpretation that gives a holistic and well-rounded understanding of the conflict to visitors who may be experiencing their only Civil War park. Gettysburg’s new Museum and Visitor Center (opened in 2008) has proven to be a resounding success with its incorporation of a more historically accurate emancipationist theme that seeks to dislodge the mythologized remnants of the Lost Cause and reconciliationist traditions that have dominated American memory of the war since the guns stopped firing.<sup>53</sup>

Additionally, the new Visitor Center at Gettysburg clearly presents a more comprehensive portrait of the war as a whole. It clearly attributes the cause of the war to slavery, and also places the battle of Gettysburg itself into a larger military history

---

<sup>53</sup> For detailed insight into how the language of NPS signage reflects these interpretive traditions, *Interpreting Sacred Ground* by J. Christian Spielvogel (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2013) represents an outstanding overview of the topic, though it may lack extensive information on the actual history of how these linguistic traditions were formed.



milieu. This contextualization more fully illustrates the essence of its importance in the grander scheme of the war. Changes towards a more comprehensive understanding of the conflict are largely due to a shift in the NPS's interpretive focus.

These concerns over the lack of slavery's presence in NPS interpretation were heavily vocalized by Representative Jesse Jackson, Jr. of Illinois in 2000. His qualms over the lack of unified interpretation within the NPS were taken seriously by the rest of Congress, which quickly compelled Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt to mandate that the NPS present slavery as the primary cause of the Civil War at sites under its control.<sup>54</sup> As a result, Gettysburg's new interpretive efforts at its Visitor Center present a significant focus on the history of the institution of slavery in the United States. Furthermore, the design of the Visitor Center exists as an introductory structure designed with the full intention of having guests follow up their visit with battlefield experiences. Former Park Superintendent John A. Latschar, shortly before the new facility opened, went so far as to say that "[o]ur objective is to compel people to get out on the battlefield...if people come to the museum but don't go on the battlefield, we will have failed."<sup>55</sup>

Thus, the importance of exterior interpretation also occupies a key role in a new interpretation of the battle. Gettysburg Foundation president Robert C. Wilburn contended on the eve of its opening that the new museum "...won't pull any punches. We want people to understand how terrible the war was" and seemed hopeful that this would in fact be the case.<sup>56</sup> Echoing Wilburn's sentiments, Civil War historian Wayne E. Motts also theorized that the new museum could conceivably deter future generations from

---

<sup>54</sup> Bruce Babbitt, Foreword to *Rally on the High Ground: The National Park Service Symposium on the Civil War*, edited by Robert K. Sutton. (Eastern National, 2003), v.

<sup>55</sup> Dave Caldwell, "At Gettysburg, Farther From the Battle but Closer to History," *New York Times*, March 12, 2008, H30.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, H30.

deciding on violence as an easy option if previous conflicts like the Civil War were presented as scenes of unsettling carnage and trauma.<sup>57</sup>

The new museum certainly does portray the cost of the war in graphic terms. However, Latschar's hope that the visitors to the site will venture beyond the museum raises questions over whether the park's wayside exhibits also convey the horror of warfare and the trauma of combat as it appeared to individual soldiers that the museum has strived to depict in its internal exhibits. The NPS wayside exhibits throughout the park are, in the words of Park Supervisory Historian Scott Hartwig:

Primarily informational; they let visitors know what happened at that particular location that was significant. That is their primary mission. Since they are so brief in the content they can present they don't support or advocate any particular narrative. Waysides do not stand alone. They are only a single tool in the interpretive tool box. To properly place them in context it is necessary to see the entire experience a visitor has when they come to Gettysburg.<sup>58</sup>

Hartwig's point that the wayside exhibits cannot exist in a vacuum is an important one. If visitors are to gain a comprehensive understanding of the events of the Gettysburg, then they surely must experience all interpretive mediums that the NPS offers. This is an ideal outcome, though, and every visitor experience is different. There is certainly additional opportunity to convey language of violence and trauma while still offering mostly car-bound visitors the general facts regarding troop movements and major events at NPS wayside exhibits.

The evolution of GNMP's ownership and mission mirrors changes in its interpretive efforts over the 150 years since the battle and reveal trends that have led to the current interpretive setting at the park. The immediacy of the recognition of Gettysburg's importance after the battle makes it a fascinating example of a Civil War

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., H30.

<sup>58</sup> Scott Hartwig, e-mail message to author, May 8, 2013.

military park, while also presenting unique perspectives on evolving attitudes towards interpretation within its boundaries.

The efforts to preserve the land on which the Battle of Gettysburg was fought began as a grassroots effort among local citizens. Led by David McConaughy, an “imaginative Republican lawyer from Gettysburg”<sup>59</sup> who took it upon himself to immediately begin acquiring lands that had seen combat during the three days of fighting, Gettysburgians and the nation at large immediately realized that something seismic had occurred at this Pennsylvania farm town. McConaughy and other local dignitaries recognized the place that the community could hold in history, and found themselves pulled in by a “primal attraction to [a scene] of destructive power... [a]nd it is this attraction that has led people like [McConaughy] to feel instinctively the urge to sanctify these places [and other sites of conflict].”<sup>60</sup>

McConaughy and his colleagues felt that the site of something so momentarily horrific and bloody needed to be saved. These initial individual efforts to preserve the grounds of combat cried out for further organization as a means of securing additional support and funding. McConaughy took these first steps upon himself just weeks after the firing had ceased by writing to friends and requesting that his fellow “patriotic citizens of Pennsylvania...unite with me in the tenure of the sacred grounds of this Battle Field” but requested that contributions to his efforts at preservation be limited to ten dollars per citizen, so that all could claim an equal share in the noble undertaking.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> John S. Patterson, “From Battle Ground to Pleasure Ground: Gettysburg as Historic Site,” in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, eds. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 132.

<sup>60</sup> Linenthal, *Sacred Ground*, 92.

<sup>61</sup> McConaughy to Ingersoll & others, August 19, 1863, in David McConaughy Correspondence, Vertical Files, Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association, GNMP Library, as cited in Harlan D. Unrau, *Gettysburg: An Administrative History* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1991), 5.

McConaughy moved fast and had purchased tracts that included sections of the Round Tops and Culp's Hill by mid-August of 1863, but much remained to be done if he had hopes of keeping the battlefield much as it had been during the days of the fighting. Gettysburg was a community subject to change like any other, and he realized the need for preservation as a means of preventing changing uses for the space. The preservationist group that McConaughy had begun to foster eventually became a formal organization. Founded as the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association (GBMA) in September of 1863 and chartered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in April of 1864, the GBMA would serve as the first organized effort to preserve the grounds at Gettysburg, and was noteworthy in its status as a privately-run and funded enterprise.

While created with seemingly pure and apolitical motives of perpetual preservation, the efforts of the GBMA possibly represented what Edward Linenthal describes as an attempt to “freeze the meaning of Gettysburg in a simple and enduring patriotic orthodoxy.”<sup>62</sup> This was in preparation for what he contends was a narrative tradition “developed in the 1880s as Americans sought to recover the epic excitement of the Civil war and to forget its horror” thus leading to a public memory of the war that was dominated by reconciliationist sentiment.<sup>63</sup> This immediate focus on mutual white heroism attempted to push any unpleasant or complicated memories of the war to the rear (or beyond the realm) of the American consciousness. Fellow scholar Jim Weeks agrees with this assertion, stating that:

From postwar America's rapid transformation emerged shared feelings among veterans that all who had proved their manhood during the war were brothers in arms. As “alien strains” of eastern Europeans, certified as inferior by science of the day, poured into the country, veterans could share pride in the myth that Anglo-Saxon heroism forged a powerful new America. At the same time,

---

<sup>62</sup> Linenthal, *Sacred Ground*, 90.

<sup>63</sup> Linenthal, *Sacred Ground*, 90.

relentless industrialization bred nostalgia for the passing of agrarian life that helped Northerners lament the Old South's demise.<sup>64</sup>

This common gallantry that united white veterans of both sides against the incoming hordes of foreigners would work its way into the interpretation at Gettysburg.

McConaughy and his associates, however, were primarily concerned with preservation and were not yet busying themselves with these interpretive quandaries.

One of McConaughy's contemporaries played an equally important role on the publicizing of Gettysburg as a site of sacrifice and heroism, worthy of genteel honor. John Bachelder was a multi-talented artist who became one of the battlefield's first historians in the years following the battle. He had arrived in Gettysburg just days after the battle and never really left, "promoting Gettysburg as the focal point of his trade in images" as the artist pored over extensive official and unofficial records and created now-famous maps of the grounds of combat.<sup>65</sup>

Through numerous interviews with veterans of the battle and his own sojourns over its grounds, Bachelder gradually become one of the first true historians of the park, earning the admiration of Union and Confederate veterans alike. Bachelder would work for years on his precise and attractive maps of the battlefield, doing work that many veterans felt was necessary in the place of a bureaucratic War Department that could not decipher such a jumble of information.<sup>66</sup> Jim Weeks argues that these martial works of art had an adverse effect on the memory of the battle. Noting how Bachelder himself advertised his own maps as "well adapted to framing and [forming] a suitable ornament for the...dining or sitting room," Weeks in turn laments how "the map transformed the

---

<sup>64</sup> Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 106.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>66</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg: An Administrative History*, 48.

monstrous conflict into an edifying image appropriate for the parlor.”<sup>67</sup> By making the battlefield of horrors palatable for a wide audience by sanitizing the bloodshed into a representative work of art, Bachelder had succeeded in creating a more comfortable memory of the famous battle with which American consumers could freely engage as they stood in awe of the heroism of its participants.

This type of purification and appreciation of the conflict for its themes of manly heroism was of course not solely limited to this type of mass-produced military artwork. Historian David Blight is well known for his groundbreaking work arguing that this type of reconciliatory tone in the wake of the war helped set back American race relations and prevented Americans from truly grappling with what the war had accomplished once it had ended slavery. By instead choosing to steer the public memory of the Civil War towards a less complicated legacy of universal white valor in an instance of sectional misunderstanding and chastisement, white Americans were able to focus on reconciliation with fellow whites while continuing to ignore the elephant in the room of millions of newly freed black Americans who wished to now assume their rightful place in American society.<sup>68</sup> Thus, in the immediate aftermath of the war (and even during it, as in Linenthal’s argument), white Americans worked quickly to assert a relatively comfortable memory of the conflict that emphasized white reconciliation at the expense of an acknowledgement of either the abolition of slavery or of the innate horror of the everyday existence of a Union or Confederate soldier.

Blight is careful to emphasize that not all white Americans were comfortable with this approach to popular memory of the conflict. Indeed, he writes of Union veteran Thomas Barr, who in a speech some years after the war lamented that the South’s

---

<sup>67</sup> Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 23.

<sup>68</sup> For more on Blight’s work, his most thorough exploration of this idea is of course *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

“treason’ should have been ‘so punished...that it might never come to be eulogized as true loyalty.’”<sup>69</sup> Barr argued that the former Confederacy had been allowed back into the fold too easily, and that its crimes should have been punished far more severely. However, Blight describes those who stated similar opinions as voices of “dissent” in the face of an overwhelmingly popular tone of reconciliation in the wake of the conflict. McConaughy and the GBMA’s efforts to preserve the battlefield at Gettysburg created an opportunity for this dominant reconciliationist memory of the conflict to be tied to a particular place of significance that was extremely well-preserved, though whether this precise scenario was what motivated McConaughy’s actions is speculative at best.

The GBMA continued to supervise the stewardship of the battlefield in the decades following the war. Attempts at interpretation continued, including the publishing of a guidebook in 1873, *Gettysburg: What to See, And How to See It*, written by Bachelder.<sup>70</sup> In the volume, Bachelder remarked how the field could be viewed at the most leisurely pace, on foot, on horseback, or even by street car, and, for those most affluent of visitors, “a carriage, in which the more prominent places can be readily visited, and studied” could be easily procured.<sup>71</sup> In this attempt to make the park sound like a bucolic pleasure ground, built for unhurried enjoyment and recreational purposes, Bachelder was contributing to an early perception of the battlefield not as a place of horror and slaughter that should be lamented and regretted. Rather, this type of travel advice seems to suggest Gettysburg as a park in the truest sense of the word, where

---

<sup>69</sup> Thomas F. Barr, *Memorial Address of Col. Thomas F. Barr, Judge Advocate, USA, Stillwater, Minnesota, May 30, 1879* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society), 4-5. As cited in David Blight, “Decoration Days: The Origins of Memorial Day in North and South,” 121, in *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture*, edited by Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>70</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 44.

<sup>71</sup> John B. Bachelder, *Gettysburg: What to See, And How to See It* (New York, 1873), 15-18. As cited in Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 45.

agreeable study of bloodless struggle could be rendered a pseudoacademic pursuit while enjoying a pleasant horseback ride.

Bachelor's shilling for the park as something of a pastoral retreat renders it simple to realize how reconciliatory themes that marginalized the violence of the conflict were already making themselves apparent in the post-war years, at the expense of the true descriptions of both the war's causes as well as its horrific carnage. The GBMA did play a role in this early interpretive effort, and John M. Vanderslice's history of the organization, written in 1899, details much of the history of that organization while also including a lengthy and general overview of the events of the battle itself. Vanderslice's work offers a good summary of the GBMA's history, but is also permeated by writing that mythologizes the combatants of Gettysburg and renders both sides into interchangeable heroes fighting for abstract or unnamed causes.

When writing on Pickett's Charge, for example, Vanderslice compares the Virginians advancing towards Cemetery Ridge to the famous 300 Spartans at Thermopylae, and laments that the North Carolinians at their side have been relegated to a secondary (and thus forgotten) role not dissimilar to that of the Spartans' Thespian allies.<sup>72</sup> In writing the history of a horrific battle that was lost by the Confederacy, Vanderslice had transformed the agents of a legendary military miscue into echoes of Greek mythology; romantic warriors making one last stand for what they felt was right. The invocation of this heroic and idealized perception of martial manliness suggests an American (Vanderslice, in a powerful position to dictate interpretation at Gettysburg) who was ready to simply acknowledge that both sides had fought valiantly, and that all that could be done at the battlefield park was to celebrate this mutual gallantry.

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 267.



In 1878 Vanderslice had attended a Pennsylvania GAR reunion that happened to be held at Gettysburg, and became enamored with the battlefield and its significance.<sup>73</sup> It seems that he saw an opportunity to create a space where all veterans, Union and Confederate, could join in celebrating a tradition of mutual heroism. Humorously writing in the third person, Vanderslice recalls his first encounter with the organization during that reunion, recalling that “the scope of possibility of the Memorial Association attracted his attention, as did the apparent apathy or inactivity of those controlling it” and immediately began inquiries into placing the organization under GAR control, where he felt it could be far better managed.<sup>74</sup>

By 1880 Vanderslice had “[engineered] the takeover of the GBMA board,” and an era of Northern monument construction soon began as he convinced his fellow Union veterans that Gettysburg was more than just a battlefield, and instead imagined it as a sacred ground representative of the entire war where all (presumably white) soldiers could be celebrated for their service and heroism.<sup>75</sup> At this time, Bachelder took over one of the directorships of the GBMA from Vanderslice as well, and would be one of the most visible leaders of the organization, though Vanderslice would still work within the organization.<sup>76</sup> By the time the 1880s were beginning Gettysburg had already fundamentally changed, with visitation by pleasure-seeking Americans transforming “an ineffable scene of human wreckage, described with adjectives such as *revolting*, *sad*, and *ghastly*...into a pleasant site for genteel touring.”<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Patterson, “Battle Ground to Pleasure Ground,” 135.

<sup>74</sup> Vanderslice, *Gettysburg Then and Now*, 364.

<sup>75</sup> Patterson, “Battle Ground to Pleasure Ground,” 135.

<sup>76</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 47.

<sup>77</sup> Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 35.

Weeks remarks that as McConaughy ceded control to Vanderslice and the GBMA, he could look back on a legacy where he had “[initiated] the battlefield’s transformation from the hell experienced by participants into a landscape of edifying views infused with the heroic.”<sup>78</sup> National Park Service Chief Historian Robert K. Sutton has remarked that periods of reconciliation like the era of Union monument building that emerged simultaneously with Vanderslice’s ascension to control over the battlefield enabled veterans from both sides to “take ownership of the battle and erect monuments on its ‘sacred ground’...while at the same time avoiding any discussion of what they were fighting about.”<sup>79</sup> Additionally, this memorialization became a vital component of establishing a narrative where the Confederates had fought bravely for a worthy cause, while also granting “ownership of the battle” to both sides.<sup>80</sup> This shared ownership of the event and its memory allowed both sides an equal stake in how the events of early July 1863 (and by extension, the events of the war itself) would be remembered by most Americans.

Joan Zenzen contends that this altering of the landscape via widespread memorialization was really an attempt to preserve areas that were heavily wooded and/or rural, and as such could easily become overgrown and effectively forgotten.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, she argues that this sanctifying act put Americans, North and South, in touch with a patriotic past dominated by memory of the Revolutionary generation. She continues to state that “[t]his emerging nationalism also helped salve the emotional and

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>79</sup> Robert K. Sutton, “Commemorating the American Civil War in National Park Service Battlefields,” in *The Heritage of War*, edited by Martin Gegner and Bart Ziino (New York: Routledge, 2012), 109.

<sup>80</sup> Sutton, “Commemorating the American Civil War,” 109.

<sup>81</sup> Joan Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), xx.

psychological wounds between sides.”<sup>82</sup> Union and Confederate veterans could unite in this process of preserving certain battlefields like Gettysburg that were of agreed mutual significance to both sides, and scatter monuments across them. In doing so, they were not only saving the sites from further development, but the very act of commemoration itself was a celebration of a shared patriotic heritage that the white veterans could now focus on rather than unpleasant and divisive legacies of violence and the difficult challenges brought on by emancipation.

Under the guidance of Vanderslice and other new members of the GBMA, an era of Northern reunions at the Gettysburg battlefield soon began from the 1880s onwards, initiating a long tradition of these triumphant celebrations.<sup>83</sup> Confederate veterans would soon be invited as well, so that they could clasp hands with their former adversaries and join those men in creating a memory of the war that focused on a celebration of the valor of its participants, rather than recognition of racial repercussions or the stark realities of the combat that they had participated in. Vanderslice would become one of the dominant forces behind these initial interpretations of the history of the battle at the park while it was still a privately-owned entity, but Gettysburg was due for changes.

The role of the GBMA and its operations in the years immediately following the war can at times be a bit murky, but Vanderslice does an admirable job of detailing the process. He lamented that no records of a meeting of the organization were logged until 1872, almost a decade after the GBMA’s formation, and that a five year gap existed in records-keeping from mid-1874 until mid-1879.<sup>84</sup> Since the GBMA had come under control of the GAR, Vanderslice instituted a program where GAR posts around the

---

<sup>82</sup> Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas*, xx.

<sup>83</sup> Sutton, “Commemorating the American Civil War,” 135.

<sup>84</sup> Vanderslice, *Gettysburg Then and Now*, 363.

country could buy “shares” in the management of the park, and a board was soon elected, with Bachelder and Vanderslice among its members.

Vanderslice’s pilgrimage to the field a few years before was not forgotten, and “the Grand Army of Pennsylvania encamped upon the field for a week each summer from 1880 to 1894,”<sup>85</sup> perpetuating the trip that had alerted him to the dire need for fresh management blood within the GBMA. Additionally, in 1880, Vanderslice ceded control of the GBMA to Bachelder, who by that time was regarded as the preeminent authority on the history of the battle and began the construction of roads on the field, anticipating massive visitorship.<sup>86</sup>

As the 1880s ended, changes were afoot at Gettysburg. The federal government had begun to take an interest in establishing national parks at some battlefields that had been privately maintained and interpreted. The administrative history of Gettysburg notes that in 1889, “the GBMA board, recognizing the calls for marking the Confederate lines at Gettysburg as part of the national reconciliation effort, adopted a resolution to that effect.”<sup>87</sup> From a practical preservationist point of view, the decision to also save Confederate lines made sense, as modern observers have noted that the effort to preserve only the Union side of the lines opened up much of the rest of the park (that had been Confederate lines) to private development, some of it irrevocably so.<sup>88</sup> However, this does not appear to have been one of the preeminent concerns to these early interpreters. The nation had decided that it was time to put the horrors of the war behind them, as

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 368.

<sup>86</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 47. Portion on road construction from Vanderslice, *Gettysburg Then and Now*, 368.

<sup>87</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 61.

<sup>88</sup> Amy Worden, “A Gettysburg battle plan: the field as it once was,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 24, 2013, accessed June 26, 2013. [http://articles.philly.com/2013-06-24/news/40148272\\_1\\_cyclorama-battlefield-national-park-service](http://articles.philly.com/2013-06-24/news/40148272_1_cyclorama-battlefield-national-park-service).

well as any uncomfortable discussions regarding its legacy outside of martial heroism, and simply make a unified effort to move on agreeably.

