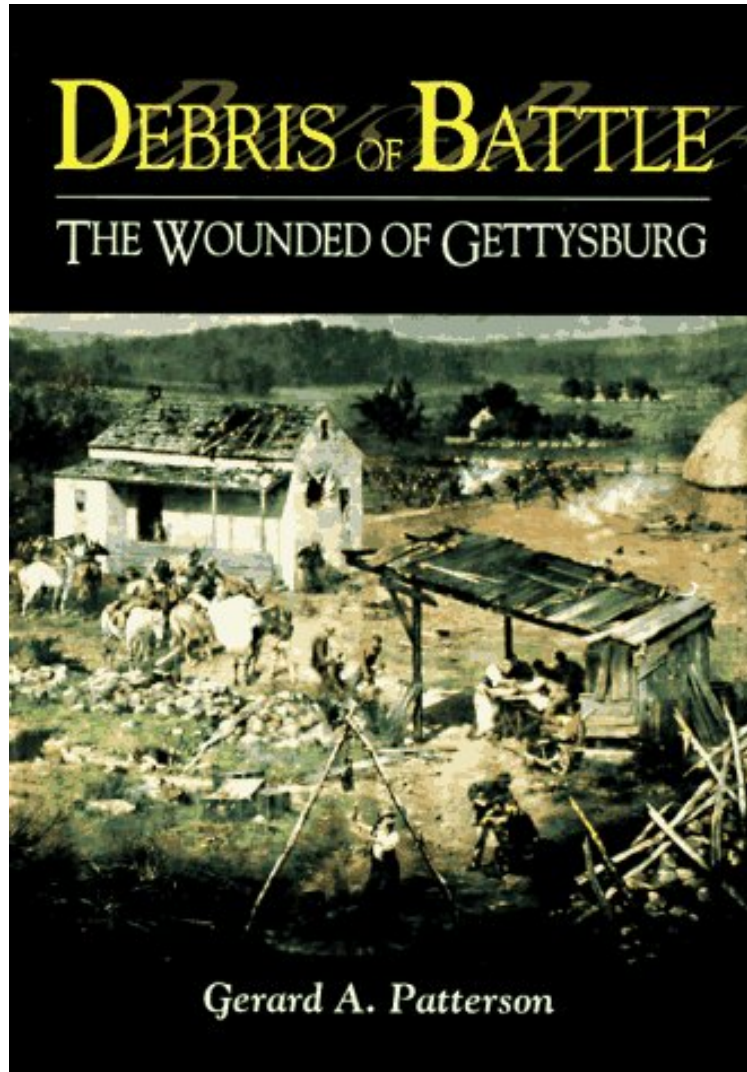


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## Debris of Battle

*Gerard A. Patterson*

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**Gerard A. Patterson : Debris of Battle** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Debris of Battle:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. "to care for him who has borne the battle" By arthur banner Kierkegaard said that we live life going forward, but only understand it looking backward. In other words, the manner that we live often impacts on the future in unpredictable and unknowable ways. This compelling and informative book by Gerard Patterson shows the truth of this assertion. He illustrates in a masterful fashion how governments are good at planning and executing battles, but often fail in the management of the aftermath. Patterson provides an almost day-by-day account of the aftermath of the battle of Gettysburg. We skip the glory and excitement

