War & Disease: The Fall of Our Soldiers

Gina Dougherty

Throughout history there have been many wars fought with many lives lost. As time has progressed so has our technology. The way that soldiers are housed, fight, and are cared for have all evolved to better suit their needs and to prolong life. With the death tolls as high as they are, it is interesting to see in what manner the soldiers have died. Perhaps they were injured on the battle front, but they survived. The way they are cared for greatly influences the outcome. During the American Revolution and the Civil War, sanitation and sterilization were not a concern. Because of this, wounds often became deeply infected, leading to the soldiers death.

In wars such as World War I the barracks were often crowded. Even in the trenches they were in close contact constantly. This proved to be an essential element for the spread of disease. In 1918 Spanish flu was on the rise and was spreading through the barracks at a rapid pace. This strain of influenza was proving to be more lethal than any weapon used in battle during the four years of the war. Spanish flu was not the only concern. Measles, mumps, and meningitis would often sweep through the barracks claiming young, healthy men’s lives. In fact during the Civil War statistics show that 284,000 of the Union and Confederate soldiers died due to disease where as 204,000 soldiers were killed in battle or fatally wounded. These numbers are proof that disease was more fatal than actual combat.