Walt Whitman
Civil War Nurse

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Bearing the bandages, water and sponge,
Straight and swift to my wounded I go,
Where they lie on the ground, after the battle brought in;
Where their priceless blood reddens the grass, the ground;
Or to the rows of the hospital tent, or under the roof’d hospital;
Ambulance Train
To the long rows of cots, up and down, each side, I return;
To each and all, one after another, I draw near – not one do I miss;
An attendant follows, holding a tray – he carries a refuse pail,
Soon to be fill’d with clotted rags and blood, emptied and filled again.
A Brief Chronology

1819 – born on Long Island, New York
1855 – published first edition of Leaves of Grass
1863 – appointed a representative of the Christian Commission
1863-64 – works as a volunteer nurse in hospitals in Washington DC
1865 – publishes Drum-Taps
1867 – Drum-Taps included in Leaves of Grass
1892 – dies in Camden, New Jersey
Christian Commission Building in Washington DC
I onward go, I stop,
With hinged knees and steady hand, to
dress wounds;
I am firm with each – the pangs are sharp,
yet unavoidable;
One turns to me his appealing eyes –
poor boy! I never knew you,
Yet I think I could not refuse this moment
to die for you, if that would save you.
On, on I go (open doors of time! open hospital doors!)
The crush’d head I dress, (poor crazed hand tear not the bandage away,)
The neck of the cavalry-man with the bullet through and through I examine,
Civil War Hospitals

• Prior to war – few medical facilities in Washington

• Field hospitals – a collection of tents

• By 1862 – 20,000 wounded troops in Washington

• Public buildings converted to hospitals – average size 500 beds

• Poor heating, ventilation, sanitation
Campbell Hospital
Washington DC

originally a barracks for cavalry
Civil War Nursing

- Care was often performed by convalescing veterans
- Scurvy and malnutrition common
- Rampant infection
- Amputations common
- Leading diseases – typhoid, dysentery, malaria
Famous Nurses of the Civil War

**Union**

Dorothea Dix  
Mary Todd Lincoln  
Mary Ann Ball Bickerdyke  
Mary Jane Safford  
Clara Barton

**Confederate**

Sally Louisa Tompkins
Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed already the eye, yet life struggles hard,
(Come sweet death! Be persuaded O beautiful death!
In mercy come quickly.)
From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand, 
I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, 
wash off the matter and blood, 
Back on his pillow the soldier bends with curv’d neck and side-falling head, 
His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on the bloody stump, 
And has not yet look’d on it.
Maimed Soldiers
I dress a wound in the side, deep, deep
But a day or two more, for see the frame all wasted and sinking,
And the yellow-blue countenance see.
I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot with the bullet-wound, Cleanse the one with a gnawing and putrid gangrene, so sickening, so offensive, While the attendant stands beside me holding the tray and pail.
I am faithful, I do not give out,
The fractur’d thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdomen,
These and more I dress with impassive hand, (yet deep in my breast a fire, a burning flame.)
Was Walt Whitman Really a Nurse?

- Untrained
- Unpaid

Attention to psychological needs
Provided physical care
Demonstrated compassion