Gettysburg was to be wrapped up in these changes as Bachelder dove headfirst into soliciting information from Confederate veterans, lamenting how no roads at all existed on the Confederate lines, but still stating that “[a]s an ornamental battlefield, Gettysburg has no equal in any country.”<sup>89</sup> Speaking of the site as a decorative place appropriate for recreational enjoyment could indicate how Bachelder and the GBMA were perfectly willing to have Gettysburg stand as a decorative space where tales of bravery could be repeated again and again. This was preferable to an acknowledgement of the battlefield as a space of contested memory, where difficult conversations regarding the legacy of the human suffering wrought by the war and the battle could exist.

Historian Jim Weeks notes that at Gettysburg towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “the Department of Pennsylvania GAR remarkably staged volcanic sham battles as a regular feature at its annual Gettysburg encampment. Often conducted in conjunction with other Gettysburg reunions and dedications...the battles attracted thousands of spectators.”<sup>90</sup> Weeks stresses that this “combat cleansed of horrors” could help to call to mind violent experiences within veterans, but that this was not necessarily viewed as a negative by people of the time.<sup>91</sup> He attributes this to their disappointment in a “society growing increasingly atomized,” and that at their prized reunions and gatherings at Gettysburg the veterans could “reengage the youthful camaraderie of war without the tension.”<sup>92</sup> These battles may have assisted the veterans in evoking these powerful memories of their younger years. However, it is not difficult to envision civilian

---

<sup>89</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 62.

<sup>90</sup> Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 103.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-4.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

onlookers, especially children, associating a battlefield with a display of fireworks pageantry more suitable for a joyous Fourth of July celebration, when in reality it had been a site of horrific bloodshed.

Eventually, the federal government continued taking more of an interest in Civil War battle sites, and eventually stepped in at Gettysburg, largely over the concerns regarding battlefield grounds on private land, as well as a remaining lack of Confederate interpretation.<sup>93</sup> Legislative and legal wrangling still needed to be carried out before the lands could officially be turned over to federal control, but in preparation for the move, the government appointed a commission of three veterans in 1893: Bachelder, Union General W.H. Forney, and Confederate Colonel John P. Nicholson.<sup>94</sup>

Nicholson's inclusion indicates how those in control of the park were gaining more of an interest in presenting the Confederate perspective of the battle, which suggested an inevitable step towards reconciliation once they were able to preserve and interpret the physical space where Confederate veterans had fought with identical valor to Union troops, their motives and cause relatively free from scrutiny. Timothy Smith argues that the Gettysburg battlefield commission, reliant on veterans' accounts for better or for worse, established much of what is still understood today as basic interpretations of the battle. He also laments how these initial misunderstandings perpetuated themselves as "aged veterans' memories began to fail and their pugnaciousness increased" and that when mixed with egos, this made for an environment rife with distorted memory.<sup>95</sup> Through their increased certainty that what they done and experienced was truthful, even as these stories surely changed over time,

---

<sup>93</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 67.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>95</sup> Timothy B. Smith, *The Golden Age of Battlefield Preservation: The Decade of the 1890s and the Establishment of America's First Five Military Parks* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee, 2008), 165, 26.

these veterans were directly contributing to misinterpretations of the battle's occurrences and subsequently the realities of combat.

As the battlefield commission performed their work on the farmland surrounding Gettysburg, the bill to finally establish the battlefield as a national park in late 1894 was introduced by New York Representative Daniel E. Sickles, a former Union general who had virtually destroyed his own corps at Gettysburg through either a monumental blunder, or a shrewd realignment of his troops, depending on who was asked. He had lost a leg in the battle, and had previously served on the board of the GBMA and as the chair of the New York State Monuments Commission for over two decades, and continued this memorialization effort into his post-war legislative career. In February of 1895, Sickles succeeded at this legislative task, and the Gettysburg National Military Park was created. The creation of the park effectively dissolved the GBMA and transferred its landholdings and debts to the federal government.<sup>96</sup>

The 1890s, Timothy Smith remarks, brought their own set of challenges to America and were a time where:

The North and the South developed new issues other than the racial questions that had so divided them. White Americans thus began displaying unity while emphasizing the courage, bravery, and honor of Civil War soldiers with monuments, statues, and joint reunions. But the chief symbols of this conciliatory and commemorative era were the military parks.<sup>97</sup>

The sites where the battles had occurred were taking on a meaning larger than themselves, and as veterans began to recognize the need to memorialize what they had done as they grew older, permanent landscapes like the battlefield parks became the most popular agents of memory. Furthermore, the idea of reconciliation strengthened

---

<sup>96</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 77-78.

<sup>97</sup> Smith, *The Golden Age*, 5.

during this time period, as gestures like inviting Confederate veterans to be keynote speakers at Memorial Day celebrations became more and more widespread.<sup>98</sup>

Christopher Waldrep argues that “[a]t [this] crossroads of Gilded Age masculinity and pragmatism, Civil War memory became an instrument for men seeking to remake themselves through violence” which would later manifest itself when American doughboys in World War I expressed a “revitalized interest in Civil War military heroism.”<sup>99</sup> When it became apparent that a new war was necessary in the minds of their leaders, military-age American men reached back to a previous generation and saw a history of gallantry and noble sacrifice. Their experiences in the trenches of Europe would prove to be extremely disillusioning, but before that, a romanticized version of Civil War combat provided the impetus to get them into uniform and overseas by a populace that had suppressed the displeasing aspects of the memory of a war that had killed hundreds of thousands in horrific fashion.

G. Kurt Piehler also echoes these sentiments through the prism of park architecture, arguing that:

The widespread use of classicism [in park monumentation] contributed to the movement to gloss over the brutality of the Civil War...it reflected an effort to minimize and rationalize the tremendous suffering [the] conflict caused. To a large degree, it encouraged those who wanted to make modern warfare acceptable as it emphasized the heroic nature of battle and of dying for one’s country.<sup>100</sup>

By using statues and monuments that evoked the timeless battle narratives of the Greeks and Romans, Piehler argues that those who chose these designs took a considerable step towards accelerating reconciliation between the two sides while also presenting a

---

<sup>98</sup> G. Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington: Smithsonian University Press, 1995), 65-6.

<sup>99</sup> Christopher Waldrep, *Vicksburg’s Long Shadow: The Civil War Legacy of Race and Remembrance* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), xv.

<sup>100</sup> Piehler, *Remembering War*, 86.



memory touchstone that allowed future generations to look back at past conflicts as venerable opportunities to distinguish oneself and attain manhood, rather than horrific orgies of killing. Further, Piehler argues that when the war was remembered via local monumentation especially, “[death] and destruction were not ignored; they retained a heroic quality and were represented as serving a transcendent purpose. Monuments depicted dying and wounded soldiers as remaining steadfast to the end.”<sup>101</sup> If veterans could not totally wipe away the horrific consequences of the war, they could at least portray them in as favorable of a light as possible.

The transition from privately organized and run entity to a federal holding was relatively seamless for Gettysburg. One of the primary reasons that the field was of interest to the War Department was the possibilities that it could hold as a sort of outdoor classroom for aspiring officers.<sup>102</sup> The War Department especially favored the grounds at Gettysburg, as they represented a large space that had, in large part, been preserved from development and thus provided ample camping ground for large bodies of either Army or National Guard troops, as well as a relatively untouched version of a battlefield ripe for tactical and strategic lessons.<sup>103</sup>

Forney and Bachelder died before the park was officially passed to the War Department, so Nicholson, the sole remaining member of the original battlefield commission, was soon joined by William M. Robbins and Charles A. Richardson, a Confederate and a Union veteran, respectively.<sup>104</sup> The men were now to be formally known, as of 1895, as the Gettysburg National Military Park Commission (GNMPC).<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> Piehler, *Remembering War*, 72.

<sup>102</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 86.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>104</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 91.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

They would continue the commission's work of establishing battle lines including granting, for the first time, the opportunity for Confederate veterans to establish their own monuments on the battlefield.

Robbins expended much of his energies writing the narratives for the Confederate markers" while also attempting to have various Confederate veterans come to Gettysburg and help him mark positions.<sup>106</sup> Robbins excelled at this task, and "by the time he finished, Confederate positions were more effectively marked than their Union counterparts, albeit far less grandly."<sup>107</sup>

The fact that only the Confederate member of the commission was tasked with dealing with the Confederate interpretation and preservation can raise suspicions over objectivity in these early interpretive efforts. Additionally, it begs the question over whether or not these early interpretive efforts truly represented the reconciliationist mood of the country at large. If the two sides had truly put aside their differences, did it really make a difference who was objectively studying the accounts of others and distilling this information into palatable signage? To the veterans of Gettysburg, it did seem to matter, and it was easier for those who had recollections of the fighting to communicate with someone who had been on their side. Interpretive planning at Gettysburg was still very much in its infancy, but was already exhibiting signs that the work of reconciliation was still largely simple lip service.

The park at this stage was receiving mostly positive reviews, a place of natural beauty that could be appreciated as "a lesson to the military student and an inspiration to the patriot."<sup>108</sup> Early interpretation was focused on creating a usable outdoor

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>107</sup> Kenneth E. Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 131.

<sup>108</sup> John B. McPherson, "Battlefield of Gettysburg," *Cosmopolitan*, XXIII (October, 1897), 624. As cited in Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 97.

classroom for the military, but was also concerned with an arena where tourists of the day could feel content that they were experiencing a sanitized site of heroic deeds. The fact that these deeds had involved the infliction of death and suffering does not appear to have been a source of concern for these early historians, and the tourists seemed content with this presentation as well. Kenneth Foote refers to this placid portrayal of the conflict as a “nostalgic notion of the war,” and channels Oscar Handlin when he argues that by taking hold of this idea, “Americans grotesquely distorted the actuality of the war as it had been, and the continued preservation of that symbol also obscures the surviving problems left by the war...slavery, race, and the type of society that the United States wished to become.”<sup>109</sup> In short, a refusal to grapple with these very real issues contributed to an early understanding of Gettysburg as a place of patriotic pride with seemingly little effort or thought devoted to why, exactly, the soldiers had been there, and what indignities and agonies they had truly suffered.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century began, Gettysburg continued to flourish as a site of tourism and remembrance. Jim Weeks notes how veterans on the eve of the 1900s lamented that American culture seemed headed for a state where “violent spectator sports...strenuous outdoor activity, exotic dances, and parks designed for amusement instead of uplift.”<sup>110</sup> Pleasure-seeking Americans traveling to the town were “middle-class tourists, wage-earning excursionists, and veterans – [who] brought vitality to Gettysburg lacking in their genteel predecessors.”<sup>111</sup> These citizens who flooded the town seemed intent on enjoying the experience as a vacation, rather than a solemn pilgrimage to a site of blood-soaked sacrifice. Weeks further remarks that while middle-class visitors of the time could

---

<sup>109</sup> Kenneth E. Foote, *Shadowed Ground*, 129.

<sup>110</sup> Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 85.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

“[mix] remembrance with play, working-class excursionists generally played without remembrance,” instead treating a trip to Gettysburg as a day in the sun and fresh air to be enjoyed.<sup>112</sup> These battlefield tourists were joined by Confederate veterans of the battle, perhaps realizing their own mortality, who were finally returning to Gettysburg to dedicate their own monuments.<sup>113</sup>

The interpretive history of the park was also altered by a “growing number of complaints about the battlefield guides” by 1912, necessitating for the first time a licensing process that the War Department would oversee.<sup>114</sup> The Department had been displeased with the cab drivers who had picked up passengers at the railroad station in town and acting as de facto tour guides, offering up faulty anecdotes and half-baked theories regarding the happenings of the battle.<sup>115</sup> This licensing was a vital development in the interpretive history of the park. For one of the first times, the administrative mechanism of the site was making itself concerned with the actual visitor experience, and claiming a stake in what they would be taught, and how.

The 1920s and 1930s also saw the park run more closely by the War Department, rather than granting the Gettysburg National Military Park Commission virtual free reign over the battlefield.<sup>116</sup> The department took further interest in the battlefield guides, exerting more control over interpretive efforts as a whole as they appointed a Superintendent of Guides in 1926 who could oversee all activities of the newly accredited battlefield guides.<sup>117</sup> Federal influence reared its head yet again in 1929 when after a visit

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>113</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 105.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 126.

to southern Pennsylvania, President Herbert Hoover made it known that he felt the park would benefit from additional marking beyond the basic bronze tablets erected by the War Department detailing basic troop movements and casualty figures.<sup>118</sup> Jim Weeks notes that Hoover found the tablets “confusing,”<sup>119</sup> and park administrators scrambled to meet and find a suitable alternative that would satisfy all visitors, to say nothing of the President of the United States. The veterans themselves were displeased with the layout of the park, with the GAR itself voicing its official and formal displeasure with the condition of the site. They referred to the state of the park as one of “neglect,” and this statement of displeasure by the Union veterans of the war also crossed the desk of an assuredly peeved Hoover.<sup>120</sup> The matter remained mostly unresolved by the War Department, and the economic crisis of the 1930s limited large improvement projects, though some chunks of funding were granted to the park as stimulus measures and allowed for minor improvements.<sup>121</sup>

Finally, in 1933, the ownership of the park was passed to the NPS by virtue of Executive Order 6166 (authored by President Franklin D. Roosevelt) as the conclusion of an attempt by the government “to consolidate administration of all federal parks and monuments under the National Park Service.”<sup>122</sup> Given the bureaucratic issues and funding problems that had plagued the War Department’s administration of the park, they could hardly have regretted to see jurisdiction over the land pass to a different federal agency. The administrative history of GNMP itself indicates that the NPS felt “the

---

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.128.

<sup>119</sup> Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 123.

<sup>120</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 129-130.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 133-7.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 139.

War Department's administration of its parks and monuments was inadequate."<sup>123</sup> The relatively recent professionalization of history (something that was not really of the War Department's concern) coupled with the myriad of other responsibilities that the military was tasked with does not make this a particularly surprising conclusion.

The NPS's history program was in its infancy when the Service took over the administration of parks like Gettysburg. Horace Albright, an instrumental figure in the NPS's early history, had been struck by a visit to the battlefield at Lookout Mountain near Chattanooga in 1915. After the moving experience he remarked that it was the "[beginning of] the germination of my plan to get battlefield and other historic places into the future national park system."<sup>124</sup> The administrators of the NPS recognized the historical value of sites like the battlefields and were intent on having them under their purview so that interpretive efforts could be concentrated and improved.

The NPS wasted no time in attempting to place their mark on the interpretive efforts of the park. Gettysburg's own administrative history details how the NPS historical program's head (Verne E. Chatelain) hoped that the NPS's takeover of sites like Civil War battlefields would "breathe the breath of life into American history for those to whom it has been a dull recital of meaningless facts – to recreate for the average citizen something of the color, the pageantry, and the dignity of our national past."<sup>125</sup> While the enthusiasm that the NPS displayed for a fresh, attractive brand of historical interpretation is to be commended, the usage of the term "pageantry" indicates that the Service still held history as something to be marveled at by the public. Many of the

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>124</sup> Horace M. Albright and Marian Albright Schenck, *Creating the National Park Service: The Missing Years*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 117.

<sup>125</sup> "History and Our National Parks," [June 1935], Old History Division Files, WASO. As cited in Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 146.

unpleasant realities of American history were still relegated to a negligible or nonexistent role, even with these fresh interpretive decisions.

NPS administrators immediately began evaluating the status of the grounds at Gettysburg, from buildings to grass mowing schedules to interpretive efforts. Superintendent James R. McConaghie (a holdover from the War Department management regime) produced this comprehensive report in 1934, and his findings indicate that the only signage on park grounds was those iron and bronze tablets constructed by the GNMPC and the War Department.<sup>126</sup> He further lamented the fact that “[l]ittle effort has been made toward establishing a definite educational program” during the War Department’s administration.<sup>127</sup> The only educational efforts put forth by the War Department had come in the form of uniformed guides, which visitors of course had to seek out. These guides showed tens of thousands of guests around the park, though even at their peak capacity they were still only conducting tours for a fraction of the tourists who descended on the battlefield every year (the park itself at that time estimated that for every visitor that employed a guide, three did not).<sup>128</sup> The NPS had its work cut out for it as it sought to make the battlefield into a place where interpretive efforts were more welcome than they had been while the park was under the purview of the War Department, and where those interpretive undertakings would be viewed by a majority of visitors.

The alphabet soup of Roosevelt’s New Deal programs overtook Gettysburg throughout the 1930s, as Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Civil Works Administration (CWA), and Public Works Administration (PWA) camps all came to town and began

---

<sup>126</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 149.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

work on improving the grounds themselves, painting fences and tending to crops.<sup>129</sup> During this time, few interpretive improvements were made to the park in the forms of signage. However, these enhancements to the grounds began a permanent effort by the NPS to return the grounds to their appearance in July of 1863.<sup>130</sup> Features that would seem unimaginable to the modern eye, such as trolley and railroad tracks on the field itself, were quickly eliminated by the NPS in a bid to aid visitors' visual understanding of the battle.<sup>131</sup>

Jim Weeks discusses these changes at Gettysburg in the first portion of the twentieth century at some length in his work, crediting the spreading popularity of the automobile and new federal highway legislation with increasing visitation at Gettysburg in the first half of the twentieth century, excepting the lean years of the Depression itself.<sup>132</sup> This newfound reliance on a mode of rapid transit rendered previous monumentation virtually obsolete, as visitors no longer wished to stand in quiet contemplation at verbose, ubiquitous tablets. Indeed, the interpretive shifts at Gettysburg reflected changes within American society at large, "as [Civil War] veterans, railroads, and genteel culture vanished, so too did the memories of Gettysburg conjured by them."<sup>133</sup> The Park Service regretted its unpreparedness for this new tourist in the aftermath of the transfer of the park from the War Department, immediately realizing that the interpretive and educational efforts on the battlefield were simply inadequate.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 156.

<sup>130</sup> Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 121.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.



Weeks' assertion that the "logistics of circulating tourists around the park had passed from hackmen [and] trolley companies to the federal government" is largely true.<sup>135</sup> An increasingly auto-bound population created a need for a fresh approach to interpretation, a term that was first used at the park in 1940 as a means of describing the historical arm of the NPS's presence there (previously divided into "educational" and "research") and expressed interest in additional signage being placed around the park.<sup>136</sup> This signage would eventually be placed in 1947 in the form of "seven roadside exhibits that explained key sites with maps and illustrations. Essentially, the exhibits fixed in print and graphics what the guides transmitted orally, and focused visitor attention on the story of the battle."<sup>137</sup> Current GNMP Supervisory Historian Scott Hartwig emphasizes that these initial exhibits "were not interpretive," but their explanatory capabilities have stood the test of time, as some of these relatively ancient exhibits are still enjoyed by visitors to this day.<sup>138</sup>

These initial forms of explanatory signage served a fairly basic purpose in simply conveying the basic troop movements and various heroic actions of the battle. They were developed throughout the 1940s, and by modern standards would not hold up to close historical scrutiny. Stories that have long since been disproven were presented as virtual fact. For years, a myth perpetuated that Union and Confederate soldiers shared water at Spangler's Spring, a fresh water source near the heavily contested ground of Culp's Hill. Anecdotes like the occurrence at Spangler's Spring are presented with only slight

---

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>136</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 180.

<sup>137</sup> Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 123.

<sup>138</sup> Scott Hartwig, e-mail message to author, May 8, 2013.

disclaimers (“it is said...”),<sup>139</sup> though Gettysburg human interest stories like that legend have long since been disproven. An insistence on perpetuating myths of the battle that could have been disproven, or at least not mentioned until they were proven, seems to indicate a lingering unwillingness to confront the realities of the battle itself, including the true human suffering that had enveloped the small town in 1863.

In his suggested feedback during the development of the proposed wayside exhibits in 1942, GNMP Superintendent J. Walter Coleman wrote that:

It was our intention to set up these field exhibits, not so much as exhibits alone, but to serve as a means of orientation for the large number of visitors who do not employ a guide. Our observations indicate that for every visitor who employs a guide, seven do not. It is believed, therefore, in view of this special need, that an orientation map should be one of the main features of such an exhibits and that it should be large enough to enable to the greater number of people to read the lettering easily and to follow the avenues and direction indications to other landmarks where these field exhibits are placed.<sup>140</sup>

Coleman’s assertion that the exhibits would stand merely to orient guideless visitors, rather than truly inform them about or interpret any deeper meaning of the battle, is telling of these early NPS efforts. The agency was simply attempting to disseminate information in a passive manner at this point, rendering the active direction of a paid battlefield guide nonessential, but still helpful. They still clearly recognized the value of the battlefield guides and respected the scope of their work, expressing hope the desire that “in our desire to cooperate with guides, we felt that our descriptive material of each landmark be limited to a brief examination of its meaning... [and] appropriate historical photographs and brief captions on each exhibit.”<sup>141</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup>GNMP Superintendent J. Walter Coleman, Memo to Regional Supervisor of Historic Sites Roy E. Appleman, February 18, 1942. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 1. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

<sup>140</sup> GNMP Superintendent J. Walter Coleman, Memo to Regional Supervisor of Historic Sites Roy E. Appleman, April 28, 1942. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 1. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

<sup>141</sup> Coleman, Memo to Appleman, April 28, 1942. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 1. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

These wayside exhibits would eventually become more elaborate and extend beyond the machinations of the battle itself as years passed. Mission 66, a massive, top to bottom ten year overhaul of the NPS beginning in 1956, was enacted in order to correct what John Bodnar considers “loose and casual” historical interpretation at the NPS. In his words, “NPS officials and the advisory board had [previously] worked to formulate and enforce thematic standards but at actual sites the training of personnel engaged in interpretation and exhibit preparation was generally inadequate.”<sup>142</sup> Mission 66 at Gettysburg first saw the construction of a new Visitor Center, located on Cemetery Hill and surrounded by sprawling parking lots, in a centralized location that seemed at odds with the NPS’s previous and ongoing concerted efforts to preserve the aesthetics of the battlefield itself.

