

MAIMED MEN

Although the exact number is not known, approximately 60,000 surgeries, about three quarters of all of the operations performed during the war, were amputations. Although seemingly drastic, the operation was intended to prevent deadly complications such as gangrene.

Sometimes undertaken without anesthesia, and in some cases leaving the patient with painful sensations in the severed nerves, the removal of a limb was widely feared by soldiers.



LEFT: Amputation in front of a hospital tent, Gettysburg, July 1863
Courtesy National Archives and Records Administration

BOTTOM LEFT & BELOW: Private George W. Lemon from George A. Otis, *Drawings, Photographs, and Lithographs Illustrating the Histories of Seven Survivors of the Operation of Amputation at the Hipjoint, During the War of the Rebellion, Together with Abstracts of these Seven Successful Cases*, 1867
Courtesy National Library of Medicine



Private George W. Lemon was shot in the leg at the battle of the Wilderness on May 5, 1864. He was captured by Confederate soldiers and did not receive treatment for his injuries until he was freed by Union forces over a week later. For more than a year he suffered repeated infections in the wound and poor health, until Surgeon Edwin Bentley amputated the limb. The soldier made a full recovery and was fitted with an artificial leg in 1868.



As Americans sought to put the memory of the conflict behind them, they increasingly ignored the plight of aging, disabled, impoverished veterans. Instead, memorializing the dead and asserting national patriotism became the focus of Civil War remembrances, and the image of the veteran became one of a money-grabbing dependent.

ABOVE:
"The Insatiable Glutton," *Puck* magazine cartoon, December 1882
Courtesy National Library of Medicine

This exhibition is brought to you by:

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
& HUMAN SERVICES



LIFE AND LIMB

THE TOLL OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR



*A. J. Hutchins, Co. K, 25th Ohio Volunteers
Wm. H. McFarland, Co. B, 5th Wisconsin Vols.
Y. M. Higgins, Co. H, 2nd Me Vols.
Thomas Shields, Co. G, 6th N. Y. Vols.
S. M. Dyer, Co. I, 5th Wis Vols.*

ABOVE:
Soldiers at Armory Square Hospital, Washington, DC, 1860s
Courtesy National Library of Medicine

“No tongue can tell, no mind convey, no pen portray the horrible sights I witnessed.”

Recollections of a soldier wounded at Antietam, 1862

More than three million soldiers fought in the war from 1861-1865. More than half a million died, and almost as many were wounded but survived. Hundreds of thousands were permanently disabled by battlefield injuries or surgery, which saved lives by sacrificing limbs. These men served as a symbol of the fractured nation and remained a stark reminder of the costs of the conflict for long after the war.

BELOW: Collecting the remains of the dead, 1865
Courtesy Library of Congress



Honorable SCARS

“It is not two years since the sight of a person who had lost one of his lower limbs was an infrequent occurrence. Now, alas! there are few of us who have not a cripple among our friends, if not in our own families.”

Physician Oliver Wendell Holmes, 1863

The vast numbers of men disabled by the conflict were a major cause of concern for Rebel and Union leaders. Some worried about preventing idleness and immoral behavior, while others focused on the economic hardship veterans would later face if they could not find employment after the war. Proposed solutions included wartime work as cooks, clerks, and hospital attendants, pensions and convalescent homes for those discharged from the army because of their disability, and funds for the purchase of artificial limbs.