of the battle itself and are left to linger over the gore, the dead and wounded, the debris of battle. The author provides the raw data but leaves it up to us to find the meaning in these events. The battle of Gettysburg was the greatest catastrophe to befall the United States. Never had the nation experienced the number of dead and wounded as resulted from this one battle; the nation was ill prepared to deal with the consequences. Fortunately, we have the perspective of knowing how things turned out. We take solace in the fact that these events set in motion a new relationship between the nation and those who served. We take comfort in knowing that the nation would come to "care for those who had borne the battle." and would provide "a final resting place for those who gave their lives" so that they not be forgotten. These words, uttered by Lincoln at the dedication of the cemetery at Gettysburg would become a sacred promise to those who fought. In a brisk and clear fashion, the author describes the aftermath of the battle of Gettysburg, not from the point of view of the soldier or politician but more pertinently from the point of view of the civilians. In stark detail, the author describes how the civilians involved themselves with the aftermath of the engagement, visiting the battlefield in an effort to care for those who were victims of the battle. Civilian groups, such as the Sanitary Commission and Christian Commission took on the task of helping to care for the victims of the battle in an organized and effective fashion. Their success, in a sense, camouflaged the failure of the government to do its duty. What is surprising was the role of women. Some were members of charitable organizations while others were relatives and still others saw themselves as substitutes for mothers or sisters who could not be with their men who were wounded or dying. The author sharply compares the heart-felt motives of these women with the apparent uncaring appearance of the federal and state governments. However the author makes clear that it was not heartlessness that accounts for the lack of governmental action, but rather an unfamiliarity with what was expected of them. It just never occurred to them that they were in fact responsible for their men whether the men were fighting, were wounded or were dead. For example, there was much discussion of Jonathan Letterman, the doctor in charge of the wounded who in confusion over divided responsibility elected to accompany Mead in pursuit of Lee, ignoring his responsibility to care for the men wounded in battle. William Hammond, the Surgeon General comes across somewhat better, but his problem seemed to be related to the lack of communication between the battlefield and Washington. Pathetic as it seems, he simply did not know what was going on. Ultimately he was court martialed and relieved, not for dereliction of duty but for a questionable charge of corruption. It was the civilians who noticed that the government was absent without official leave and it was they that demanded that the country be called to account. Several patriotic citizens of Adam's Country approached the Governor of Pennsylvania with a recommendation to establish a national cemetery so that the Union dead would not be forgotten. Governor Andrew Curtin responded by proposing a national cemetery, which was quickly accepted. Although it was paid for by the states, the federal government supplied the coffins. It represented the first national cemetery in the United States. The dedication of the national cemetery at Gettysburg allowed people to look back to uncover the meaning of the catastrophe. Both Edward Everett and Lincoln were charged with this responsibility. Everett talked for 2 hours detailing the history of the battle but he confessed that he failed to come to grips with the "central idea of the occasion." It was up to Lincoln to take on this task. He talked for just for 3 minutes and found the meaning of the conflict by looking to the past, to the very birth of the nation, to Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence. To Lincoln, the battle came to symbolize the meaning of America, that all men are created equal. Without saying as much, he implied that the war had something to do with freedom and slavery, and that the men who lost their lives had not died in vain. Nearer the end of the war, Lincoln would have another opportunity to look back and to define the relationship between its citizen soldiers and the responsibility of the nation to these men. In his second inaugural address, he stated: "Let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan. " In this book we witness the birth pangs of federalism. The author describes these events as a first take on history and therefore he is not concerned with the meaning of the events and the impact on the form that the country would take. By looking forward from the event we find that the country would change forever. Instead of seeing itself as agency of the states, the federal government assumed the role of leader and manager of the country. The federal government would take responsibility for the National Cemetery at Gettysburg, as well as for 131 other cemeteries across the nation, thus transferring responsibly for its war dead from the states to the national government. Eventually, 30% of the federal budget would go for pensions for soldiers and their families. A series of soldiers' homes would be built to become the beginnings of the VA system dedicated to the care of disabled and impoverished veterans. The creed of the military became "leave no one behind." If we are to understand the manner by which the past led to the present, we must understand the events as they occurred. This book helps us to do just that.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. excellent..By Purple Craze  
What happened after the three day battle at Gettysburg. The coming together of people to get Gettysburg back to a city. Very interesting and I have read the actual battle of Gettysburg books, many of them, this one what happened after July 3.....excellent...love the viewpoint.  
3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Guts (and gore) outweigh the glory  
By Kerry Walters  
"When it was over the army, as if trying to conceal some vile repugnant act in which it had been engaged, barred all approaches to Gettysburg." Such is the opening line of Gerard Patterson's Debris of Battle, and it's entirely appropriate. The aftermath of any Civil War battle was both vile and repugnant in its carnage. Lead bullets that shattered bone, grapeshot that ribbed men into pieces, solid shot that

took off limbs: the wounds inflicted when north fought south were horrible. Because of the huge number of wounded in the big battles like Gettysburg, military medical teams were almost always overworked and understaffed (thus making quick amputations even more likely). Sepsis and lockjaw were frequent consequences of triage surgery, even when the wounds were relatively minor. Thousands of dying and injured soldiers, physicians worked to the breaking point (sometimes keeping themselves going only with liberal doses of whiskey), confusion, despair: Patterson describes it all with meticulous documentation and heartbreaking detail. To make things even worse, both at Gettysburg and elsewhere, the Army of the Potomac was frequently short of ambulance wagons and medical supplies. Too often they were considered hindrances, getting in the way of wagons carrying food and ordinance. So, as Patterson points out, the privately-run U.S. Sanitary Commission was the real hero at Gettysburg and other battlefields when it came to tending to the wounded. Growing into a nationwide organization with more than 7,000 branches, the Sanitary Commission not only provided much needed medical supplies and care to wounded soldiers, but also watchdogged the government to make sure that the Army took seriously what happened to the soldiers who'd been used and wounded in battle. Nor did the Commission sit back and passively wait to be called in. As Patterson notes (p. 42), "The organization's strategists in Washington followed the movements of the army..., trying to estimate when and where the next encounter might occur so that supply depots could be set up with reach and aid would be available if required." Patterson's book is well-written and a real eye-opener for Civil War buffs who focus on the glory of war and forget the gore. The next time you're in Gettysburg, take a few minutes to visit the site of Camp Letterman, the hospital that treated the thousands of wounded for nearly 6 months after the battle. You'll find the marker that commemorates the hospital hard to find. It's tucked between a Giant foodstore and a strip mall. Curious that the battlefield is so well preserved, and the hospitals so forgotten.

When the battle at Gettysburg ended, over 21,000 Union and Confederate wounded lay helpless in the shattered woods and decimated fields surrounding the small town. As both armies withdrew they left the care of the wounded--and the burial of the dead--to a stunned citizenry. Amazingly, an unprecedented number of volunteers from both the North and South, including the U.S. Sanitary Commission and the U.S. Christian Commission, soon descended upon the isolated town, bringing with them much-needed medical attention, supplies, and food. Now available for the first time in paperback.

"A deeply moving, really wonderful book." -- Thomas Fleming, author and historian "Adds a fascinating coda to the military campaign." -- Gary W. Gallagher, in *Civil War Magazine* About the Author Gerard A. Patterson is the author of "From Blue to Gray: The Life of Confederate General Cadmus M. Wilcox" (0811706826), "Justice or Atrocity: Gen. George E. Pickett and the Kinston, N.C. Hangings" (1577470273), and "Rebels from West Point: The 306 U.S. Military Academy Graduates Who Fought for the Confederacy" (0811720632), and has contributed more than 30 articles to "Civil War Times Illustrated," "American History," and other history publications.