Mission 66 was instantly attractive to Congress thanks to its concentrated funding request. Previously, NPS improvement projects had been individually approved, creating a time-consuming and cumbersome process before Park Service Director Conrad L. Firth proposed a centralized solution where Congress could simply approve one large funding package. This proved popular with Congress, and a \$1 billion package (to be paid over the following decade) was approved in 1956 by the legislative body.<sup>143</sup> The project was vital to the health of the Park Service, as increased visitation in a car-dependent society enjoying a new Interstate Highway System had placed new strains on the parks, including on their interpretive capacity. The days of guides being able to lead any appreciable amount of visitors through the Gettysburg battlefield seemed to be over, and “although nothing could replace personal contact with a ranger or interpreter, there simply would never again be enough of them in proportion to visitors to rely on personal

---

<sup>142</sup> John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 195.

<sup>143</sup> William C. Everhart, *The National Park Service* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 26.

interactions as the primary means of interpretation.”<sup>144</sup> New alternatives, namely wayside signage, would be explored.

J. Christian Spielvogel notes that the period of Mission 66 is also when the interpretation of the battle became heavily tilted towards the portrayal of Pickett’s Charge. Paul Philippoteaux’s enormous cyclorama painting of the climactic moment would be housed in a brand new Visitor Center courtesy of federal funding, and Spielvogel notes that “half of the park’s recommended two-hour tour consisted of programs about the climactic Pickett’s Charge.”<sup>145</sup> The new Mission 66 analysis of the battle thus created an interpretive environment where Gettysburg was seen as the single greatest turning point of the war, and Pickett’s Charge was viewed as the fulcrum on which the sole pivotal battle turned. Modern scholars would likely dispute both of these notions, but the state of scholarship regarding Gettysburg in the 1950s and 1960s called for an interpretive focus that essentially centered on this idea.

The interpretation at Gettysburg featuring turning points like Pickett’s Charge and the battle itself reflected larger issues regarding the centennial anniversary of the Civil War. Iconic photographs of Confederate and Union veterans of that action meeting at the famous stone wall where the attack stalled personified a commemorative spirit of reconciliation to most Americans viewing these images. Historian Robert Cook has written extensively on the centennial celebrations of the Civil War, and how the NPS essentially squandered a sterling opportunity to shift the direction of the national dialogue on the memory of the war. Echoing David Blight’s argument that memory in the immediate aftermath of the war was intended to emphasize reconciliation among white

---

<sup>144</sup> Ethan Carr, *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 189.

<sup>145</sup> J. Christian Spielvogel, *Interpreting Sacred Ground: The Rhetoric of National Civil War Parks and Battlefields*. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2013), 43.

Americans, rather than seeking to discover what the war could have accomplished for black Americans, Cook contends that the NPS simply parroted these earlier, antiquated ideas of reconciliation in the early 1960s, an interpretive decision made all the more offensive by the burgeoning civil rights movement within the United States.<sup>146</sup>

At Gettysburg specifically, the memory of the battle was clearly still contested ground. Segregationist Alabama Governor George Wallace, during his visit to the park in July of 1963, “made a point of mingling with Confederate reenactors who participated in a rerun of Pickett’s charge...and two weeks later was testifying before the Senate Commerce Committee against the new civil rights bill.”<sup>147</sup> Not only was the racial memory of the war still very much in flux, but the realities of Civil War combat and trauma were still largely disregarded in the celebratory environment of the centennial. Americans were not at all deterred by the prospect of martial violence when they were celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of the conflict, when they perhaps would have been well-served to receive a reminder on the grim realities of warfare with the conflict in Vietnam just beginning to register on the American consciousness.

After the turmoil of the 1960s and the Civil War Centennial ended, there was still interpretive work to be done. By the 1980s it was decided that the Mission 66 signage was already becoming outdated as new scholarship on the battle became available and the interpretive priorities of the NPS shifted. The Park’s 1982 General Management Plan called for signage that was truly interpretive in nature, not just expository, and would offer some deeper meaning to the battle besides knowing who was where on the field, and at what time. This began a process that would eventually take roughly a decade,

---

<sup>146</sup> Robert J. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

<sup>147</sup> Cook, *Troubled Commemoration*, 199.

where the NPS would still focus on the exhibits' foremost informational role while also beginning to more adroitly incorporate interpretive information and themes.

The interpretive efforts of the NPS at this point in time gradually began to evolve. Scott Hartwig, who had a hand in the planning and production of the new signs, emphasizes that these wayside signs were still meant to primarily provide basic information on the actions of the battle itself.<sup>148</sup> However, human interest anecdotes were gradually introduced that offered more realistic depictions of the grim reality of the war. For example, in 1967 photography historian William Frassanito had finally identified the site of several Alexander Gardner photographs of a particular field at Gettysburg, what he describes as “some of the most dramatic and best-known battlefield scenes ever recorded.”<sup>149</sup> These photographs portrayed scores of Confederate dead at the southernmost end of the battlefield in the Rose Woods, and are a haunting representation of the human suffering of war.

The NPS recognized the value of this relatively new scholarship, courtesy of Frassanito, and in the original Development Concept Plan for the new waysides in 1986 noted that “there are many pictures of the dead soldiers laying [sic] along this treeline, and this wayside would give us a good chance at revealing the cost in human lives [that] the battle tolled.”<sup>150</sup> The idea for this particular wayside continued to grow as the planning process progressed. In late 1987 a memo from NPS Interpretive Specialist John Fiedor noted that the Rose Woods wayside would be “[n]ot essential to the story of the chronological events of the battle, but a good place to focus [on] the human cost and

---

<sup>148</sup> Scott Hartwig, e-mail message to author, May 8, 2013.

<sup>149</sup> William A. Frassanito, *Gettysburg: A Journey In Time* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1975), 198-9.

<sup>150</sup> 1986 GNMP Development Concept Plan. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 2. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

agony using pictures of battle dead.”<sup>151</sup> A willingness and desire to delve deeper into interpretive challenges like the human cost of the fighting so early in the planning process indicated a National Park Service that was indeed willing to change its approach to the signage on the grounds.

Moreover, this readiness to adapt was echoed by multiple members of the NPS, with a senior supervisor in 1989 noting that “I really like the plan. Most of my observations are positive. It’s good to see the inclusion of the purpose of monuments, care of wounded, etc.”<sup>152</sup> An approach more focused on the interpretation of monumentation and traumatic impacts of 19<sup>th</sup> century warfare represented a step forward from the previous interpretations of the battle that focused on mutual white heroism and valorous deeds.

Additionally, on a practical level, the new waysides would be designed in such a way so as to affect how visitors interacted with the park. James C. Roach, the GNMP Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services, noted in 1991 that “the basic philosophy was not to have drive by wayside exhibits. The feeling was and is that there was a need for our visitors to see the battlefield on the field not from their vehicles.”<sup>153</sup> The NPS hoped to actively engage visitors and force them to tangibly interact with the battlefield, rather than skimming text out the window of a slowly moving car. When guests were coaxed out of their cars by the promise of engaging interpretive text, they could then see the battlefield as it could best be understood.

---

<sup>151</sup> Memo from Interpretive Specialist John Fiedor to Chief of Interpretation, November 18, 1987. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 3. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

<sup>152</sup> Memo from Interpretive Supervisor, EISE to James C. Roach, Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services, April 14, 1988. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 7. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

<sup>153</sup> Memo from James C. Roach, Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services to Chief of Cultural Resource Management Reed L. Engle, October 28, 1991. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 14, Folder 6, Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

Preservation of the battlefield should not solely be geared towards the morbid discussion of battlefield trauma, however. As Edward Linenthal has observed, most Civil War battlefields are in relatively unspoiled, pastoral settings, and that “one of the great ironies associated with American battlefields is that they are often quite beautiful and, except at the height of the tourist season, quite peaceful” and that “the [fields] on which [some] of the greatest dramas of the Civil War was acted out *should* be physically inspiring as well as spiritually profound.”<sup>154</sup> A trip to a Civil War military park should not exist solely as an exercise in reliving the horrors of the war. Indeed, battlefields would likely see a sharp decline in attendance if this were to be the gloomy case. Visitors will experience powerful emotions when they visit places like Gettysburg, and as Joan Zenzen asserts, “individuals gain an invaluable opportunity to link past and present. Cultural values are passed, and lessons are learned.”<sup>155</sup> Civil War battlefields thus also function as sites to spur interest in the study of history and allow a common ground for Americans to experience the history of the conflict in a variety of ways. Understanding the horrific experiences of the soldier in combat is a vital part of that history, but can function as just one component of a larger interpretive experience.

Georgie and Margie Boge express hope that visitors to Civil War sites genuinely wish to learn, and are “not drawn by flashy neon signs, bargain tourist shops, or recreational opportunities but rather by curiosity and profound reverence for the soldiers who fell in a war of clashing ideals.”<sup>156</sup> Christopher Waldrep would likely agree, arguing that “the mythology of war is a source of strength, a resource for any nation or national

---

<sup>154</sup> Linenthal, *Sacred Ground*, 89.

<sup>155</sup> Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas*, xxi.

<sup>156</sup> Georgie Boge and Margie Holder Boge, *Paving Over the Past: A History and Guide to Civil War Battlefield Preservation* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1993), 7-8.



movement.”<sup>157</sup> The Boges’ observation suggests an American public that is eager to know more about the history of the war and will be focused on that aim when they visit a battlefield park, and so the parks themselves thus represent an unparalleled learning opportunity. However, if one is to believe Waldrep’s assertion as well, they perhaps are simply interested in feeling a swell of patriotic pride and/or militarism, and it remains entirely possible that their experience at a park like Gettysburg will simply affirm these narrow expectations, rather than broadening them.

The work of interpreting the actions at Gettysburg began in the immediate aftermath of the battle. In the 150 years since then, numerous stakeholders have wrangled for control over this memory of the battle as different agencies have taken administrative control of the site. From the earliest Gettysburg citizens purchasing land with their own money, it became clear that the significance of this piece of Pennsylvania farmland was easily recognized by the American people. The NPS has come far in making a concerted effort to effectively interpret the battle rather than simply state the key players and troop movements of the fighting. In doing so, the agency has created an environment where difficult questions regarding race relations, civil liberties, and other challenges can be discussed. However, not all components of the battlefield experience mirror these objectives. The waysides created by the NPS have evolved effectively over the years, but still leave something to be desired in portraying the reality of war. This is not necessarily a space concern, as the NPS has clearly displayed a willingness to incorporate human interest stories on these waysides, consuming considerable portions of the precious little text that visitors have the patience and interest to read. Rather, the Park Service has produced interpretive wayside signage that relies on reconciliationist sentiment in a bid to placate advocates of both sides, and in turn largely neglects to

---

<sup>157</sup> Waldrep, *Vicksburg’s Long Shadow*, 290.

acknowledge the brutal reality of a gruesome war and its effects on the men who had fought, killed, and died on its fields.

## CHAPTER 3

### “A Good Chance at Revealing The Cost In Human Lives”: The Evolution of National Park Service Interpretive Signage at Gettysburg

In the immediate aftermath of the American Civil War, discussion over exactly what the conflict had meant and what it had accomplished had already long begun. Initially, the veterans themselves largely dictated the war’s memory and determined what it had meant to the country, focusing chiefly on the mutual heroism of all white soldiers who had fought. Unfortunately, this was often at the expense of productive dialogue regarding the racial repercussions of the war.<sup>158</sup> As a result, these reconciliatory attitudes that unreservedly praised all white combatants overshadowed more starkly candid explorations of the impacts of the conflict, the most egregious example being the reluctance and/or refusal to properly comprehend the impact that the freeing of four million previously enslaved African-Americans would have on society. Additionally, the understanding of other aspects of the conflict also suffered as a result of these reconciliatory attitudes between the former adversaries. While soldiers’ memoirs were popular in the wake of the conflict and sought to accurately portray the experience of the common warrior, these were often celebratory accounts fixated on memories of being around the campfire with the boys and complaints about rations and the weather.

As a result, an underexplored topic throughout these works was the experience of the Civil War soldier in combat. The fear, confusion, and horror of combat and its associated traumas are rarely discussed in great detail by veterans in their memoirs. Subsequently, this became one of the silenced legacies of the American Civil War. The traumatic ordeals that veterans of Civil War combat endured would be relatively unknown by the vast majority of Americans, replaced instead by more comfortable

---

<sup>158</sup> David Blight’s *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) remains the gold standard for the exploration of how reconciliatory attitudes dominated veterans’ memories of the war.

memories of the war that assured the public that all white soldiers on both sides fought bravely over political differences. Once this conflict ended, all that was left to do was shake hands and move forward. As a result of this gradual reconciliation between white veterans, the legal and social standing of African-Americans would essentially remain at the status quo ante bellum, even in the absence of slavery. These placatory attitudes quickly spread into public interpretation of the war, including at historic parks like Gettysburg. Historian Timothy B. Smith argues that the soldiers themselves wanted the battlefield parks to stand simply as monuments to heroism:

As temperatures cooled after the fact, as old men reconciled, and as younger generations took up new issues, the old wounds of the Civil War began to fade into memory as the North and the South developed new issues other than the racial questions that had so divided them... White Americans thus began displaying unity while emphasizing the courage, bravery, and honor of Civil War soldiers with monuments, statues, and joint reunions. But the chief symbols of this conciliatory and commemorative era were the military parks.<sup>159</sup>

While the legacy of the war could still be debated in various other forms of discourse, Smith argues that most of the veterans could at least agree upon establishing the battlefield parks as a neutral zone, free of any uncomfortable or traumatic narratives and geared completely towards a solemn appreciation of the unquestionable heroism displayed by soldiers from both North and South. Eventually, these battlefields' interpretive authorities would not be the veterans of the war, but the federal government, which would seek its own approach towards Civil War memory. The National Park Service (NPS) was and is the face of this changing authority. The NPS has long been a powerful force behind the public's understanding of the American Civil War, and its interpretation of the war at these parks is thus an authoritative and influential voice.

As a result of the NPS's interpretive authority, interpretation of the war that incorporates reconciliationist sentiments at national parks can be damaging to a

---

<sup>159</sup> Smith, *The Golden Age*, 5.

cohesive understanding of the entire war. These sentiments have dominated memory of the war and created an environment where most interpretive efforts at battlefield parks have cautiously worked around discussion of the actual killing and suffering that occurred - a reluctance to discuss combat trauma that has only recently begun to be rectified. Despite these gradual corrections, much remains to be done regarding this issue, and the interpretive efforts of the NPS at Gettysburg National Military Park (GNMP) offer a revealing example of a site that has progressed significantly in portraying the violence of combat and its effects at its Visitor Center while still leaving something to be desired in this regard at the majority of its interpretive wayside signage.

The cost to newly free African-Americans of the emergence of a reconciliationist tradition was, of course, catastrophic. However, a failure to humanize the veterans by attempting to understand the visceral experiences of combat and the men's very human reactions to them was also a tremendous disservice. By rendering these soldiers as one-dimensional paragons of virtuous conduct at best or faceless automatons at worst, it became easy to forget that they were human beings who had experienced emotions and terrors similar to soldiers throughout history. The daily fears and indignities of Civil War soldiering, large and small, were largely ignored and forgotten. The men experienced terrors beyond their worst fears, and were largely shocked at how dehumanizing the entire experience was.

Death was a constant companion to the soldiers, as hundreds of thousands of men slept in the elements and used unsafe transportation, many probably climbing aboard trains for the first time. Fatalities could seem unspeakably random and unfair, even in a world consumed by violence. A Union brigade that had taken hundreds of casualties at Gettysburg exactly a month earlier had three men die on August 3, 1863

when they were struck by lightning.<sup>160</sup> Joseph K. Taylor of the 37<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts witnessed a train accident in September of 1862 that killed two members of another regiment and injured dozens more, and Taylor remarked how horrified he was by the terrified wounded men, with their “legs crushed [and] faces all blood.”<sup>161</sup>

Just a month later Taylor was again jarred by the sight of a man run over by a train near him, severing both of the unfortunate man’s legs and breaking his spine. He eventually died in agony a few feet from Taylor after being unceremoniously shoved into Taylor’s railroad car to wait out his final minutes.<sup>162</sup> To make matters worse for the beleaguered men, the threat of death or dismemberment was coupled with an intense distrust and fear of those who would care for them if they were wounded. Taylor himself witnessed at least one soldier die from what he considered neglect by surgeons, and raged to his father that “I tell you some of our army doctors will have a deal to answer for when the day of reckoning comes.”<sup>163</sup>

The aftermaths of battle revolted soldiers as well, with former pastor Samuel W. Fiske of the 14<sup>th</sup> Connecticut reporting back home in September of 1862 to the *Springfield (MA) Republican* under the pseudonym Dunn Browne on the aftermath of Antietam:

The excitement of battle comes in the day of it, but the horrors of it come two or three days later...The air grows terribly offensive from the unburied bodies, and a pestilence will speedily be bred if they are not put under ground. The most of the Union soldiers are now buried, but some of them only slightly. Think now of the horrors of such a scene as lies all around us, for there are hundreds of horses too,

---

<sup>160</sup> Cook, *History of the Twelfth Massachusetts Volunteers*, 108.

<sup>161</sup> Kevin C. Murphy, ed. *The Civil War Letters of Joseph K. Taylor of the Thirty-Seventh Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry*, (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), 38.

<sup>162</sup> Murphy, ed. *Civil War Letters of Joseph K. Taylor*, 47.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

all mangled and putrefying, scattered everywhere...the crops trampled and wasted, the whole country forlorn and desolate.<sup>164</sup>

Fiske's description of the battlefield, published in a newspaper, is important in that it reminds us that the American public was not unaware of what occurred on the battlefield, and in fact Americans were exposed to letters like these as quickly as the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century news cycle could operate, primarily by virtue of newspaper "correspondents" such as Fiske, or soldiers that they knew personally. Historian Frances Clarke attributes this openness, at least when describing the death of comrades, to an adherence to the Victorian ideal of a "Good Death," as she explains that "[l]etter writers tended to be scrupulously honest in specifying the last words and gestures of the dying, which were the most important details that families looked for in assessing the state of the soul at the point of death."<sup>165</sup>

Drew Gilpin Faust's *This Republic of Suffering* delves into significant detail about what a "Good Death" meant to a Civil War soldier and his loved ones. She summarizes her definition of this concept:

How one died thus epitomized a life already led and predicted the quality of life everlasting. The *hors mori*, the hour of death, had therefore to be witnessed, scrutinized, interpreted, narrated – not to mention carefully prepared for by any sinner who sought to be worthy of salvation. The sudden and all but unnoticed end of the soldier slain in the disorder of battle...could have provided the material for an exemplary text on how not to die. <sup>166</sup>

Consequently, not all descriptions of battlefield violence in letters home were for the writer's own catharsis, or even an attempt to have the recipient understand his

---

<sup>164</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Mr. Dunn Browne's Experiences in the Army: The Civil War Letters of Samuel W. Fiske* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 10. Throughout this work I have transcribed the original words of soldiers exactly as they appeared in their own memoirs so as to preserve their unique voices, even if this meant the inclusion of minor spelling and grammatical errors.

<sup>165</sup> Frances Clarke, *War Stories: Suffering and Sacrifice in the Civil War North* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 45.

<sup>166</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 9.

experiences. Rather, they could represent an opportunity to ease the suffering of a dead comrade's family if the writer could successfully describe a courageous and admirable death.

Other soldiers wrote of experiences similar to Browne's where they witnessed carnage that was virtually indescribable. Thomas Mann of the 18<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, after the Battle of Fair Oaks in the spring of 1862, was revolted by the sight of "[m]any of the dead bodies of men and horses, only slightly buried after the battle, [who] were uncovered by the floods of rain and filled the air with poisonous gasses."<sup>167</sup> Mann was later captured and attempted to write a book about his experiences in 1867, still a very young man in his early 20s. However, he deemed his own writing then to be far too "bitter and opinionated" to be of much value, and he was forced to set the work aside until 1887, finally publishing the work to national acclaim in 1890.<sup>168</sup> Mann had been horrified by his experiences as a teenager in uniform during the Civil War, and found he was later disgusted by his own acrimony in his attempts to describe his experiences. Throughout the book he notes that he is hesitant to even share some parts of his experiences; so overwhelming are the emotions that the memories of his friends suffering and dying raise.<sup>169</sup>

However, it appears that in the wake of the war, battlefield trauma was something that the public and many veterans simply wished to put behind them. In his work *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War*, Gerald

---

<sup>167</sup> John J. Hennessy, ed. *Fighting With the Eighteenth Massachusetts: The Civil War Memoir of Thomas H. Mann* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 69.