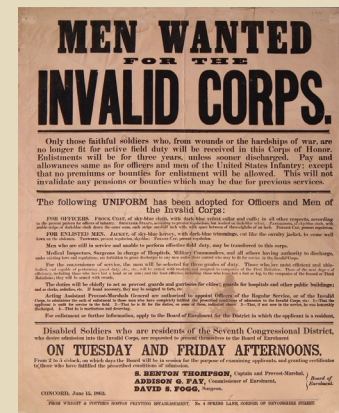
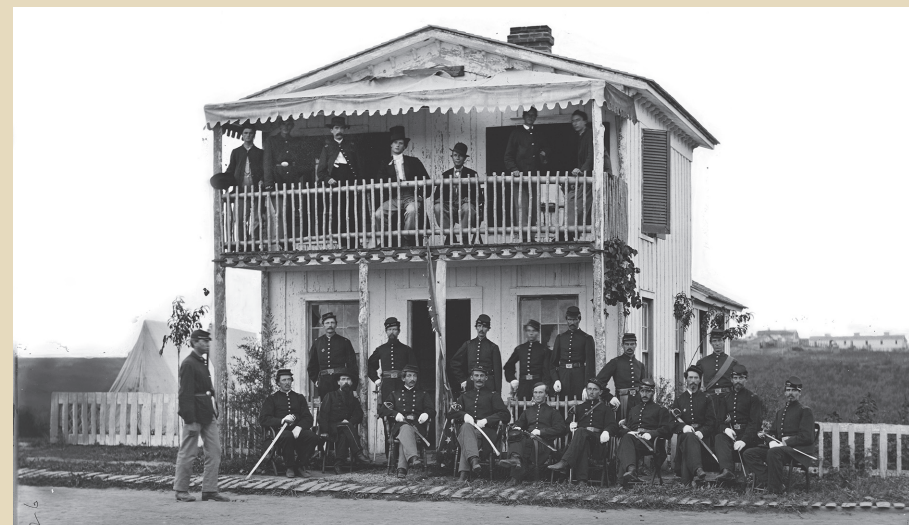
RIGHT: Civil War veterans, 1860s
Courtesy Library of Congress



The Invalid Corps was established by the federal government in 1863 to employ disabled veterans in war-related work.

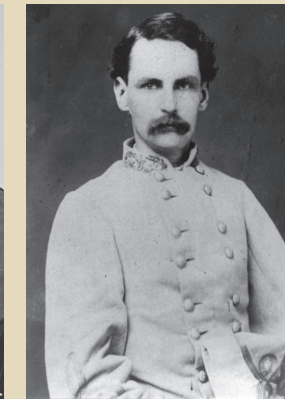
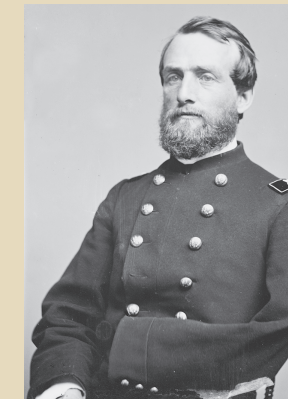
Soldiers were divided up into two battalions, based on the extent of their injuries. The first carried weapons and fought in combat. The second, made up of men with more serious impairments, served as nurses, cooks, and prison guards.

Members of the Invalid Corps (known as the “Cripple Brigade” among their former comrades), were not offered the generous financial awards granted to re-enlisting soldiers and new recruits in the Union. Nicknamed “Inspected-Condemned” after the initials stamped on faulty goods, the Invalid Corps was renamed the Veteran Reserve Corps in 1864 to put an end to the mockery.



ABOVE: Recruitment Poster, 1860s
Courtesy National Park Service, Gettysburg NMP

BELOW: Company D, 10th US Veteran Reserve Corps, (formerly the Invalid Corps), Washington DC, 1865
Courtesy Library of Congress



FAR LEFT: Lucius Fairchild lost his left arm on the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863. He was elected Governor of Wisconsin in 1866.
Courtesy Library of Congress

LEFT: Francis R. Nichols lost an arm and a foot in separate Civil War battles. He became Governor of Louisiana in 1877.
Courtesy Library of Congress

The selflessness of soldiers fostered great respect in the years after the war. In 1862 the federal government allocated Union veterans \$75 to buy an artificial leg and \$50 for an arm, and by 1864 the Confederacy was also providing financial assistance for such purchases. Pension payments were increased regularly, and men pursuing political office often found that their obvious injury proved useful in attracting voters. Displaying an “honorable scar” in this way, especially during and immediately after the war, helped amputees to assert their contribution to the cause.

BELOW: Left-handed handwriting sample by veteran Alfred B. Whitehouse, 1860s
Courtesy Library of Congress

