

Bacteria and Bayonets: The Impact of Disease in American Military History

By David R. Petriello

(Philadelphia and Oxford: Casemate, 2016) (263 pages; \$21.68 hardcover, \$7.62 Kindle)

Author David Petriello's goal in *Bacteria and Bayonets* was to highlight the influence of disease on American military history and to create "an introduction to a field of study underappreciated and in need of further examination" (p. 8). As an introduction to the field, it is a readily accessible and easy read. However, in the important work of connecting more broadly the historiographies of the history of medicine and military history, Petriello's work suffers from structural limitations.

The primary limitation was a failure to clearly define the meaning of "American military history" in either a geographical or an institutional sense. The opening chapters provide an overview of the conflicts of the Spanish, French, and British early modern empires against their imperial or indigenous rivals, spanning the territory of modern-day North and South America. In adopting such a broad geographical and temporal scope, it is difficult for the reader to develop an understanding of the meaning of American military history. Only in Chapter 6, with the discussion of the American Revolution, does the book narrow its focus to the institution of Washington's Continental Army and its successors. This provides a much-needed narrative-connecting thread for the remainder of the monograph.

The second structural limitation was the intended task of introducing 500 years of military medical history in such a short work. Although disease clearly had a larger effect on military campaigns before the Second World War than after, 20th-century conflicts are given unnecessarily short treatment in the penultimate chapter. Opportunities to highlight the relationship between military and medical history are lost. Indeed, the Second World War receives a mere 11 pages and the Korean War none, despite these theatres of operation significantly advancing how American military forces conceived of military medicine and implemented new medical techniques and treatments. In comparison, the examination of the American Revolution by Petriello was an extensive 40 pages.

Perhaps the most concerning structural limitation was the source material utilized. Petriello's exclusive reliance on printed primary and secondary sources fails to allow a deep exploration of connections between medicine and military history, even if there had been space for such an analysis. Such source

material results in a top-down overview of military medicine at various snapshots in time, often through the lens of military commanders. This approach is far more reminiscent of traditional military history and does not account for recent historiographical trends such as the incorporation of methodology of social and cultural history within the discipline of military history or the long-standing use of such frameworks in the history of medicine. Petriello's sources are also likely responsible for a lack of context surrounding contemporary European or American medical thought. This is especially noticeable when comparing European and indigenous experience with disease. When summarizing the devastating effects of virgin soil epidemics of smallpox and other European diseases upon 16th- and 17th-century indigenous peoples, Petriello blames, "Poor understanding of epidemiology, combined with counter-productive treatment methods, resulted in increased death rates at a time when European encroachment called for a healthy united front on the part of the Indians" (p. 22). Such a characterization implies not only that indigenous peoples should have had an advanced understanding of diseases they had never previously encountered but also just as egregious that early modern European medicine had a superior and sophisticated understanding of epidemiology, which was not the case.

Bacteria and Bayonets succeeds in highlighting the intersection of the history of medicine and American military history for an audience unfamiliar with its subject matter. In format and execution, it would likely be most enjoyable for a popular audience that does not seek the nuance of a detailed academic treatment of military medicine. For readers with an interest in nursing history, nurses unfortunately feature little here. Yet, as an introductory work, it offers plenty of fodder for considering and questioning what has been glossed over, which could lead to more expansive investigation by future scholars.

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