<sup>168</sup> John J. Hennessy, introduction to *Fighting With the Eighteenth Massachusetts: The Civil War Memoir of Thomas H. Mann* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), xv.

<sup>169</sup> Hennessy, ed. *Fighting With the Eighteenth Massachusetts*, 120. A good example of this is given when Mann speaks of his experience at Fredericksburg, where he explains that "The narrator, who was himself a participant in these scenes, and who is putting forth his best efforts to tell the simple, unvarnished truth, hesitates for the moment before marching himself and his comrades into the storm of death, overcome by his own memories of the terrible destruction that resulted."



Linderman remarks that civilian efforts to seize control over the memory of the war irritated veterans, and that during the fighting “[the veterans had] yearned for the end of the war, never realizing that it would truly end for them only years later, when they surrendered the war they had fought to the war civilian society insisted they had fought.”<sup>170</sup>

The memory of the war was thus manipulated by the American public, who lionized soldiers to such an extent that as the veterans aged in the decades after the war “it was no coincidence that many young men who had never seen war and who lived in a society subjected to no external threats or even provocations should begin to feel themselves and their generation vaguely deficient.”<sup>171</sup> By elevating soldiers to an exalted status of untainted heroism at the expense of attempting to garner a truer understanding of the effects of the trauma they had experienced, American society had raised the Civil War soldier to such a pedestal that later generations felt inadequate if they did not engage in an equally heroic and violent display of manhood and courage.

However, Linderman also argues that the veterans themselves eventually became complicit in this mythmaking. America at large was able to forget the miseries and trauma associated with soldiering and warfare, transforming war into a patriotic experience that represented one of the only true ways to affirm one’s citizenship and loyalty, an argument that veterans eventually joined in with. They confronted younger generations with “[c]hallenges...[and] insinuations of filial ingratitude, flaccidity, and deficient patriotism” and used their service as a crutch to compensate for being left behind in a

---

<sup>170</sup> Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 3.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

country that was rapidly becoming more business-oriented, run by non-combatant oligarchs like Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Morgan.<sup>172</sup>

Linderman explains further by stating that “[i]f in 1864-1865 the war had seemed intolerable to many soldiers, by the 1890s veterans were using the war both to escape from an unrewarding present...and to reproach their sons for the defects of the present.”<sup>173</sup> The soldiers had experienced unimaginable horrors that they were desperate to escape from when they were in their midst. However, as the years progressed and the positives of their service were either selectively remembered or reinforced by civilian patriotic influence, they slowly began to look back at the war years with a sense of nostalgia. Whether they realized it or not, civilian influence had affected their memories of their time in uniform, according to Linderman. As a result, the memory of the war became altered as soldiers began to assign values to their experiences that they would not have considered when they had been younger men tasked with killing other young men, and subsequently traumatic or unpleasant memories of actual combat were relegated to the background in favor of more patriotic, gallant memories of service.

Through the letters of soldiers, both published and unpublished, we are able to see that the men were not unaware of the horror of their experiences, and did not universally view combat as a noble passage into manhood. Roland Bowen of the 15<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry wrote a chilling letter home to a childhood friend that wound up being dozens of pages long, reliving in great detail the Battle of Ball’s Bluff on October 21, 1861, and just how his initial enthusiasm to “kill one of those Devils” had died down after that horrible day.<sup>174</sup> Bowen recounts tales of men mad with bloodlust, comrades dying

---

<sup>172</sup>“Challenges...patriotism” from Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 295, oligarchs segment from Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 285.

<sup>173</sup>Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 295.

<sup>174</sup> Gregory A. Coco, ed., *From Ball’s Bluff to Gettysburg...And Beyond: The Civil War Letters of Private Roland E. Bowen, 15th Massachusetts Infantry 1861-1864* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1994), 20.

next to him as they screamed in agony, and even notes his own troubling ambivalence towards the human suffering all around him. He eventually admits that in the evening after the battle had ended he collapsed and “wept like a child” once he realized that he had survived the day.<sup>175</sup>

Also present at Ball’s Bluff was a young officer named Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. of the 20<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts. A Harvard-educated Boston Brahmin, Holmes counted himself as a committed abolitionist during his collegiate career.<sup>176</sup> Ball’s Bluff represented Holmes’ first combat experience, and very nearly his last. He had been fighting with his men for about an hour when in the late afternoon he felt as if “a horse had kicked [him]” as a ball slammed into his chest.<sup>177</sup> He struggled to the bottom of the bluff and two of his fellow soldiers carried him to a hospital, where he witnessed horrors that shocked him. Writing two years after this experience in 1864, he noted that “the spectacle [of wounded and dead men] wasn’t familiar then” and thus proved to be quite a shock.<sup>178</sup> He recognized a detached arm on the floor in a pool of blood as belonging to a friend of his, and witnessed a surgeon cut off the finger of a patient who was, incredibly, on his feet, and looking on with “a very grievous mug” as his digit was sawed off.<sup>179</sup>

Holmes wrote of these injuries to his mother as he lay on his back in the hospital, and freely admitted to her that he originally had thought these wounds to be fatal. He wrote of how “the first night [after I was wounded] I made up my mind to die & was going to take that little bottle of laudanum as soon as I was sure of dying with any pain”

---

<sup>175</sup> Coco, ed., *Ball’s Bluff*, 31-50.

<sup>176</sup> Mark DeWolfe Howe, *Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes: The Shaping Years 1841-1870*, Vol. I. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 65.

<sup>177</sup> Mark DeWolfe Howe, ed. *Touched With Fire: Civil War Letters and Diary of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. 1861-1864*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947), 23.

<sup>178</sup> Howe, ed., *Touched With Fire*, 25.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

before he had even experienced any physical pain from his wounds.<sup>180</sup> Fortunately, his surgeon soon knocked him out with a type of opiate and removed the laudanum bottle from his possession, preventing him from even having the option of suicide, but the willingness to take such actions is somewhat startling. Fitting of an educated man of Harvard, Holmes turned to philosophical thoughts over his state as he lay in bed, pondering the potential fate that lay ahead if he were to perish.<sup>181</sup> In his diary he later appeared to address this drastic and seemingly troublesome emotion by noting how he “[had] been struck with the intensity of the mind’s action and its increased suggestiveness, after one has received a wound—”<sup>182</sup> The workings of his mind had startled him after such a relatively brief first exposure to combat, and Holmes was struggling to process the experience.

In later life Holmes became a Supreme Court justice and subsequently one of the highest profile veterans of the war. He experienced a transformation in his opinions on his military service as he aged, quite different from those of a young man revolted by the scattered body parts of his friends and his own suicidal thoughts as he writhed in agony and more in line with the common revisionist veteran’s experience described by Linderman. He looked back on his military service not as an experience of bloody horror that he left as soon as his original enlistment was up in 1864, but rather a time of noble sacrifice and transition into manhood. Called upon to speak on Memorial Day in 1884 at a Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) post in Keene, NH, Holmes delivered a speech detailing his military experiences and how they had transformed him. Twenty years earlier, Holmes had recoiled when seeing his ambulance mate as “a ghastly spectacle – [he had] [t]wo black cavities [which] seemed all that there was left for eyes – his

---

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 13, 18.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 23.

whiskers & beard matted with blood which still poured black, from his mouth – and a most horrible stench-” and had warned his parents of the perils of walking at night near a battlefield, since it was possible to slip on the torn bodies of those already killed.<sup>183</sup>

Instead, Holmes now looked back on the war almost with fondness, as something that had set him and his contemporaries apart:

But, nevertheless, the generation that carried on the war has been set apart by its experience. Through our great good fortune, in our youth our hearts were touched with fire. It was given to us to learn at the outset that life is a profound and passionate thing. While we are permitted to scorn nothing but indifference, and do not pretend to undervalue the worldly rewards of ambition, we have seen with our own eyes, beyond and above the gold fields, the snowy heights of honor, and it is for us to bear the report to those who come after us. But, above all, we have learned that whether a man accepts from Fortune her spade, and will look downward and dig, or from Aspiration her axe and cord, and will scale the ice, the one and only success which it is his to command is to bring to his work a mighty heart.<sup>184</sup>

Rather than thinking of his military service as a violent, painful hell that he could not wait to leave, Holmes became a wise old soldier, imploring younger men to understand the transformative and beneficial experience that he and his compatriots had undergone.

Holmes’ story is just one of numerous similar ones that verify Linderman’s supposition that many of the soldiers’ memories of the true horrors that they had experienced in combat were suppressed in favor of patriotic narratives of mutual sacrifice, honor, and bravery. It should be noted that this was simply an early American instance of what is a common phenomenon. A permutation of a war’s memory in its aftermath is nearly a historical certainty. World War II in the United States is now regarded as an example of a country heroically pulling together as one; the “Greatest Generation” fighting towards a noble outcome that all deemed to be vital and for which all sacrificed. This narrative, however, neglects the horrors of the war and the inequity of

---

<sup>183</sup> Howe, ed. *Touched With Fire*. “A ghastly spectacle...,” 30. Perils of walking at night are discussed on page 51.

<sup>184</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, “Memorial Day,” in *Speeches* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1900), 11.

the sacrifices that it demanded. In reality, innocent Japanese-Americans were treated as enemies and herded into concentration camps, American soldiers burned their adversaries alive, hundreds of thousands of German and Japanese civilians were killed when their cities were bombed, and when the war finally ended in 1945, barely 1/3 of Americans admitted to feeling that they had sacrificed anything at all during the course of the entire conflict.<sup>185</sup>

It can be argued that this type of revisionist attitudes towards memory of the Civil War influenced early interpretation of battlefield sites, as at Gettysburg National Military Park (GNMP). In its early days, the park was owned by the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association (GBMA), an organization devoted to the acquisition and preservation of the battlefield. During the time of the GBMA's administration of the park, the responsibility for determining battle lines and processing what had occurred on the field lay mostly in the hands of committees of veterans, with both Confederate and Union soldiers represented in these undertakings.<sup>186</sup>

These proud veterans were of course susceptible to their own prejudices as well as outside pressures of veterans groups, who gradually began to agree on a narrative of the battle that guaranteed a place of mutual heroism in perpetuity for all combatants. In doing so, they were successful in controlling the memory of the Battle of Gettysburg, guiding it in such a way that the actual, visceral implications of fighting (terror, cowardice, mutilation, killing, etc.) were all but completely erased from the interpretation of the battle. Granted, these early explanations were largely focused on simply understanding what had occurred on the field, with essentially no "interpretation" by modern standards, but the nature of these early discussions of the

---

<sup>185</sup> Michael C.C. Adams, *Echoes of War: A Thousand Years of Military History in Pop Culture* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 195.

<sup>186</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg: An Administrative History*, 71.

battle evoked unquestionable themes of heroism, free of the various sufferings of combat.<sup>187</sup>

Even the acquisition of the park by the War Department in 1895 failed to create an environment where the trauma of the battle was investigated or portrayed. The War Department focused primarily on using the park's space for its own devices as it trained officers on the grounds of the field, using the largest battle in North American history as a convenient case study and outdoor classroom.<sup>188</sup> Additionally, the War Department left the study and interpreting of the park's history in the hands of committees of veterans, who performed extensive research via study of official records and interviews with comrades and former adversaries alike.<sup>189</sup>

However, this was still a somewhat flawed process, as the aging veterans became more and more certain of what had and had not occurred as they aged, walling off younger historians and their differing interpretations of the battle, essentially stifling discussion.<sup>190</sup> Historian Timothy B. Smith contends that Gettysburg was actually unique in its discourse's civility in the face of this increasing "pugnaciousness," and that arguments at other fields like Shiloh and Chickamauga became so contentious that they "threatened the makeup and integrity of the [battlefield commissions at those sites]."<sup>191</sup>

Yet, as Smith continues, "the determination to be accurate, egos and lack of patience of aging men, and fading memories all combined to cause many disputes over what actually happened where," even if these disagreements at GNMP were less

---

<sup>187</sup> An explanation of these types of heroic interpretations of the battle can be found on page 41, where John Vanderslice's descriptions of the unquestionable valor of the battle's participants can be better understood.

<sup>188</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 86.

<sup>189</sup> See Chapter 2 for additional information on this interpretive process regarding veterans at Gettysburg.

<sup>190</sup> Smith, *The Golden Age*, 165.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

acrimonious than those at similarly-sized parks elsewhere.<sup>192</sup> As a result, it appears that as these men aged, one of the more comfortable narratives that they chose to focus on was an insistence that all combatants had behaved admirably while under fire, at that the horrendous sights, smells, and sounds of combat and its aftermath were simply not to be mentioned. This allowed veterans to maintain a clean, simple, romanticized memory of the war and cement a legacy of wholesome fearlessness and Victorian manly courage.

A reconciliationist tradition of interpretation became ingrained in Gettysburg's identity as it became a focal point of American Civil War memory, and subsequently host to a myriad of events such as massive reunions in the decades after the war. The battlefield guides who had given tours to visitors for decades were no longer one of the sole sources of interpretation as other interpretive mediums emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Namely, signage at Gettysburg that is truly interpretive in nature is a relatively new modification to the park, only initially coming into existence towards the middle of the twentieth century, but some sparse documentation does exist which marks the evolution of that signage. These were changes that were largely prompted by the transfer of a number of Civil War battlefield parks from the War Department to another government agency. The National Park Service had taken over control of Civil War battlefield parks, including Gettysburg, in 1933 as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt sought to restructure his administration by merging various branches and offices.<sup>193</sup> Early wayside exhibits instead sought to simply convey the Park Service's best, brief explanation of the key events and personalities that occurred and interacted within the field of vision of the reader, with little interpretation of these occurrences.

---

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>193</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 139.



The sites that were chosen to bear the first wayside markers at Gettysburg reflect the prevailing attitudes espoused by the veterans in determining what had been of vital importance to the battle. J. Christian Spielvogel contends that the Mission 66 legislation, which sought to essentially revamp the entire Park Service over a ten year period beginning in 1956, was when these somewhat antiquated opinions became nearly inexorable.<sup>194</sup> Sites on the field like the “High Water Mark of the Confederacy” where Pickett’s Charge was repulsed were now identified as the most important areas of the field, and the addition of interpretive signage at those places (in addition to the official bronze markers erected decades earlier by the War Department) served to further emphasize their importance relative to other sites around the field. These first interpretive markers became accepted as the points on which the fate of the entire battle swung, often at the expense of other equally important sites of combat.

The bronze tablets and markers that the War Department erected still stand on the field in the current day, but are dry in nature and are primarily focused on capturing the absolute barest details of a brigade’s, division’s, or corps’ activities during the three day battle. These were posted on the field in addition to a myriad of monuments depicting soldiers in states of stoic and confident bravery. In the words of historian Jim Weeks, the “ennobled poses of some artwork” that the War Department had added or authorized at the turn of the century “oriented visitors toward the glory of combat and away from reflection about mass sacrifice.”<sup>195</sup> Weeks’ assertion suggests an environment that, even before signage that was strictly devoted to interpretation, was geared towards reminding visitors that they were at a site of relatively bloodless sacrifice, where all troops who had not fought bravely before dying a “good death” had at least emerged largely unscathed and unaffected by their experiences.

---

<sup>194</sup> Spielvogel, *Interpreting Sacred Ground*, 43.

<sup>195</sup> Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 64.

Signage at Gettysburg of course existed before the formalized efforts of Mission 66, though this was primarily in the form of the basic explanatory signage like unit markers and the bronze markers that the War Department had erected. These initial efforts to expand beyond expository information and into interpretation appear to have begun in the early 1940s, and are riddled with inaccuracies when held up to modern standards and research. To give one such example, the text of a proposed sign near where Alexander Gardner took his famous “Rebel Sharpshooter” image days after the battle states numerous anecdotal fallacies presented as fact. William Frassanito’s groundbreaking photographic research in the 1970s regarding many of the images taken of the battlefield in the immediate aftermath of the fighting dispelled long-held beliefs about what had occurred in these pictures and represents a fascinating example of how outdated much of this old interpretation truly was.

The Park Service’s interpretation of the “sharpshooter” picture seems to have been based on Gardner’s original caption of the event, in which he clearly took creative liberties. The following quotation is from an original draft of the text for field exhibits, sent via memo from GNMP Superintendent J. Walter Coleman to Regional Supervisor of Historic Sites Roy E. Appleman in May 1942, and is shown here in part:

This photograph was made by Alexander Gardner, an assistant to Brady, a day or two after the battle...A young Confederate had built a stone barricade between two large boulders in Devil’s Den, and from his comparatively safe position was picking off Federal officers on Little Round Top. Eventually, a fragment of a shell gave him a mortal head wound, and leaning his musket against the rocks, he lay down to die... [Months later] Gardner returned to the secluded spot in Devil’s Den where he had happened upon the lone dead Confederate sharpshooter. Nothing had been disturbed. The musket, now rusty, still leaned against the rock rampart. A skeleton in tattered clothes lay where the body had rested before. The details in charge of burying the dead had not found the body of the Confederate boy.<sup>196</sup>

---

<sup>196</sup> GNMP Superintendent J. Walter Coleman, Memo to Regional Supervisor of Historic Sites Roy E. Appleman, February 18, 1942. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 1. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

Frassanito would later discredit nearly all of this romanticized mythology through careful re-examination of Gardner's images, noting that what appears to be the same body (an infantryman, not an elite sharpshooter) is also in other Gardner photographs elsewhere on the field, and the photographer, in a "flash of creative excitement," carried the body with his assistants forty yards away from its initial resting place to create the dramatic image described above. Additionally, Frassanito contends that the knapsack under the soldier's head was staged as well, to support the "formulated...scene's potential" where the Confederate soldier would die a brave and stolid death, going so far as to place his own pillow before expiring.<sup>197</sup> Years later, Frassanito's findings were again challenged by graduate student Richard Pougher, who asserted that the two bodies were indeed different men, but Frassanito's version of events has made its way into the official Park Service signage that is now at the scene where the photograph was taken.<sup>198</sup> While these findings represent outstanding research on the part of Frassanito, the fact that official Park Service field exhibits were reliant on the hearsay of a photographer's conjecture represents the state of historic interpretation at GNMP at that time. Coleman himself, after receiving feedback from Appleman, remarked that "[it] is felt that the special interest of the Confederate sharpshooter photograph warrants a longer caption and it is likely that the necessary space can be arranged. It is a very interesting note and it would, in large part at least, be well worth using."<sup>199</sup>

However, some of Frassanito's conclusions (that the body would have been easily found by burial parties. or that the soldier's weapon would have been long gone when Gardner had returned to the field months later thanks to the scores of battlefield

---

<sup>197</sup> Frassanito, *Gettysburg: A Journey In Time*, 192.

<sup>198</sup> Thomas A. Desjardin, *These Honored Dead: How the Story of Gettysburg Shaped American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 186-7.

<sup>199</sup> GNMP Superintendent J. Walter Coleman, Memo to Regional Supervisor of Historic Sites Roy E. Appleman, April 28, 1942. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 1. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

scavengers that descended on Gettysburg) were simply the product of a rudimentary understanding of the timeline and geography of the battle, rather than a fresh method of analysis or the discovery of a long hidden source. Even disregarding the fact that the bodies in the pictures described may have been different after all, the elements of the story relating to the body's presence months after the fact can still be easily disproved. As a result, his work seems to suggest a Park Service that enjoyed these types of anecdotes enough where they were not overly eager to renounce them, let alone seek further information. As a result, the memory of this one particular anonymous Confederate morphed beyond a story of his own unique suffering. A soldier who had likely died a painful death not dissimilar from thousands of other soldiers was now turned into a comforting symbol of a brave American boy, wounded severely and recognizing his fate before accepting it with manly courage once he realized his doom.

The fact that the Park Service incorporated new research like that of Frassanito into its later interpretive incarnations in order to dispel these types of fallacies is certainly encouraging. However, examples of reconciliationist narrative that needed later replacement continued to permeate later incarnations of the wayside signage at Gettysburg. When updated exhibits were to be installed as part of Mission 66, there was much discussion over what the content of the signs should be. Sparse documentation exists regarding the layout and text of this group of signage, but at least two of these signs from Mission 66 remains on the field - a tablet near where Pickett's Charge was finally repulsed which shows basic troop movements, and one towards Culp's Hill just south of town.<sup>200</sup> However, the fact that most of these exhibits were later removed when a new wave of signage was installed in the 1990s suggests that their interpretive conclusions were either incorrect or outdated by the time a new generation of signage

---

<sup>200</sup> Brooks D. Simpson, e-mail message to author, October 2, 2013.

was prepared. John Bodnar suggests that Mission 66 represents the first time that NPS interpretation changed from being done in a “generally loose and casual manner” with poorly trained interpretive personnel to a more concerted effort of performing historical interpretation that stood up to more intense scrutiny.<sup>201</sup>

The largest modification to GNMP during Mission 66 was the construction of a new Visitor Center, built in time for the Civil War centennial. The structure and its sprawling parking lots, built directly on a centralized location near where fierce fighting had taken place around Cemetery Hill, was regarded at the time as “powerful.”<sup>202</sup> However, modern historians would probably regard this placement as atrocious, and completely contradictory to a preservation ethic at Civil War battlefields stressing that sites should be maintained much as they were at the time of the fighting. Historian Ethan Carr also believes that the typical Mission 66 visitor center, at Gettysburg and at other NPS sites, marked a new age in Park Service interpretation, as it shifted the memory of Mission 66 from a “physical legacy of facility development... [to] the program’s less tangible achievements in historic preservation policy and the practice of interpretation [which] may in the end prove to have been more critical in the history of park management.”<sup>203</sup> Thus, by these standards, Gettysburg’s first Visitor Center stood as an excellent example of this new interpretive facility that could centralize interpretation, and the updated facility (opened in 2008) stands as an even stronger example of the evolution of Civil War interpretation within the Park Service. However, the signage that lay on the battlefield itself still had its own interpretive challenges independent of these new facilities.

