Surgeon in Blue
Jonathan Letterman, the Civil War Doctor
who Pioneered Battlefield Care
by Scott McGaugh

Publishers Weekly
2013 marks the 150th anniversary of the deadliest battle ever fought on American soil. At Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, over the course of three days in July 1863, nearly 50,000 men lost their lives. But bloodshed isn’t the focus of this stirring tale. Instead, McGaugh (Battlefield Angels) focuses on Civil War surgeon Jonathan Letterman’s radical efforts to staunch the bleeding at Gettysburg, Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville. Union commander George McClellan called Letterman “the man for the occasion,” and McGaugh’s engrossing narrative bears this out . . . In addition to being an incisive portrait of the great doctor and leader, McGaugh’s history is a testament to the brave men to whom Letterman dedicated his life.

Kirkus
The carnage of the Civil War has been vividly rendered in the photography of Mathew Brady and the field-hospital writings of Walt Whitman. USS Midway Museum marketing director McGaugh (USS Midway: America’s Shield, 2011, etc.), offers a solid, well-researched life of Jonathan Letterman (1824-1872), a Pennsylvania-born physician who, as medical director of the Army of the Potomac, instituted bold and far-reaching reforms to alleviate the suffering of men wounded in battle. At a time when Army medical care was chaotic and almost an afterthought—nearly 3,000 wounded lay unattended on the battlefield for three days after the Battle of Bull Run—Letterman provided “more humanitarian and effective care” . . . Against the moans, mangled bodies and putrid odors of the war, McGaugh shows how Letterman, a quiet, private man with an analytical mind, reformed his medical corps . . . The author also details Letterman’s earlier years serving on isolated outposts and his later careers as a failed wildcatter on California oilfields and a coroner in San Francisco . . . A nicely crafted biography that also offers Civil War buffs an unusual ambulance-wagon view of the great conflict.

As medical director of the Army of the Potomac during the American Civil War, Jonathan Letterman made important innovations in the battlefield evacuation and treatment of wounded men that changed the history of military medicine. With sensitivity and insight, Scott McGaugh presents the story of this fascinating figure and his legacy, which has saved uncounted thousands of lives of soldiers wounded in many wars.

James M. McPherson
Pulitzer Prize Author of Battle Cry for Freedom

The name Jonathan Letterman is known to few people today, yet, it would be nearly impossible to find an American today whose life has not been touch by this famous man. His medical innovations touch lives every time 911 is called for a trauma incident, a patient arrives at an emergency room, a medic treats a wounded warrior or medical supplies are delivered to a disaster zone. His innovations were not simply evolutionary, they were revolutionary. Unfortunately little has been written about this remarkable man—until now.
Thanks to Scott McGaugh’s work, Letterman can be introduced to a world that already benefits from his legacy.

George Wunderlich
Executive Director
National Museum of Civil War Medicine

This is an important book whose author has thoroughly and ably researched the underside of warfare, namely, the travails of the wounded soldier from being abandoned on the battlefield to becoming the object of compassionate care.

John S. Haller, Jr.,
Emeritus Professor of History and Medical Humanities, Southern Illinois University
Author of Farmcarts to Fords: A History of the Military Ambulance, 1790-1925

With a keen sense of innovation, Dr. Letterman not only met the challenges of battlefield medicine in the Civil War, he pioneered a system of frontline medical care, supply and evacuation that heralded today's 'continuum of care' model practiced by the U.S. military. In his eloquent and engaging portrait of the legendary medical strategist, Scott McGaugh reminds us that Letterman's spirit lives on today in every corpsman and medic, at every forward medical facility, and at every hospital in theater.

André B. Sobocinski
Historian, Office of Medical History
Bureau of Medicine & Surgery
United States Navy

Surgeon in Blue is a meticulously researched, totally fascinating narrative of Dr Jonathan Letterman’s pioneering of modern battlefield medicine in the midst of the nightmare carnage of the Civil War. Scott McGaugh’s extraordinary work of military history documents a life-saving legacy that still echoes through Iraq and Afghanistan.

Richard Setlowe,
Author of The Experiment and The Haunting of Suzanna Blackwell