---

<sup>201</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 195.

<sup>202</sup> Carr, *Mission 66*, 193.

<sup>203</sup> Carr, *Mission 66*, 197.

Little documentation exists regarding the production of the Mission 66 generation of interpretive signage. Much of what it depicted can instead be deciphered from the preliminary reports that were produced regarding the production of the next generation of the signs in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which mostly replaced the Mission 66 placards. These later reports sought to determine if any of these old Mission 66 signs were still usable, and if so, what improvements could be made upon them. Efforts to begin updating the outdated signage began in the mid 1980s, with a number of reports and drafts produced by the NPS detailing the many improvements that could be made and the new topics that brand new signage could tackle. There was significant room for improvement. In fact, a preliminary report by the NPS at GNMP indicated that while “the information presented in the old exhibits is generally correct...[then-NPS Chief Historian] Edwin C. Bearss has called the old waysides the second-worst...in the Civil War parks,”<sup>204</sup> presumably due to their lack of comprehensive interpretation and cohesive storyline.

Additionally, the existing exhibits were largely inadequate from a technological perspective, as their antiquated cast aluminum cases could not “accommodate finely-detailed type and linework or full-color graphics,” all vital to engaging modern visitors.<sup>205</sup> Independent of these technical concerns, and much more significant, were the clear interpretive shifts of the NPS. The human cost of the fighting appears to have taken a more important role in their thinking from the beginning, as in 1986 a wayside was first proposed at the edge of the Rose Woods, where more of Gardner’s photographs had been taken depicting Confederate soldiers laid out for burial.

---

<sup>204</sup> Wayside Exhibit Proposal, 1988. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 8. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

<sup>205</sup> Wayside Exhibit Proposal, 1988. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 8. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

Frassanito's work had again been a factor in the identification of the importance of this field in the Rose Woods where these dead soldiers lay, allowing the NPS to determine finally where on the field these bodies had been originally photographed and correcting the long-held erroneous conclusion that these were Union soldiers near McPherson's Woods or in the Wheatfield, on totally different portions of the field.<sup>206</sup> The NPS, knowing that where the troops had actually laid was virtually devoid of interpretation, saw an opportunity to not only describe the action near the Rose Woods, but to also incorporate a fresh angle that could reveal some of the traumatic effects of combat. The NPS report of 1986 states that the basic troop movements in the area should of course be included in signage, but also notes that "[there] are many pictures of the dead soldiers laying along this treeline [sic], and this wayside would give us a good chance at revealing the cost in human lives the battle tolled."<sup>207</sup> The Park Service, in these preliminary reports regarding new signage at GNMP, appears to have realized that a gap existed in the interpretation of the battle, and that there were opportunities where sources that portrayed or discussed the trauma of combat and its effects could be seamlessly integrated to interpretive materials without distracting the reader from the main story of the battle and its machinations.

A preliminary proposal, submitted for review in 1988, also offered insight into the new standards that the NPS would hold for the fifty-four planned "low profile interpretive exhibits" throughout the park, with an expected relevant lifespan of roughly twenty years.<sup>208</sup> Standards for the waysides were established, and intended effects were

---

<sup>206</sup> Frassanito, *Gettysburg: A Journey in Time*, 205-6.

<sup>207</sup> Gettysburg NBP Devil's Den & Little Round Top Wayside Exhibit Plan, Rose Farm and Woods Action Exhibit. Exhibit Planning, Prep, Maintenance, and Preservation Wayside Plan (Draft Little Round Top/Devil's Den Wayside Plan), 1986. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 2. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

<sup>208</sup> Wayside Exhibit Proposal, 1988. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 8. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

clearly outlined. The exhibits would be used to “identify major historic sites...describe battle events...state the significance of...sites and events...help visitors to visualize historic scenes,” describe the wartime topography, spark interest in visitors that would provoke additional research, and “reinforce and confirm interpretation presented in other media.”<sup>209</sup> While most of these objectives are fairly self-explanatory, the last is perhaps telling. While at the time the interpretive efforts of other mediums (the Visitor Center, etc.) mostly did not delve into the trauma of combat, the new Visitor Center does explore this to considerable extent. As such, it can be argued that the interpretive signage at Gettysburg, which is not intended to operate in a vacuum given the NPS’s own standards stated above, is not fulfilling those very standards in that it is failing to reflect the vivid and visceral realism of the study of combat that is presented at the Visitor Center.

Additionally, the NPS report states that an intended use of the waysides would be to “provide interpretive focal points....which will help to guide visitors to points of interest, orient them, and provide capsule orientation.”<sup>210</sup> Thus, the waysides would serve not just simply to point out the most important sites on the field, but would also function as standalone interpretive exhibits. This was vital to a Park Service that hoped to change its approach and create a more comprehensive experience via the waysides which, rather than “[describing] only parts of the story, would “summarize and synthesize, providing an overview which will make the monuments and plaques more understandable.”<sup>211</sup> A shift had come where the NPS was no longer interested in the individual units’ self-written stories of their own heroism, nor in niche human interest

---

<sup>209</sup> Wayside Exhibit Proposal, 1988. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 8. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

<sup>210</sup> Wayside Exhibit Proposal, 1988. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 8. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

<sup>211</sup> Wayside Exhibit Proposal, 1988. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 8. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.



stories. Rather, the organization's focus was now on presenting an interpretation of the battle that portrayed all aspects of the effects on its participants and the town, including the trauma of the combat itself and its after effects.

The NPS report further states that the new signage would be aesthetically altered, for reasons of aforementioned technological limitations of cast aluminum, but also to ensure that the NPS signage could be easily distinguished from the cast iron tablets of the War Department's efforts.<sup>212</sup> The outdated styling of the cast aluminum can probably be attributed more to the technological limitations of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century rather than any ideological implications. Alternatively, the desire to differentiate this new NPS signage from that of the War Department suggests that the new interpretation would be a completely Park Service-dominant effort, devoid of any of the traditional depictions of the battle that encouraged the perpetuation of myths and glorification of combat, replaced by sound historical scholarship that would portray a more well-rounded depiction of the battle, buttressed by vivid interpretation.

A report from 1992 is particularly telling of the Park Service's updated approach to the interpretation of the battle. Senior Historian Kathy Harrison and Chief of Cultural Resource Management Jim Engle headed up the effort to perform an inventory of the existing signage, and revealed a number of conclusions that are revelatory regarding the Park Service's Mission 66 era approach to historical interpretation. Their reports and recommendations indicate a Park Service that was beginning to recognize the romanticization of previous interpretations, and a Service that also hoped to take a more proactive role in the interpretation of events. Charming human interest anecdotes, such as the aforementioned Confederate sharpshooter story, now came under significant scrutiny from Park Service officials. A story of Wesley Culp, a Confederate soldier

---

<sup>212</sup> Wayside Exhibit Proposal, 1988. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 8. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

supposedly killed on a family member's land at Culp's Hill where he had played as a boy, was one of these anecdotes-as-history to come under intense inquiry.

Engle and Harrison denounced the Mission 66 signage detailing Culp's death and its inherent irony taking place on a hillside of the same name. Harrison questioned why there existed a need to interpret a small "human interest story" when Culp's Hill was barely interpreted as a whole, and also expressed concerns that the Wesley Culp exhibit was physically off of the beaten path anyways, and as such was probably not a site of high visitation.<sup>213</sup> Elsewhere in the report, Harrison remarks that more of these Mission 66 signs were unnecessary and lacked in interpretive power, suggesting needless clutter as opposed to strong historical assets.

As a result, the signage that was eventually erected in the early 1990s, based on the input of Harrison and other historians, represented a turn towards an interpretation that presented a more comprehensive interpretation of Culp's Hill in particular and of Gettysburg in general. Earlier interpretations of the battle, as portrayed in the park's signage, relied heavily on outdated information, or unreliable sources such as the failing memories of aging veterans. Conversely, the most recent incarnation of the signage depicts components of the battle like the grisly images of the dead lined up for burial at the Rose Woods. When this was combined with a willingness to eliminate signage regarding events that had been deemed irrelevant or mythological, it in turn indicated a Park Service willing to present a completely different narrative of the battle. This updated interpretation and signage incorporated a wide variety of elements that were both backed by sound research and also presented a holistic overview of the battle.

This updated signage was a significant improvement on earlier interpretive efforts at the park that were either not all that interpretive to begin with, or otherwise

---

<sup>213</sup> Wayside Exhibit Proposal, 1988. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 8. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

tended to rely on the mythology of melodramatic human interest stories or knowingly incorporate the unconfirmed reports of veterans speaking decades after their actions there. As a result, this early signage was unreliable at best and presented a flawed and narrow interpretation of the conflict that emphasized the gallantry of all soldiers involved in the fighting at the expense of alternative viewpoints. This subsequently promoted a reconciliationist viewpoint of the conflict that obscured a more complete understanding of the true causes, effects, and costs of the war, including the traumatic experiences of the soldiers who had actually been engaged in the grisly business of combat. In the current incarnation of the interpretive signage, the NPS has shown a willingness to occasionally delve into the more uncomfortable aspects of the war, while still allowing the signage to accomplish its primary objectives of orienting the visitor and describing the key people and actions of the battle. However, there still exists room for further improvement where this aspect of the battle is concerned, and future interpretive signage offers significant opportunities for the Park Service to continue its exploration of all aspects of Gettysburg and of the war in general. These “alternative” interpretations will frequently delve into the violence and trauma of the Civil War in a way that most visitors will not be used to, but will serve a vital purpose in humanizing the combatants while allowing visitors to experience a more complete understanding of the battle.

## CHAPTER 4

### “Make Sense of the Incomprehensible Carnage of the War”: Violence and Battlefield Trauma in Wayside Signage at Gettysburg National Military Park

For three days in July of 1863, Gettysburg was a site of unimaginable violence and terror. From July 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup>, tens of thousands of men were killed or maimed in horrific manners, and even those who survived physically unscathed were surely changed forever by their experiences. However, the millions of visitors who come to visit the site are largely not exposed to these unsettling and horrific aspects of the war. Kenneth Foote specifically refers to Gettysburg when he argues that “victims [of the battle] died for a cause, and the cause, rather than the victims, spurs sanctification...sanctified sites [like Gettysburg]...mark the traumas of nationhood.”<sup>214</sup> Thus, when attempting to calculate the importance of a site of violence, the traumas of a nation typically supersede the individual traumas of those who were in the throes of the necessary violence.

Kirk Savage contends that this decision by Americans to focus on what amounted to a “greater good” public memory of the war was a deliberate process that started immediately after the conflict. He notes that in 1866 respected author and critic William Dean Howells wrote an essay in *The Atlantic* that clearly outlined his ideas regarding monumentation at Civil War battlefields. Savage writes that Howells made his feelings apparent in his essay:

Howells wanted society to forget what the soldiers did in the war; it was simply too terrible to contemplate ... Instead, Howells argued, the monuments of the war should remember what the soldiers’ terrible deeds finally achieved, for this was the only way that he and many like him could make sense of the incomprehensible carnage of the war.<sup>215</sup>

---

<sup>214</sup> Foote, *Shadowed Ground*, 10.

<sup>215</sup> Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 164-5. To make this point, Savage uses and cites: William Dean Howells, “Question of Monuments,” *Atlantic Monthly* 18 (May 1866): 646-49, esp. 647.

As a result of the attitude of Howells and others, the individual horrors that soldiers had suffered were displaced by more comfortable memories of the war's broader legacy, and the change that it had supposedly wrought in its preservation of the Union and, to a far lesser extent, its obliteration of American slavery. Subsequently, a dominant reconciliatory tradition that minimized the war's horror dominated memory of the conflict as Americans decided to focus on glorious results of the war (a reunited Union in particular) while choosing to forget the unpleasant aspects of the actual fighting itself.

The interpretive efforts at sites like the Gettysburg National Military Park accordingly reflect this attitude. John Bodnar contends that parks like Gettysburg primarily exist to convey the "symbolic expression of the triumph of the nation-state and the glory of the sacrifice of those who contributed to that goal."<sup>216</sup> Bodnar's point, while perhaps overly cynical, underscores that the triumph of a reunited America is the most crucial legacy of the American Civil War that is presented to the public. Consequently, the portrayal of a united America as the war's key legacy renders those who died in its pursuit as almost an amorphous mass, devoid of agency. The dominant reconciliatory interpretation exists at the expense of an understanding of both the after-effects of slavery as well as of the millions of personal traumas experienced by soldiers. However, recently the Park Service has begun to better comprehend and interpret both of these relatively silent legacies.

As for slavery, it is now mandated by law that the issue of emancipation be presented at national parks as the primary cause of the Civil War, which ideally will eventually remove any confusion or willful misinformation that still lingers over vague "causes" like states' rights.<sup>217</sup> Conversely, the trauma of combat and its effects on

---

<sup>216</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 191.

<sup>217</sup> Babbitt, Foreword to *Rally on the High Ground*, v.

combatants is still largely unexplored and has only recently begun to be prominently featured at Gettysburg's Visitor Center. While this is certainly a step towards presenting a more holistic account of all aspects of the conflict, there still exists an opportunity to convey narratives of trauma through the wayside signage that dots the roadways and foot paths of the park. Though their primary intent is to provide expository information regarding the battle and its participants, the waysides present a unique opportunity for the National Park Service to communicate brief instances of interpretive language that can still allow the main mission to be accomplished.

This section will explore specific instances of both existing signage that could easily be modified to incorporate traumatic narratives, as well as sites that currently lack signage but offer opportunities to analyze additional components of battlefield trauma. These particular examples of signage can be analyzed as a means of better understanding how the Park Service could conceivably integrate the horror of the battlefield while still orienting visitors to major sites and personalities, as the original mission of wayside signage intended.<sup>218</sup> By incorporating traumatic elements at the sites around Gettysburg listed below, the NPS will be able to present a fresh, multi-faceted approach to its interpretation of the battle.

### **The Death of Alonzo Cushing**

Perhaps the most well-known junior officer to die at Gettysburg, Lieutenant Alonzo H. Cushing was killed on the final day of the battle as his battery fought off Pickett's Charge near the famous Copse of Trees on Cemetery Ridge south of town. Likely adding to Cushing's fame was the fact that Confederate Brigadier General Lewis Armistead, made famous in current times by the portrayal of his life and death in the novel *The Killer Angels* and its film adaptation *Gettysburg*, was mortally wounded

---

<sup>218</sup> Wayside Exhibit Proposal, 1988. Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present, D6215, GETT 43970, Box 13, Folder 8. Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical file.

amongst Cushing's guns as his men overran them before being repulsed by Union reinforcements.

In the early afternoon of July 3<sup>rd</sup>, Confederate artillery began bombarding the Union line, which Cushing's battery of six cannon essentially centered. His men were shredded by the bombardment as they struggled to return the fire of the Confederates, and men and horses were disemboweled by the flying metal.<sup>219</sup> Cushing's unit suffered grievous casualties during the preliminary bombardment, and still more when the Confederate advance on their lines began. The NPS signage at this site on Cemetery Ridge briefly interprets the story of Cushing's battery specifically, while also analyzing the role of artillery at Gettysburg at large, namely through descriptions of the various types of ammunition used by these guns. Perhaps most importantly, there is a portrait of Cushing and a brief vignette about his life:

**Lt. Alonzo H. Cushing** graduated from West Point in 1861, a classmate of George Armstrong Custer. At age 22 he died beside his cannon here. According to Cpl. Thomas Moon who served under him, he 'looked more like a school girl than a warrior, but he was the best fighting man I ever saw.'

This entry on Cushing, while accurate, displays little of the personal characteristics that would humanize him as a fallible, complete person. Instead, it focuses strictly on his martial aptitude while also including a quote that paints him almost as a cherubic victim of pure sacrifice. While the former piece of information is perhaps the most vital in relevance to the description of an officer at a military park, the latter stands out as an unnecessary reduction of a person to a simplistic state of existence.

However, this was significantly different from the truth. According to Cushing's biographer Kent Masterson Brown, Cushing was a notorious hazer at West Point and enjoyed making life miserable for those in younger classes at that institution, as his "love of deviling plebes never left him," even going so far as being reprimanded for hazing just

---

<sup>219</sup> Kent Masterson Brown, *Cushing of Gettysburg: The Story of a Union Artillery Commander* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 237.

days before he graduated from the Point, among a myriad of other disciplinary actions taken against him.<sup>220</sup> Additionally, the choice of describing him as a “school girl” is curious. Even though his facial features were soft in appearance, he was a powerful athletic specimen who was an avid weightlifter, not the diminutive and frail individual that a description as a school girl might evoke.<sup>221</sup>

Additionally, the description on the interpretive exhibit at the site of Cushing’s battery understates the extent of the physical trauma that he experienced in the hours before his death. During the Confederate barrage, Cushing was wounded in the shoulder and in the testicles during the early stages of the firing, leaving him in such agony that he began vomiting while remaining on his feet.<sup>222</sup> Artillerists from other batteries all around Cushing’s were also being blown to pieces, with flying metal shredding the bodies of the cannon crewmen and literally tearing men into pieces.<sup>223</sup> After his initial wounding, Cushing’s thumb was burned to the bone preventing an explosion when he used a bare hand to prevent gasses from escaping a vent in one of his cannon.<sup>224</sup> Cushing continued to issue orders to the men of his battery, to the astonishment of eyewitnesses, and his suffering only ended when a bullet slammed into his mouth and landed in his brain as Confederates surged over the stone wall that fronted his guns.<sup>225</sup> Cushing had lived the last several hours of his life in absolute agony, dying on a nondescript field far from home. The NPS signage that describes his death states the barest of necessary facts to

---

<sup>220</sup> Brown, *Cushing of Gettysburg*, 37.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>223</sup> John H. Rhodes, *The History of Battery B, First Regiment Rhode Island Light Artillery*. (Providence, RI, 1894), 209-210, as cited in Brown, *Cushing of Gettysburg*, 238.

<sup>224</sup> Philip M. Cole, *Civil War Artillery at Gettysburg* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 229 and Brown, *Cushing of Gettysburg*, 249.

<sup>225</sup> Brown, *Cushing of Gettysburg*, 251.



convey that Cushing died at Gettysburg, but even more detail could be included without compromising length limitations.

Additional information of this type could assist visitors to the park in realizing that, though separated by centuries from themselves, the men who fought at Gettysburg were human. Their sufferings become all the more heroic when interpretation is able to convey both that they felt much the same fears and anxieties as soldiers of other wars, as well as how agonizing the process of combat and death could truly be. They were not perfect paragons of virtue, and to attempt to portray them as little more than the manifestations of wholesome sacrifice and heroism is to belittle their actions and render their deeds inevitable. Undoubtedly the courage of men like Alonzo Cushing deserves recognition and respect, but by expanding the narrative it could be possible to present a portrait of Cushing the person, not just Cushing the dead hero. In turn, his sacrifice would be rendered all the more incredible, while simultaneously presenting a more honest interpretation of warfare.

Additionally, by downplaying the trauma of combat, there is a risk of losing the individuality of the soldiers. By neglecting to focus on specific instances of trauma, which can easily be told in narrative form, Park Service signage can run the risk of visitors thinking of those who died as little more than numbers, rather than individual humans. Adam Bradford notes that this was not unheard of among those who lived in the Civil War era, as Walt Whitman was already concerned by this trend during the war. Whitman attributed the loss of individuality to the spread of a modernized and mechanized economy that turned men into the cogs in a machine rather than individuals. Taken to a more extreme level, “this deflation of human value reached its culmination in the Civil War, where social, political, and economic forces combined to make men into soldiers

and reduce their value to their ability to kill one another.”<sup>226</sup> Thus, the concern over reducing Civil War soldiers to mere numbers and stripping of them of their humanity is hardly a new concern, and telling stories like Cushing’s to an eager public is a highly effective way to reach those visitors and direct them towards a fuller understanding of the soldier’s experience.

The strength of public history at NPS-run sites like Gettysburg is that they offer outstanding storytelling as a means of reaching the public. Dolores Hayden, in her study of urban history in Los Angeles, notes how important “urban storytelling” is in creating a strengthened public interest in history.<sup>227</sup> Stories connect people to history in a way that is possible in few other disciplines, and professionals in related fields such as anthropology have recognized the power of this avenue and work hard to ensure that engaging the public through effective narratives remains a priority.<sup>228</sup> As such, the Park Service’s creation of a brief narrative surrounding the heroic death of Alonzo Cushing is an outstanding way to engage the public, but details regarding the trauma of his death could give visitors a more holistic understanding of the battle itself, as well as the individual experiences that make up one of the most dreadful aspects of human existence.

Thus, an alternative for Cushing’s brief narrative can be considered that omits some of the unnecessary information in the NPS version in favor of details that flesh out the story of his death:

1861 West Point graduate **Lt. Alonzo H. Cushing** commanded this battery and was wounded horrifically in the abdomen, shoulder, genitals, and hand during the Confederate barrage. He bravely directed his men for almost two more hours

---

<sup>226</sup> Adam Bradford, “Re-collecting Soldiers: Walt Whitman and the Appreciation of Human Value,” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 27 (Winter 2010): 146.

<sup>227</sup> Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997), 228.

<sup>228</sup> Y.A. Orr, “Public Anthropology: The Power of Storytelling,” *Current Anthropology* 50 (August 2009): 413.

as their cannons tore apart swaths of charging Confederates until an enemy bullet entered his mouth, killing him instantly.

While the challenges of introducing significant personal detail are of course related to space considerations, a prospective new inscription reading along these lines would allow visitors to understand just how much men like Cushing suffered when they died by way of flying metal. The inscription given here also states a brief narrative that describes in small order how Cushing's battlefield experience progressed, and places him in a larger battlefield context.

J. Christian Spielvogel asserts that introducing a "savage interpretation" of Civil War combat is vital in that it gives greater contextual meaning to a war that still had two years to go and would rapidly devolve into a hellish struggle through 1864 and 1865.<sup>229</sup> Spielvogel notes that the importance of this fact is that a "heroic battle of Gettysburg memory restores the integrity and power of that heroic frame for the war as a whole."<sup>230</sup> In other words, by creating an unmistakable memory of Gettysburg as an isolated place of heroism that is relatively free of savagery, historians and the public can run the risk of losing historical perspective on the conflict at large. This in turn marginalizes the months and years of the war that came after Gettysburg, a war which would rapidly degenerate into a ferocious conflict more resembling World War I than the sweeping gallantry of cavalry charges and Napoleonic assaults.

### **The Fence at the Emmitsburg Road**

One vital section of the battlefield is the fences that run along the Emmitsburg Road south of town. These tall encumbrances were a scene of slaughter to the advancing Confederates of Pickett's Charge as they struggled to climb over them, and represented one of the last barriers that these men had to overcome before their last surge into the

---

<sup>229</sup> Spielvogel, *Interpreting Sacred Ground*, 87.

<sup>230</sup> Spielvogel, *Interpreting Sacred Ground*, 87.

Union lines that included Cushing and his men. GNMP Supervisory Historian Scott Hartwig notes that these high fences are typically discussed to varying degrees of detail on the park ranger walks that run daily during tourist season, indicating that the park fully recognizes their significance and impact.<sup>231</sup> However, the fence lines that still exist over the ground of Pickett's Charge are devoid of any passive interpretation in the form of wayside signage for the visitor who just happens upon them.

The fences caused many of the Confederates to delay their advance as they clumsily climbed over them, now well within the range of Union small arms as the Northern lines lay only two hundred yards ahead. Stephen Sears refers to the Emmitsburg Road as "literally and figuratively a barricade to their further advance," and notes that Brigadier General Johnston Pettigrew's men especially foundered in this sunken road, with many abandoning the charge at this point, through their own volition or through death and dismemberment at the hands of Union troops.<sup>232</sup> Advancing Confederates were not only in range of Union riflery, but now also faced canister from Cushing's battery and others. A fearsome brand of artillery ammunition, canister was a cylinder filled with iron spheres roughly the size of golf balls, and was effective only at close range, much like turning an artillery piece into an enormous shotgun. Soldiers were terrified of the weapon, and its effects were unfathomably destructive.

Union accounts from Gettysburg emphasize how canister fire had the effect of terrifying and demoralizing their targets, as when the 15<sup>th</sup> New York Battery's commanding officer Lieutenant Andrew McMahon noted that his guns had been firing at the advancing Confederates south of Cushing's position with more traditional ammunition for some time with considerable effect. However, when they began firing double canister (two canister rounds simultaneously in the cannon's barrel, effectively

---

<sup>231</sup> Scott Hartwig, e-mail message to author, October 17, 2013.

<sup>232</sup> Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 429-430.

doubling a cannon's output), this increased fire "had the immediate effect of staying their attack and throwing them into disorder."<sup>233</sup> Lieutenant William Wheeler of the 13<sup>th</sup> New York Battery used similarly euphemistic language when he noted due to some skillful maneuvering, his guns were given "a fine opportunity to enfilade [the Confederate] column with canister, which threw them into great disorder and brought them to a halt three times."<sup>234</sup> Language that made it sound as though the noise and flames of the cannon were inflicting confusing damage on the nebulous advancing Confederates can seem almost deliberately vague when reading primary source material.

While surely writing primarily for conciseness, these writers' accounts must be explored deeper if the Park Service is to focus on valuable primary sources in its interpretive signage. The implications of language used in battle reports like the examples above are that a better perception and understanding of the true, traumatic impacts of these actions is lost. This is not to say that the language used in the reports was deliberately evasive, however. Fear in battle was a powerful weapon, and the terror of canister could indeed "throw a column into disorder." In fact, deliberately terrifying horses was an acknowledged tactic to combat cavalry actions, and explosive ammunition was preferable when faced with mounted troops, as "the loud noise and sudden flash startled the horses and caused much more consternation than physical damage."<sup>235</sup>

When facing advancing men, however, an emphasis still existed on imposing as much physical damage as possible. Canister fire was a horrific weapon that shredded men to pieces, with the spray of shrapnel from its exploding container not unlike the

---

<sup>233</sup> *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols., (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), ser.1, vol. 27, pt.1, 889.

<sup>234</sup> *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols., (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), ser.1, vol. 27, pt.1, 753.

<sup>235</sup> Brent Nosworthy, *The Bloody Crucible of Courage: Fighting Methods and Combat Experience of the Civil War* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2003), 431.

crude explosive weapons used in some modern terrorist attacks to maim and kill. Amputations still occur in modern times for these similar types of shredding injuries as in the Civil War era. One doctor who treated victims of the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013 remarked that the decision to amputate limbs was easy, as the medical personnel “just completed the ugly job that the bomb did.”<sup>236</sup>

Canister fire, if fired on hard ground, was to be aimed low, so that the balls could ricochet off of the ground and into the lower bodies of the advancing men, choosing to maim them rather than risk aiming higher and overshooting the attackers.<sup>237</sup> These were the true destructive impacts of the batteries that McMahon and Wheeler commanded, not simply a “driving off” of their enemy. The psychological impact of the weapon was also immense. Gerald Linderman notes that most new recruits were naturally shocked the first time that they saw a man obliterated by ordnance like canister, and that “the realization that few soldiers died with tidy holes through the chest” was a startling awakening.<sup>238</sup>

The violence of all Civil War weaponry, including canister, can be difficult to comprehend. Sergeant Austin K. Stearns of the 13<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry was horrified when he saw of the effects of Civil War ordnance at Second Bull Run in August of 1862. He came upon a wounded Union soldier who had been hit in the throat, and was struggling to speak as “everytime he tried to speak the blood would fill his mouth and he would blow it out in all directions...at the time I thought he was the most dreadfull sight I

---

<sup>236</sup> Reuters, “Boston Marathon bombs packed with gunpowder, shrapnel,” *Milwaukee-Wisconsin Journal-Sentinel*, April 17, 2013, accessed August 30, 2013, <http://www.jsonline.com/news/usandworld/bombs-packed-with-shrapnel-to-maximize-injuries-009itiq-203190871.html>.

<sup>237</sup> Nosworthy, *The Bloody Crucible*, 436.

<sup>238</sup> Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 124-5.

ever saw.”<sup>239</sup> At Gettysburg the following year, Stearns was again shaken when a fellow sergeant was shot through the head with his brains seeping out of the wound, gurgling as he struggled to touch the wound.<sup>240</sup> Charles Harvey Brewster of the 10<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts wrote home about the Gettysburg battlefield as well, surprisingly disclosing to his mother that in the aftermath of battle he witnessed “men with heads shot off, limbs shot off, Men shot in two, and men shot in pieces, and little fragments so as hardly to be recognizable as any part of a man.”<sup>241</sup>

There can be no doubt that the only Civil War weapon capable of reducing human beings to unrecognizable bits like Stearns saw was artillery, and likely canister fire at that. Even modern historical fiction has begun attempts to more faithfully portray the effects of this type of ammunition on flesh, as in Ralph Peters’ *Cain at Gettysburg*, where advancing Confederates are hit in their flank by canister fire on July 1: “Yankee artillery opened an enfilading fire from the high ground near the pike. It gashed through men caught in the thicket. Bodies tumbled, burst, dissolved. Spraying blood wildly, limbs leapt into the air.”<sup>242</sup> This gruesome scene is likely similar to the effects of the canister fire that was spraying the advancing Confederates of Pickett’s Charge on July 3, “throwing them into disorder.”

Thus, an opportunity exists at the Emmitsburg Road to place a wayside interpretive exhibit that would accomplish several things. First, the fact that many of the men, especially of Pettigrew’s division, simply stopped at this slightly sunken road and

---

<sup>239</sup> Arthur A. Kent, ed., *Three Years with Company K, Sergt. Austin C. Stearns, Company K, 13<sup>th</sup> Mass. Infantry (Deceased)* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), 108.

<sup>240</sup> Kent, ed. *Three Years with Company K*, 180.

<sup>241</sup> David W. Blight, ed., *When This Cruel War is Over: The Civil War Letters of Charles Harvey Brewster* (Amherst: The University Press of Massachusetts, 1992), 239.

<sup>242</sup> Ralph Peters, *Cain at Gettysburg* (New York: Forge Books, 2012), 124. In his author notes, Peters speaks to his desire to bring “war’s horror” to the masses in a modern interpretation of the Battle of Gettysburg.

would not advance further offers a chance to interpret the varied reactions of men to combat and the limits of courage. Gerald Linderman's central argument in his study of Civil War soldiers in combat is that "[manliness, godliness, duty, honor, and knightliness all]...remained subordinate to courage... [above all, courage] served as the goad and guide of men in battle."<sup>243</sup> Thus, most men would have regarded a refusal to advance as a direct repudiation of their duty and a signal that they lacked the necessary courage to thrive as effective, manly soldiers. The Park Service could have an ideal opportunity in this paradigm to explore what motivated men in combat, and how some were able to operate effectively while others simply reached a point where they could go no further.

Second, the Emmitsburg Road exhibit would offer an exemplary opportunity to interpret the true violence and carnage of combat. Care must be taken in this instance to use appropriate primary source material. If quotations such as the aforementioned ones from official action reports are utilized, the violence of the cannon fire in particular is downplayed, and euphemistic language continues to obscure the true effects of this level of violence. It is possible to still use primary source material in this particular instance, but perhaps accounts of enlisted men or attacking Confederate officers and men could be found that more honestly and viscerally describes the violence of the artillery fire on July 3. Lt. John H. Moore of the 7<sup>th</sup> Tennessee is one such Confederate, noting in detail how the fences delayed his men:

The time it took to climb to the top...seemed to me an age of suspense...the plank or slab fence was splintered and riddled, and the very grass was scorched and withered by the heat of shell and bullets. Around me lay forty dead and wounded of the forty-seven of my company that entered the scene of carnage with me.<sup>244</sup>

---

<sup>243</sup> Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 16.

<sup>244</sup> John H. Moore, "Seventh Tennessee Infantry," in *Military Annals of Tennessee*, ed. John B. Lindsley (Nashville: J.M. Lindsley & Co. Publishers, 1886), 1:251.



Accounts like Moore's would more viscerally portray the violent and traumatizing effects of both the interminable fences as well as the vicious cannon fire that was tearing through the entire length of the advancing Confederate line.

This discussion of the horror of the effects of canister fire on advancing Confederates near the Emmitsburg Road would also improve a discussion of the Civil War as a whole. As mentioned above, the final years of the war after Gettysburg are deemphasized and marginalized in national memory of the war, owing to, in the words of Spielvogel, their "potentially transforming critique of heroic masculinity."<sup>245</sup> Gettysburg is seen as a battle which somehow was not as atrociously savage as the later engagements at Cold Harbor or Spotsylvania, for example, so its interpretation tends to focus on heroic narratives that still somehow seem appropriate when studying pre-1864 battles. However, examples like this conceived interpretive signage at the Emmitsburg Road could offer an opportunity to examine how all Civil War battles were hellish orgies of killing and bloodshed, and that Gettysburg was not an exception.

Finally, the Emmitsburg Road exhibit could be an opportunity to examine how the soldiers themselves felt about death. The definition of a Victorian "Good Death" is vital to remember, as one's last moments were to be carefully prepared for and observed by many others, ideally loved ones, who scrutinized the quality of the death.<sup>246</sup> Civil War violence was, quite simply, catastrophic to these ideals. Death by canister fire near the Emmitsburg Road was sudden and vicious, often rendering those bodies bearing the brunt of the fire to be little more than unidentifiable pieces of meat. This type of undignified end flies in the face of Victorian ideals regarding dying and death, and as such, must have weighed heavily on the minds of Civil War soldiers.

---

<sup>245</sup> Spielvogel, *Interpreting Sacred Ground*, 86.

<sup>246</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 9.

Drew Gilpin Faust does address this via the perspective of civilians, who found it “incomprehensible” that “many Civil War soldiers actually vanished, their bodies vaporized by the firepower of this first modern war,” and that these civilians “found it difficult to fathom” that “an individual being [could be] entirely lost,” but such was the scale, severity, and spread of Civil War violence.<sup>247</sup> Given these prospective ideas for interpretation, it is clear that there is opportunity to interpret the fences along the Emmitsburg Road in a number of ways that could be beneficial in conveying the trauma and violence of the battlefield.

### **Iverson’s Mistake**

On the first day of the battle a Confederate brigade under Brigadier General Alfred Iverson, composed almost entirely of North Carolinian troops, advanced towards Oak Ridge, just north of Gettysburg (then Pennsylvania) College. Iverson stayed well back from the lines as his men advanced virtually blindly towards a stone wall, behind which lay a Union brigade under Brigadier General Henry Baxter. As Iverson’s men turned parallel to the stone wall, Baxter’s men rose and fired directly into their flank, inflicting 860 casualties on a brigade of roughly 1300 men almost instantaneously.<sup>248</sup> The blunder destroyed Iverson’s career, and remains one of the more costly and horrific mistakes of the entire battle. So far back from the line was Iverson that he could not understand why his men were waving white handkerchiefs as the Union soldiers continued to pour fire into them, categorizing his emotions towards the action at that

---

<sup>247</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 128.

<sup>248</sup> Variance in Civil War troop strengths and casualty numbers is commonplace. These figures originate from *The Rashness of That Hour: Politics, Gettysburg, and the Downfall of Confederate Brigadier General Alfred Iverson* by Robert Wynstra (New York: Savas Beatie, 2010), xv.

time as “disgraceful,” as he clearly did not grasp the desperate situation that his men were in.<sup>249</sup>

The signage regarding this action at Gettysburg National Military Park is actually an example where the violence of the action is conveyed fairly graphically and accurately in the interpretive writing. A wayside near the Eternal Peace Light Memorial, near what would have been Iverson’s left flank, is entitled “General Rodes Attacks” and briefly describes what happened to Iverson’s brigade, noting that:

The thunder of Southern cannon positioned here signal the beginning of the attack. Following the cannonade, Brig. Gen. Alfred Iverson’s North Carolina Brigade advanced with other Confederates against Oak Ridge. As Iverson neared the ridge, Federals concealed behind a stone wall rose up and raked the North Carolinians with murderous fire. More than half the 1,470 Confederates engaged were killed, wounded, or captured.

The language contained in this particular wayside shows a significant willingness to assign agency to the violence of the battlefield. Whereas on other signs around the park soldiers were “struck down,” seemingly by forces outside of human control, this particular wayside clearly states to the visitor that it was, in fact, human beings doing the killing of enemy soldiers. While Spielvogel argues that soldiers viewed Gettysburg as the beginning of an attritional conflict that stripped them of their individual agency as soldiers, it is still crucial to remember that it was individual men pulling the trigger and deliberately killing other soldiers.<sup>250</sup> Additionally, Spielvogel contends that within interpretive representations of Gettysburg (particularly the memory of Pickett’s Charge), Union soldiers were happy to adopt a reconciliatory attitude which further removed agency from the violence:

[Union soldiers could] savor the fruits of a decisive victory while simultaneously creating a memory of Rebels as soldiers who passively and sacrificially walked

---

<sup>249</sup> *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ser.1, vol. 27, pt.2, 579. As cited in Wynstra, *The Rashness of That Hour*, 241.

<sup>250</sup> Spielvogel, *Interpreting Sacred Ground*, 85.

across the open fields under heavy fire to endure a brave and gallant death, as opposed to men who actively sought to “kill” Union troops and destroy the Union.<sup>251</sup>

The roles in this particular scenario could conceivably be easily reversed and Spielvogel’s point would still stand. Interpretive undertakings at Gettysburg National Military Park tend to downplay the notion that soldiers were actively killing and maiming each other, in favor of interpretation that portrays these men as passively dying during battle due to vague, unnamed causes.

The interpretive markers at Gettysburg typically remove much of this agency, inadvertently contributing to a reconciliationist memory of the war where it is not immediately apparent to visitors that someone had to kill those who “died,” and that willful violence is the most unsettling component of battlefields like Gettysburg. Killing is, of course, one of the most disturbing elements of the human experience, and where so many of Iverson’s men fell represents an opportunity to interpret how Civil War soldiers were able to do something that is universally regarded as a moral wrong. Additionally, it could offer insight into how different soldiers handle the prospect of killing in their own unique ways, with some actually looking forward to it. For example, Dave Grossman, author of a landmark study on the effects of killing on the psyches of soldiers over the centuries, names an “exhilaration stage” of killing. He describes this as a state that many combatants experience which Grossman compares to that of a “hunter or marksman [feeling] a thrill of pleasure and satisfaction upon dropping his target... [i]n combat, this thrill can be greatly magnified.”<sup>252</sup> Exhilaration is just the first of five steps which

---

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>252</sup> Grossman, *On Killing*, 234.

Grossman believes constitute the psychological process for a soldier called upon to take life.<sup>253</sup>

While emphasizing the normality of these seemingly repulsive, positive emotions in response to the killing of a fellow human being, Grossman cautions about those soldiers who remain permanently anchored in this state, “aggressive sociopaths” estimated to be approximately 2% of the population who “kill completely without remorse.”<sup>254</sup> Grossman’s research expands further on the more advanced stages of this reaction to killing. He notes that among other effects of killing a soldier can “come to accept that what he has done was necessary and right” but he will likely “never completely [leave] all remorse and guilt behind.”<sup>255</sup> Eric T. Dean expands on the consequences of killing in the heat of Civil War battle, noting the exhausting nature of the work:

After the commotion of battle and the attendant adrenaline rush had subsided, there was frequently something akin to physical collapse as many Civil War soldiers felt completely exhausted and sometimes ached all over...[s]ometimes men would drop on the spot and sleep in the midst of dead bodies on the field – which reflected not so much diminished sensibilities as complete physical prostration after the incredible exertion and emotional tempest of a battle.<sup>256</sup>

Dean’s work offers fascinating insights into the psychological ramifications of the trauma of combat that will be discussed in more detail elsewhere. However, his research and Grossman’s work in noting how the actual act of killing could cause immediate psychological and physical ramifications would provide an interesting interpretive framework for the NPS to explore how different soldiers reacted to the ugly business of killing, and also render them as more complete human beings. The current interpretive wayside that describes Iverson’s folly does perform an admirable job of beginning this

---

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 231-2.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>256</sup> Dean, *Shook Over Hell*, 74.

discussion, but additional signage could delve deeper into the human experience of the trauma of combat and killing, as well as their repercussions.

### **The Railroad Cut**

Several hundred yards to the southwest of where Iverson's men met their mass fate, an inspired action by a young officer in one of the Union army's most renowned units led to the capture of several hundred Confederate soldiers in a large ditch. Lt. Col. Rufus Dawes commanded the 6<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry of the Union First Corps's Iron Brigade, a brigade composed entirely of troops from the modern Midwest that had seen ferocious fighting already throughout the war and earned their "iron" nickname for their unyielding courage at South Mountain in 1862. The 6<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin arrived on the field at Gettysburg on the morning of July 1<sup>st</sup> along with the brigade's other regiments – the 19<sup>th</sup> Indiana, the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin. The Union cavalry that had initially engaged the Confederates early that morning was in danger of being overwhelmed by greater Confederate firepower and manpower, and the First Corps was the first group of Union infantry to arrive on the field. They had crossed fields to the south and west of the town of Gettysburg after their march north up the Emmitsburg Road was diverted by a courier who told them they were desperately needed to staunch the Confederate advance against the Union cavalry.

Hacking down obstructive portions of the same fencing that would flummox their Confederate adversaries two days later during Pickett's Charge, the Union men stormed through fields and woods to arrive just in time to halt the Confederate advance. The 6<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin was held in reserve as its four sister regiments plunged into hellish fighting in an area known as Herbst's Woods on McPherson's Ridge. Dawes soon saw that other Union units protecting the right flank of the Iron Brigade's position were crumbling, and that the enemy "was pressing rapidly in pursuit of [this] retreating line, threatening the

rear of [the Iron Brigade], engaged in the woods on the left.”<sup>257</sup> Dawes ordered his regiment to begin firing into the flank of the advancing Confederates, forcing them to dive for cover into an unfinished railroad cut that led into town.<sup>258</sup> Sensing an opportunity, Dawes and his regiment sprang into action, surging over the Chambersburg Pike and across the fields towards the railroad cut with two other Union regiments, losing hundreds of men during this brief dash as they charged the hidden Confederates.

They finally reached the deep ditch, and after a brief hand-to-hand struggle, hundreds of Confederate soldiers surrendered.<sup>259</sup> The Union soldiers would eventually be forced back through the streets of Gettysburg as the Federal line folded, but Dawes’ action represented what military historian Lt. Col. Robert Bateman termed something of a “Turning Point” in the war; an instance where Union officers “knew what to do, how to do it, and had the [courage] to do it regardless of higher authority.”<sup>260</sup> While assigning turning points to wars or battles is of course a risky enterprise, Bateman, in writing for a popular general interest magazine audience, was simply trying to emphasize the brilliance and creativity of Dawes’ maneuver. The interpretive signage that the NPS has erected at the site of Dawes’ courageous decision offers basic information regarding the action:

Union infantry led by Lt. Col. Rufus R. Dawes and Col. Edward B. Fowler crossed the turnpike in front of you, climbed the fence there, and charged the cut. Although many were shot in the attempt, the charging Federals reached the edge of the cut and shouted, “Throw down your muskets!” Trapped between the steep slopes, about 230 Confederates surrendered.

---

<sup>257</sup> *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ser.1, vol. 27, pt.1, 276.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>260</sup> Lt. Col. Robert Bateman, “And The Battle of Gettysburg Begins,” *Esquire*, The Politics Blog, July 1, 2013, accessed September 4, 2013, <http://www.esquire.com/blogs/politics/first-day-of-gettysburg-battle-070113>.

This interpretive wayside shows an example of the type of signage that removes the agency of killing reminiscent of Spielvogel's argument, as Union soldiers "were shot" by antagonists who are not explicitly defined. It also eliminates the violence of the intimate hand-to-hand struggle that occurred. The Confederate surrender was not immediate, and significant violence did occur at close range. Renowned Iron Brigade historian Lance J. Herdegen offers a brief insight into the chaos of this close contact, shown here in part:

As [Pvt. Lewis] Eggleston fell, David 'Rocky Mountain' Anderson of Minneapolis swung his musket like a club, crushing the skull of the Rebel who fired the fatal ball. Nearby, John Harland was shot as he moved toward the Confederate flag, his body sliding into the railroad cut at the foot of the soldier who killed him. Private Levi Tongue aimed his musket pointblank at the Rebel. 'Don't shoot! Don't kill me,' yelled the Johnny. 'All hell can't save you now,' replied Tongue, whose discharge knocked the grayback onto the body of his friend.<sup>261</sup>

Interpretation of this flurry of violence would address many of the aforementioned challenges regarding the physical trauma of combat and the humanization of Civil War soldiers. However, Rufus Dawes, represented in the current wayside by a brief sidebar detailing his role in the charge, represents an example of the psychological trauma that Civil War combat veterans endured in their later years. Days after the battle, he wrote to his future wife about his courageous action to charge the railroad cut and stated that even though morale remained high in the army, his future partner "can hardly know the strain of such days as those three at Gettysburg."<sup>262</sup>

Dawes would become more and more disillusioned as the war dragged on. In May of 1864, near Spotsylvania Court House, he sat down to write to his wife. His regiment,

---

<sup>261</sup> Lance J. Herdegen, *The Iron Brigade in Civil War and Memory: The Black Hats from Bull Run to Appomattox and Thereafter* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2012), 386.

<sup>262</sup> Rufus R. Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers* (Marietta, OH: E.R. Alderman and Sons, 1890), 185. Lance Herdegen and Alan T. Nolan, the two foremost scholars on the Iron Brigade, both acknowledge the virtual certainty that Dawes suffered from PTSD, or "battle fatigue" in Nolan's 1961 nomenclature. Lance J. Herdegen, *Those Damned Black Hats!: The Iron Brigade in the Gettysburg Campaign* (New York: Savas Beatie, 2008), 300, and Alan T. Nolan, *The Iron Brigade: A Military History* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1961), 277. Nolan also acknowledges how the effects of psychological trauma on Dawes could be "just as crippling as the bullets that had accounted for his comrades."



still reeling from its Gettysburg losses, had taken another beating and Dawes was becoming more and more detached from his prewar persona. “The perils of last week have been fearful,” he wrote, “I cannot hope to pass thus safely through another such...The frightful scenes...made my heart almost like a stone.”<sup>263</sup> Later that month he wrote of the haunting sounds of a wounded Confederate, stranded between the lines at Spotsylvania, screaming “My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” over and over through an entire night.<sup>264</sup> Later in his memoirs he recounted the horrifying sight of the bodies of many of his own dead men roasting when the grass around them ignited after battle.<sup>265</sup> At Petersburg in June, he complained of how “it is awfully disheartening to be ordered upon such hopeless assaults” after still more of his rapidly dwindling regiment were killed in an attack on the Rebel entrenchments.<sup>266</sup> His letters reflect countless instances of this frustration with military life, as well as what would now be almost certainly characterized as descriptions of psychological trauma due to the carnage he saw and the emotions that he experienced.

Finally discharged from his original three year enlistment in late summer 1864, Dawes settled down in Ohio. In a letter back to his wife in 1881, he described visiting Arlington National Cemetery, and how among the gravestones of some of his men he was overcome by his memories of the war, seeing some in visions as clear as the days he was recalling. “Poor little [Lawson] Fenton,” he wrote, “who put his head above the works at Cold Harbor and got a bullet through his temples, and lived three days with his brains out, came to me in memory as fresh as one of my own boys of today.”<sup>267</sup> This is strikingly

---

<sup>263</sup> Dawes, *Service With the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers*, 253-4.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

similar to what would now be classified as a flashback by a combat veteran, and Dawes thus represents an example of the relatively unstudied psychological trauma component of the American Civil War.

Eric T. Dean is one of the few scholars who have studied the topic of Civil War psychological trauma in any amount of depth, notably using a sample of institutionalized Indiana veterans to argue that Civil War soldiers did in fact experience symptoms consistent to the modern day definition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).<sup>268</sup> He asserts that psychologists, when treating Vietnam veterans, have concluded that PTSD can mostly be attributed to “exposure to killing and atrocities in the war zone...and from the hostile reception by many [American] civilians.”<sup>269</sup> While the rude welcome from civilians was probably not much of a concern to Civil War veterans (especially Union men), the examples previously mentioned indicate that those fighting at Gettysburg and elsewhere certainly witnessed an overwhelming share of horrific bloodshed. The Indiana troops that Dean focuses his analysis on were admitted for a number of causes directly related to their service, including “War Excitement” and “Shock of Battle.”<sup>270</sup> While retroactive diagnosis of men who lived over a century ago is indeed a slippery slope, Dean is able to find many other cases of Civil War doctors reporting symptoms of PTSD (including chronic diarrhea, “soldier’s heart,” and general anxiety, among others) within their mentally strained charges.<sup>271</sup>

The appearance of psychological trauma in Civil War soldiers seems to be something that most visitors are not aware of, or perhaps do not want to think about.

---

<sup>268</sup> In *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). Dean’s analysis of the Indiana veterans permeates the entire book and is a key piece of study’s methodology.

<sup>269</sup> Dean, Jr., “A Scene of Surpassing Terror and Awful Grandeur,” 38.

<sup>270</sup> Dean, Jr., “We Will All Be Lost and Destroyed,” .

<sup>271</sup> Dean, Jr., “We Will All Be Lost and Destroyed,” 140-2.

Dean himself argues that “perhaps we should [not] be so keen to justify the Civil War as necessary and glorious... [a] more complete and nuanced understanding of the American veteran would seem central to such a reassessment.”<sup>272</sup> While the necessity of the Civil War is a debate for a different paper, the glorious memory of the conflict needs to be reevaluated if Americans are to truly understand the experience of the soldiers who fought that war and experienced its countless horrors after being called on to kill and maim their fellow man, and then deal with psychological consequences that were barely recognized at the time, let alone understood and treated. The story of Rufus Dawes and his perceptions of the horror of the war around him presents such an opportunity for expanded interpretive signage that addresses, in brief, the psychological effects of combat and terror that awaited veterans of the Civil War as it did veterans of any other conflict.<sup>273</sup>

The American Civil War was a horrific undertaking, as all wars are. However, the interpretive framework at Gettysburg National Military Park, specifically through the interpretive wayside exhibits, leaves something to be desired in its depiction of the traumatic effects of combat. While some waysides do perform admirably in portraying the agency of killing or faithfully conveying the carnage resulting from battle (as at Iverson’s debacle or the dead in the Rose Woods), other waysides are lacking in this type of visceral interpretation.<sup>274</sup> These waysides present opportunities to interpret different facets of the battle of Gettysburg via people and events that they already address (save for the Emmitsburg Road fences proposal). By simply altering the interpretation of the

---

<sup>272</sup> Dean, Jr., *Shook Over Hell*, 217.

<sup>273</sup> *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Macmillan, 1994) by Jonathan Shay, M.D., Ph.D. represents an outstanding study of the timelessness of combat trauma, drawing a multitude of similarities between the Vietnam veterans that he counsels for PTSD with the experiences of those in Homer’s *The Iliad*, finding an astounding amount of common ground between the two groups of combat veterans.

<sup>274</sup> For more information on the dead bodies photographed at the Rose Woods, please see pages 87-88.

existing subjects, the wayside exhibits could achieve a number of new goals that could help visitors to GNMP achieve a more well-rounded understanding of the battle and its human costs. By focusing interpretation more on the trauma and chaos of combat and its after-effects, the NPS would be able to portray the soldiers of Gettysburg as complete human beings - not purely as symbols of unassailable manly courage and devotion, but rather as humans who were significantly impacted by the horrific sights and experiences of the battlefield, which would have an appreciable impact on modern audiences.

For example, if an interpretation of the horror of combat is able to entrench itself at Gettysburg and other national military parks, perhaps a more holistic understanding of the consequences of modern foreign policy decisions would emerge among those who had visited these sites. Perhaps, however, that goal is reaching a bit too far. It would likely be a satisfactory result if visitors to Civil War military parks like Gettysburg were able to be reminded that the war was, indeed, a war, complete with the horrifying wounds and deaths of mostly terrified young men.

While Civil War battlefields will always exist as sites of inspiration and appreciation of heroic acts, visitors can still come away from sites like Gettysburg with a fuller understanding of the very real consequences of combat. If they are able to do so, perhaps the reconciliationist memory that can dominate interpretation of the war would be swept aside, in favor of a more complete understanding of the necessity and morality of the Union's causes (both preservation of the Union and the destruction of slavery), and why each side was so willing to fight for their particular reasons. If a better understanding of these issues is achieved, then a long-overdue dialogue can continue to emerge regarding the war's true impacts, rather than focusing on the narrative of mutual white heroism that many find to be so comfortable. When this understanding of the conflict's implications is grasped by the majority of visitors to Civil War military parks,

the war's full implications for humanity and society will begin to be fully grasped by the public at large.

## CHAPTER 5

### “To Forget Its Horror”: Concluding Thoughts on the Interpretation of Trauma at Gettysburg National Military Park

The portrayal of battlefield trauma at national parks is a topic that warrants study and discussion. Interpretation of Civil War battlefields too often relies on outdated and inaccurate analysis that subtly incorporates narratives intent on glorifying the participants and events of famous clashes. While courage and leadership are just some of the many positives that can be learned by visitors to Civil War parks, an interpretation that is overly focused on these sanguine legacies does a disservice to visitors. Relegating disagreeable interpretive frameworks, be it purposefully or inadvertently, to an inconsequential role contributes to a public understanding of the legacy of the Civil War that continues to be mired in a reconciliationist tradition. It can certainly be maintained that the improvements in a new Gettysburg Visitor Center more readily depicts the traumatic impacts of war. However, some components of the Park Service’s public-facing interpretation of the Civil War at Gettysburg National Military Park, namely the wayside signage, too readily reflect a reconciliationist interpretive framework that diminishes the violence of both the battle and the conflict as a whole.

The public’s perception of this reconciliationist memory of the war is reinforced by multiple factors. Gary Gallagher contends that in large part this is due to a popular culture that renders the legacies of the war virtually irrelevant, or twists them to the point where the war exists in public memory as little more than “one brave people somehow coming to a bloody impasse”.<sup>275</sup> Gallagher also notes that “honoring soldiers from both sides...was long a staple at Civil War battlefields administered by the National Park Service. Over the past decade, critics have asked whether the Park Service should

---

<sup>275</sup> Gary W. Gallagher, *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten: How Hollywood and Popular Art Shape What We Know About the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 106.

pay more attention to slavery and other political issues.”<sup>276</sup> The NPS has previously presented a version of the Civil War that emphasized its legacy as a conflict between two peoples with much in common, waged over simple sectionalism and relatively minor disagreements. This reconciliationist legacy of the war is the interpretive framework most commonly presented by the Park Service, rather than one emphasizing the conflict’s more challenging legacies of emancipation and widespread violence and suffering. While recent legislation mandates that NPS interpretation of the Civil War cites slavery as its main cause, reconciliationist traditions still permeate existing interpretation of the conflict’s memory at NPS sites, confusing visitors and occluding understanding of the war’s true causes and effects.<sup>277</sup>

Interestingly, Gallagher specifically cites the example of the film *Gettysburg* in his analysis of the impact of the reconciliationist interpretive tradition. He observes that throughout the movie the friendship and camaraderie that officers and enlisted men from both sides find in their counterparts is perpetually discovered and discussed. Oftentimes, the movie’s main theme appears to be the finding of mutually agreeable common ground with an enemy.<sup>278</sup> Since the Civil War in popular culture is a topic that can and should be explored extensively elsewhere, its purpose here is asserting the background information that visitors to Civil War parks have conceivably been exposed to before their visit to the Gettysburg National Military Park or other Civil War sites. The argument that most Civil War movies, television shows, and popular books incorporate reconciliationist traditions regarding the aftermath conflict is crucial to understand, as members of the public who have been exposed to these mediums already have a

---

<sup>276</sup> Gallagher, *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten*, 107.

<sup>277</sup> Babbitt, Foreword to *Rally on the High Ground*, v.

<sup>278</sup> Gallagher, *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten*.

preconceived notion of the conflict as a relatively benign struggle; the “bloody impasse” that Gallagher describes.

This, of course, was not the case. The Civil War was the setting for horrific carnage and violence, killing 2% of the American population and wreaking untold havoc on the psychological and physical states of many of the surviving soldiers and civilians. However, the tremendous destruction of the war and the toll that it extracted from its combatants is relatively unexplored at Civil War battlefield parks. David Blight has argued that difficult memories of the war were simply not discussed by many veterans. Blight’s research is mostly interested in how memory of the war allowed white veterans to ignore the questions and challenges of emancipation. Instead, these veterans chose to focus on the positives of the war’s end, namely the shared heroism and subsequent reunion between white veterans of both sides.<sup>279</sup> The establishment of this reconciliatory tradition in turn influenced other memories of the war which were presented at battlefield parks. One such memory of the war that was suppressed in favor of more comfortable reconciliatory tones was the unimaginable suffering and carnage that the war had demanded of its combatants. Since veterans were largely the driving force behind early interpretive efforts at battlefield parks like Gettysburg, a dominant memory of reconciliation, which they largely favored and downplayed these themes of violence, emerged instead.

Veterans of both sides influenced Gettysburg’s early interpretation in this way as they held significant authority over the park’s decision-making process. The land at Gettysburg was initially preserved as part of a grassroots effort by local citizens who had quickly realized the gravity and magnitude of the battle. However, as the war ended and it became clear that Gettysburg would be a focal point of American public memory of the

---

<sup>279</sup> Again, Blight’s *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* offers an exemplary overview of the reconciliatory mood that Blight argues dominated memory of the American Civil War.



war, veterans began taking more and more of an interest in the field. Monumentation was one such way that they imposed their own glorious memories of the battle on the landscape, a movement that G. Kurt Piehler notes was eventually legislated into permanency. Piehler notes that Congress created a Commission of Fine Arts in 1910, which “ensured that most national monuments maintained Greek/Roman influence,” a style that Piehler contends effectively minimized the horror of war and instead “[made] modern warfare acceptable as it emphasized the heroic nature of battle and of dying for one’s country.”<sup>280</sup> It is still apparent to modern observers that these early monuments were largely celebratory in nature, as former Superintendent of GNMP John Latschar studied the monuments at the park in 2004 and observed that the vast majority were fixated on the bravery of soldiers and contained no mention of the war’s legacy at all. He also found that when the lasting legacies of the conflict were mentioned, it was exceedingly likely that the preservation of the Union would be easily favored over emancipation in the memory of the conflict that the soldiers themselves wished to convey in the text of their monuments.<sup>281</sup>

While monumentation was a significant indication that white veterans wished to harbor only memories of mutual heroism of their service at Gettysburg, other interpretive decisions, many by civilian stakeholders, helped to mirror these choices. Gerald Linderman contends that many of these decisions were the work of civilians in the decades long after the war, and that their efforts to seize control of the memory of the war greatly irritated veterans, as those who had not fought at all turned to a wholehearted embrace of a memory of the war that many former soldiers did not recognize

---

<sup>280</sup> Piehler, *Remembering War*, 85-86.

<sup>281</sup> Gary W. Gallagher conversation with John Latschar, November 10, 2004. As cited in Gallagher, *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten*, Endnote 16, page 238.

and even resented.<sup>282</sup> An earlier, more benign civilian influence at Gettysburg was the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association, formed by the aforementioned local citizens. However, the GBMA also contributed to the proliferation of a reconciliationist tradition at Gettysburg where they “sought to freeze the meaning of Gettysburg in a simple and enduring patriotic orthodoxy, developed in the 1880s as Americans sought to recover the epic excitement of the Civil War and to forget its horror” in the words of Edward Linenthal.<sup>283</sup> John Bachelder was another private citizen of influence like these local residents, though he was not a local product. An artist who arrived at Gettysburg shortly after the battle ended in 1863 and became one of its first historians, Bachelder interviewed hundreds of veterans from both sides to gain a better understanding of the battle. While conducting his research, he also crafting beautiful and pleasant paintings of the battlefield and its troop movements, which historian Jim Weeks argues “transformed the monstrous conflict into an edifying image appropriate for the parlor.”<sup>284</sup> This gentrification of the conflict by early private citizens would lead many to reject a memory of the war that incorporated uncomfortable and disturbing narratives regarding the suffering and deaths of hundreds of thousands of young American men. This mollifying process would also help foster a reluctance by these same citizens to accept emancipation and its challenges.

The reconciliationist narrative that was produced as a result of these obfuscating interpretive traditions by a number of stakeholders created a memory of the battle and the war that was muddled and nowhere near complete. This interpretive tradition was profoundly problematic, as it prompted a memory of a war which had not really accomplished much aside from assuring all white soldiers from both North and South of

---

<sup>282</sup> Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 3.

<sup>283</sup> Linenthal, *Sacred Ground*, 90.

<sup>284</sup> Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 23.

their mutual heroism. Preservation of the Union also appeared in acceptable memories of the war, but the fact that the very fissure between the two sides had resulted from slavery was suppressed successfully by a public that simply wanted to move on with this reconciliatory memory of the war that was the least complicated, as well as most palatable to the losing side. John Vanderslice, another early historian of the park, furthered these types of narratives near the turn of the century, writing of the soldiers at Gettysburg as if they were all heroes of the Greek tradition at war for the glory of their city-states, rather than young men killing other young men over the right to own human beings.<sup>285</sup> While slavery likely did not bother many white men of either side, accounts like Vanderslice's laid the groundwork for future interpretation that lionized all combatants at the expense of a deeper, truer understanding of the war and its costs.

Gettysburg was run privately for decades until the War Department acquired it in 1896, but even as a federal entity, the park still relied on the interpretive efforts of aging veterans. They were responsible, on behalf of the War Department, for the installation of early iron signage that was extremely dry in nature and served only to offer basic expository information regarding troop strengths, movements, and the like. The veterans responsible for this early analysis were also primarily interested in stressing a reconciliationist narrative that obscured much of the violence and carnage that they and their comrades had been called upon to suffer and inflict. This heroic interpretation of the battle was disseminated mostly by battlefield guides initially, but interpretive signage did begin to emerge towards the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century after the Park Service acquired Gettysburg and other Civil War parks in 1933. This interpretive signage primarily showed outdated information in the tradition of reconciliation, but represented a step forward for a National Park Service (NPS) that was rapidly realizing

---

<sup>285</sup> Bachelder, *Gettysburg: What to See, And How to See It*, 15-18. As cited in Unrau, *Gettysburg Administrative History*, 267.

how many visitors to parks chose to experience them on their own terms (especially with the proliferation of the automobile), and not through the eyes of a guide.<sup>286</sup>

This initial materialization of interpretive signage at Gettysburg, as well as subsequent incarnations, continued to contain language and information that perpetuated a reconciliationist narrative. Human interest stories, seemingly based on easily debunked anecdotal evidence, continued to permeate this signage. This in turn created an environment that suggested an amiable and pastoral environment as opposed to a horrific scene of bloodshed and suffering. The NPS would actually experience some embarrassment due to this tradition during the Civil War's centennial celebrations in the 1960s, as it was widely understood that by focusing on reconciliation and reunion, the Park Service missed an opportunity to explore deeper ramifications of the conflict, namely the implications of the dissolution of slavery on American society. This absence was rendered all the more conspicuous due to the civil rights movement that was gaining additional momentum within the United States at that time.<sup>287</sup>

The reconciliationist tradition that dominated memory of the Civil War and its interpretation within the wayside signage at Gettysburg did a significant disservice to veterans of the battle. By failing to incorporate the violence and trauma of the battlefield and the catastrophic effects on the combatants, the NPS was only presenting a portion of the story, at the expense of a better understanding of the battle's impacts. This, of course, hampered understanding of the engagement by the public but also helped to perpetuate these very same reconciliationist sentiments. Visitors to the park were exposed only to interpretation that assured them of the universal heroism displayed by all combatants, regardless of their side or their cause, however reprehensible it may have been. As a

---

<sup>286</sup> Unrau, *Gettysburg: An Administrative History*, 76.

<sup>287</sup> For a detailed look into the centennial commemoration of the war, Robert J. Cook's *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007) is an outstanding resource.

result, it is not difficult to appreciate how visitors to the park could leave Gettysburg with a romanticized understanding of the battle (and the war), filled with tales of heroic deeds and painless, noble sacrifice. In reality, this understanding was one that the soldiers might hardly have recognized, as their battlefield experience as they knew it was largely one of confusion, pain, and terror.

The evidence for an interpretation that stresses the traumas experienced by Civil War soldiers certainly exists. The current signage at Gettysburg does make significant usage of first person accounts of soldiers, and the primary source materials left behind by soldiers also frequently delve into the various horrors that the men witnessed while on the field of battle. By utilizing this type of information, it would become a relatively simple proposition to incorporate underreported narratives from veterans that more accurately present a well-rounded understanding of the battle and its impacts on the combatants. The current signage does successfully incorporate the horrific impacts of combat in some places, and does assign agency to killing in others rather than passively announcing that soldiers simply “died” as it does in so many other places on the field, but work remains to be done. It is certainly possible to incorporate more narratives of trauma as a means of allowing visitors to experience a more holistic understanding of the entire battle experience.

The benefits of this type of approach to wayside signage would be multiple. First, this type of approach allows the NPS to humanize the soldiers in a way that the current interpretation cannot. While there exists ranger programs and exhibits within the Visitor Center that do seek to convey underexplored components of the combat experience, among other attempts to present the soldiers of Gettysburg as complete human beings, wayside signage tends to come up short in this sense. Since no uniform visitor experience truly exists, all facets of interpretation must reflect a unifying message of violence and

trauma if it is to be effective as possible. If a visitor only has time to drive through the park and read several waysides, then the Visitor Center's outstanding interpretation of the sufferings of war is rendered irrelevant.

When interpretation understates the trauma of the battlefield, soldiers can be reduced to pawns on a battlefield chess board, or presented as paragons of virtuous conduct who always acted with unquestioned valor. Since neither of these characterizations are the reality, a more nuanced and detailed understanding of the common soldier's combat experience would go far in helping visitors to comprehend a more complete view of the conflict as a whole. By understanding the incredible suffering and violence that was required of so many men at Gettysburg, visitors could more readily reject a reconciliationist interpretive tradition and its inherent ambiguity concerning the true results of the war. Rather, they will take on a more explicit understanding of the fearful carnage that the war called for. By better understanding the horrors that the war required, visitors will in turn be more prepared to learn about the true nature of a conflict that necessitated such stunningly horrific violence and individual trauma on a massive scale. In other words, visitors will be more willing to set aside preconceived reconciliationist narratives that downplay the traumatic effects of the war, and instead feel compelled to unearth and accept its actual legacies if they are confronted head-on with the grim realities that the clash required of its combatants.

Additionally, a comprehensive interpretation of battlefield trauma would offer visitors a more complete understanding of the horrific deeds required of all fighting men throughout history, not just Civil War soldiers. The NPS functions as a federal agency that is looked to as a key interpretive force, and as such, its words carry significant weight with the American public. If the agency were to present an interpretation of the Civil War to the public that more truthfully and viscerally portrays the realities of

warfare, there is a possibility that visitors could emerge from their park experience with a fuller understanding of the implications of the decision to send young people to war.

An earnest interpretation of the trauma of war is obviously not unheard of within the Park Service. When the new Gettysburg Visitor Center was finished in 2008, park employees expressed hopes that its fresh interpretation would easily show visitors the horrific repercussions of war.<sup>288</sup> Despite this, it remains to be seen if this commitment to depicting the trauma of warfare would be so widespread through all interpretive facets. To reiterate John Bodnar's words, "the symbolic expression of the triumph of the nation-state and the glory of the sacrifice of those who contributed" is the most important component of Civil War commemoration in the eyes of the NPS.<sup>289</sup> Warfare can be viewed as a necessity to the state, and by Bodnar's theory, a federal agency could perhaps be unlikely to wholeheartedly endorse a viewpoint of a historic conflict that so openly and viscerally offers an anti-war interpretive structure in all aspects of its public-facing narrative. However, the agency's previous efforts to incorporate narratives of trauma in places like the new Visitor Center do appear to indicate a willingness to delve into these areas and thus better inform visitors of the timeless costs of warfare.

Visits to Civil War battlefields should not be all negativity and carnage, however. The sites exist as places of powerful contemplation and rural quiet in many instances, and the heroism of their participants also can serve as valuable inspiration to visitors, especially young ones. However, battles should not be viewed as collections of strictly laudable endeavors. A presence in the wayside interpretive signage of triumphant accounts that acknowledge acts of significant heroism should ideally be balanced with more graphic reports of the true costs of combat. An interpretive structure that is able to

---

<sup>288</sup> Dave Caldwell, "At Gettysburg, Farther From the Battle but Closer to History," *New York Times*, March 12, 2008, H30.

<sup>289</sup>Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 191.

utilize both of these frameworks will allow visitors to draw inspiration from a past of courageous deeds while also understanding the very real ramifications of the violence that those actions commonly required. If visitors can gain a more holistic understanding of the battle of Gettysburg in particular and the Civil War as a whole, it will become all the more possible for them to delve deeper into an understanding of what the war was over and what it had accomplished, rather than focusing on a reconciliationist public memory of the conflict that minimizes both its true causes as well as its true costs.



## REFERENCES

- Abroe, Mary Munsell. "All the Profound Scenes': Federal Preservation of Civil War Battlefields , 1861-1990, Vol. I." PhD diss., Loyola University Chicago, 1996.
- Adams, Michael C.C. *Echoes of War: A Thousand Years of Military History in Pop Culture*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002.
- Albright, Horace M. and Marian Albright Schenck. *Creating the National Park Service: The Missing Years*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.
- Anderson, David. "Dying of Nostalgia: Homesickness in the Union Army During the Civil War." *Civil War History* 56 (2010): 247-282.
- Anderson, Judith. "Haunted Minds': The Impact of Combat Exposure on the Mental and Physical Health of Civil War Volunteers." In *Years of Change and Suffering: Modern Perspectives on Civil War Medicine*, edited by James M. Schmidt and Guy R. Hasegawa, 143-158. Roseville, MN: Edinborough Press, 2009.
- Babbitt, Brice. Introduction to *Rally on the High Ground: The National Park Service Symposium on the Civil War*, edited by Robert K. Sutton, xi-xvi. Eastern National, 2003.
- Bachelder, John B. *Gettysburg: What to See, And How to See It*. New York: 1873.
- Babington, Anthony. *Shell-Shock: A History of the Changing Attitudes to War Neurosis*. London: Leo Cooper, 1997.
- Barloon, Mark. "Combat Reconsidered: A Statistical Analysis of Small-Unit Tactics During the Civil War." PhD diss., University of North Texas, 2001.
- Barr, Thomas F. *Memorial Address of Col. Thomas F. Barr, Judge Advocate, USA, Stillwater, Minnesota, May 30, 1879*. Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society.
- Bateman, Lt. Col. Robert. "And the Battle of Gettysburg Begins." *Esquire*, The Politics Blog, July 1, 2013, accessed September 4, 2013. <http://www.esquire.com/blogs/politics/first-day-of-gettysburg-battle-070113>.
- Bearrs, Edwin C. "The National Park Service and Its History Program: 1894-1986: An Overview." *The Public Historian* 9 (1987): 10-18.
- Blight, David W. "' Decoration Days': The Origins of Memorial Day in North and South." In *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture*, edited by Alice Fahs & Joan Waugh, 94-129. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *When This Cruel War is Over: The Civil War Letters of Charles Harvey Brewster*. Amherst: The University Press of Massachusetts, 1992.
- Bodnar, John. *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Boge, Georgie and Margie Holder Boge. *Paving Over the Past: A History and Guide to Civil War Battlefield Preservation*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993.
- Boies, Andrew J. *Record of the Thirty-Third Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry from Aug. 1862 to Aug. 1865*. Fitchburg, MA: Sentinel Printing Company, 1880.
- Bösel, Anke. *Homogenizing History: Accommodationist Discourse in Ken Burns's The Civil War*. WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2003.
- Bradford, Adam. "Re-collecting Soldiers: Walt Whitman and the Appreciation of Human Value." *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 27 (2010): 127-152.
- Brandt, Dennis W. *Pathway to Hell: A Tragedy of the American Civil War*. Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 2010.
- Braudy, Leo. *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.
- Brown, Kent Masterson. *Cushing of Gettysburg: The Story of a Union Artillery Commander*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993.
- Buechler, John. "Give 'Em the Bayonet': A Note on Civil War Mythology." *Civil War History* 7 (1961): 128-132.
- Caldwell, Dave. "At Gettysburg, Farther From the Battle but Closer to History." *New York Times*, March 12, 2008.
- Carr, Ethan. *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007.
- Chadwick, Bruce. *The Reel Civil War: Mythmaking in American Film*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001.
- Clarke, Frances. "So Lonesome I Could Die': Nostalgia and Debates Over Emotional Control in the Civil War North." *Journal of Social History* 41 (2007): 253-282.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *War Stories: Suffering and Sacrifice in the Civil War North*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Coco, Gregory A., ed. *From Ball's Bluff to Gettysburg...And Beyond: The Civil War Letters of Private Roland E. Bowen, 15<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry 1861-1864*. Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1994.
- Cole, Philip M. *Civil War Artillery at Gettysburg*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002.

- Collier, John S. and Bonnie B. Collier, eds. *Yours For the Union: The Civil War Letters of John W. Chase, First Massachusetts Light Artillery*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004.
- Cook, Benjamin F. *History of the Twelfth Massachusetts Volunteers (Webster Regiment)*. Boston: Franklin Press, 1882.
- Cook, Robert. *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007.
- Courtwright, David T. *Dark Paradise: A History of Opiate Addiction in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Dawes, Rufus R. *Service with the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers*. Marietta, OH: E.R. Alderman and Sons, 1890.
- Dean, Eric T., Jr. "A Scene of Surpassing Terror and Awful Grandeur': The Paradoxes of Military Service in the American Civil War." *Michigan Historical Review* 21 (1995): 37-61.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "We Will All Be Lost and Destroyed': Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the Civil War." *Civil War History* 37 (1991): 138-153.
- Desjardin, Thomas A. *These Honored Dead: How the Story of Gettysburg Shaped American Memory*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003.
- Dixon, Benjamin Yarber. "Gettysburg: A Living Battlefield." PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2000.
- Dubin, Steven C. *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum*. New York: New York University Press, 1999.
- Du Picq, A. *Battle Studies: Ancient and Modern Battle*. Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1958.
- Everhart, William C. *The National Park Service*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1983.
- Faust, Drew Gilpin. *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "We Should Grow Too Fond of It': Why We Love the Civil War." *Civil War History* 50 (2004): 368-383.
- Foote, Kenneth. *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscape of Violence and Tragedy*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997.

- Foote, Lorien. *The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Manhood, Honor, and Violence in the Union Army*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.
- Frassanito, William A. *Gettysburg: A Journey in Time*. Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1975.
- Fussell, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Gabriel, Richard. *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1987.
- Gallagher, Gary W. *Cause Won, Lost, and Forgotten: How Hollywood and Popular Art Shape What We Know About the Civil War*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Jubal A. Early, the Lost Cause, and Civil War History: A Persistent Legacy*. Frank L. Clement Lecture, Alternative Views of the Section Conflict. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1996.
- Gatewood, John B. and Catherine M. Cameron. "Battlefield Pilgrims at Gettysburg National Military Park." *Ethnology* 43, no. 3, 2004: 193-216.
- Gregory, Kate and Andrea Witcomb. "Beyond nostalgia: The role of affect in historical understanding at heritage sites." In *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and Are Changed*, edited by Sheila Watson, Suzanne MacLeod, and Simon Knell, 263-275. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Griffin, Martin. *Ashes of the Mind: War and Memory in Northern Literature, 1865-1900*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009.
- Griffith, Paddy. *Battle Tactics of the Civil War*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Grossman, Dave. *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1996.
- Guelzo, Allen C. *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.
- Hammer, Christopher H. *Enduring Battle: American Soldiers in Three Wars, 1776-1945*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011.
- Hanson, Victor Davis. *Ripples of Battle: How Wars of the Past Still Determine How We Fight, How We Live, and How We Think*. New York: Doubleday, 2003.
- Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997.

- Hennessy, John J., ed. *Fighting With the Eighteenth Massachusetts: The Civil War Memoir of Thomas H. Mann*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000.
- Herdegen, Lance J. *The Iron Brigade in Civil War and Memory: The Black Hats from Bull Run to Appomattox and Thereafter*. El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Those Damned Black Hats!: The Iron Brigade in the Gettysburg Campaign*. New York: Savas Beatie, 2008.
- Hess, Earl J. "Tell Me What the Sensations Are": The Northern Home Front Learns About Combat." In *Union Soldiers and the Home Front: Wartime Experiences, Postwar Adjustments*, edited by Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller, 119-142. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002.
- Hess, Earl J. *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat*. Lawrence: The University of Kansas, 1997.
- "History and Our National Parks, [June 1935]" Old History Division Files, WASO.
- Holmes, Oliver Wendell. *Speeches*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1900.
- Howe, Mark DeWolfe. *Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes: The Shaping Years 1841-1870*. Vol. I. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Touched With Fire: Civil War Letters and Diary of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947.
- Howells, William Dean. "Questions of Monuments." *Atlantic Monthly* 18, May, 1866.
- Interpretive Program Files 1930-Present. Vertical file, Gettysburg National Military Park Library.
- Janas, Michael John. "Rhetoric, History, and the Collective Memory: The Civil War in Contemporary America." PhD diss., The University of Iowa, 1994.
- Jones, Edgar. "Historical Approaches to Post-Combat Disorders." *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 361 (2006): 533-542.
- Kent, Arthur A., ed. *Three Years with Company K, Sergt. Austin C. Stearns, Company K, 13<sup>th</sup> Mass. Infantry (Deceased)*. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976.
- Kinsel, Amy J. "'From These Honored Dead': Gettysburg in American Culture, 1863-1938." PhD diss., Cornell University, 1992.
- Leonard, Thomas C. *Above the Battle: War-Making in America from Appomattox to Versailles*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

- Linderman, Gerald F. *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War*. New York: The Free Press, 1987.
- Linenthal, Edward Tabor. *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991.
- McConaughy, David. Correspondence, vertical file. Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association, Gettysburg National Military Park Library.
- McConnell, Stuart. "The Geography of Memory." In *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture*, edited by Alice Fahs & Joan Waugh, 258-266. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- McPherson, James M. *For Cause & Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- McPherson, John B. "Battlefield of Gettysburg." *Cosmopolitan* XXIII, October, 1897.
- Meringolo, Denise D. *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Towards a New Genealogy of Public History*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012.
- Mitchell, Reid. *Civil War Soldiers*. New York: Penguin, 1988.
- Moore, John H. "Seventh Tennessee Infantry" in *Military Annals of Tennessee*, edited by John B. Lindsley. Nashville: J.M. Lindsley and Co. Publishers, 1886.
- Murphy, Kevin C., ed. *The Civil War Letters of Joseph K. Taylor of the Thirty-Seventh Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry*. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1998.
- Neely, Jr., Mark E. *The Civil War and the Limits of Destruction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Nolan, Alan T. *The Iron Brigade: A Military History*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1961.
- Nosworthy, Brent. *The Bloody Crucible of Courage: Fighting Methods and Combat Experience of the Civil War*. New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2003.
- Orr, Y.A. "Public Anthropology: The Power of Storytelling." *Current Anthropology* 50 (2009): 413.
- Patterson, John S. "From Battle Ground to Pleasure Ground: Gettysburg as Historic Site." In *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, edited by Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, 128-157. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989.
- Peters, Ralph. *Cain at Gettysburg*. New York: Forge Books, 2012.
- Piehler, G. Kurt. *Remembering War the American Way*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian University Press, 1995.

- Pizarro, Judith, Roxanne Cohen Silver, and JoAnn Prause. "Physical and Mental Health Costs of Traumatic War Experiences Among Civil War Veterans." *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 63 (2006): 193-200.
- Reardon, Carol. *Pickett's Charge in History & Memory*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Reid-Green, Marcia. *Letters Home: Henry Matrau of the Iron Brigade*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993.
- Reuters. "Boston Marathon bombs packed with gunpowder, shrapnel." *Milwaukee-Wisconsin Journal-Sentinel*, April 17, 2013, accessed August 30, 2013. <http://www.jsonline.com/news/usandworld/bombs-packed-with-shrapnel-to-maximize-injuries-009itiq-203190871.html>.
- Rhodes, John H. *The History of Battery B, First Regiment Rhode Island Light Artillery*. Providence, RI: 1894.
- Rosen, George. "Nostalgia: A 'Forgotten' Psychological Disorder." *Clio Medica* 10 (1975): 28-51.
- Savage, Kirk. *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Sears, Stephen W. *Gettysburg*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Mr. Dunn Browne's Experiences in the Army: The Civil War Letters of Samuel W. Fiske*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1998.
- Shay, Jonathan. *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. New York: Atheneum, 1994.
- Sheffer, Debra J. "No Sacrifice is Too Great, Save That of Honor': Honor, Death, and Psychological Combat Trauma in the American Civil War." PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2009.
- Sheldon, George. *When the Smoke Cleared at Gettysburg: The Tragic Aftermath of the Bloodiest Battle of the Civil War*. Nashville: Cumberland House Publishing, 2003.
- Slap, Andrew L. and Michael Thomas Smith, editors. *This Distracted and Anarchical People: New Answers for Old Questions About the Civil War-era North*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.
- Smith, Timothy B. *The Golden Age of Battlefield Preservation: The Decade of the 1890s and the Establishment of America's First Five Military Parks*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee, 2008.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *This Great Battlefield of Shiloh: History, Memory, and the Establishment of a Civil War National Military Park*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2004.
- Spielvogel, J. Christian. *Interpreting Sacred Ground: The Rhetoric of National Civil War Parks and Battlefields*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Interpreting Sacred Ground: The Rhetoric of National Civil War Parks and Battlefields." PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2003.
- Stephenson, Michael. *The Last Full Measure: How Soldiers Die in Battle*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012.
- Sutton, Robert K. "Commemorating the American Civil War in National Park Service Battlefields." In *The Heritage War of War*, edited by Martin Gegner and Bart Ziino, 108-124. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Rally on the High Ground: The National Park Service Symposium on the Civil War*. Eastern National: 2003.
- Talbott, John. "Combat Trauma in the American Civil War." *History Today* 46 (1996): 41-47.
- Talbott, John E. "Soldiers, Psychiatrists, and Combat Trauma." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 27 (1997): 437-454.
- United States Government. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and the Confederate Armies*. 128 vols. Washington, 1880-1901.
- Unrau, Harlan D. *Gettysburg: An Administrative History*. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1991.
- Waldrep, Christopher. *Vicksburg's Long Shadow: The Civil War Legacy of Race and Remembrance*. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005.
- Warren, Robert Penn. *The Legacy of the Civil War*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.
- Wecter, Dixon. *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1944.
- Weeks, Jim. *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Wooley, Charles F. *The Irritable Heart of Soldiers and the Origins of Anglo-American Cardiology: The Civil War (1861) to World War I (1918)*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002.
- Worden, Amy. "A Gettysburg battle plan: the field as it once was." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. June 24, 2013, accessed June 26, 2013.



[http://articles.philly.com/2013-06-24/news/40148272\\_1\\_cyclorama-battlefield-national-park-service](http://articles.philly.com/2013-06-24/news/40148272_1_cyclorama-battlefield-national-park-service).

Wynstra, Robert. *The Rashness of That Hour: Politics, Gettysburg, and the Downfall of Confederate Brigadier General Alfred Iverson*. New York: Savas Beatie, 2010.

Zenzen, Joan. *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998.