

KATE CUMMING (nurse in Chattanooga Confederate Hospital, 1863):



“One of our greatest trials last year was want of proper diet for sick men. We did the best we could with what we had - toast the bread and make beef-tea; and we had a little butter - bad at that... The great cry of our sick is always for milk. We would buy plenty, but have no money. We would get a little every day for the worst cases, at our own expense. I let the folks at home know how many were suffering for want of nourishment, for I felt confident that if they knew of it they would send us means. If they did not, I did not know what we would do, as we had nothing but beef, bread and coffee; many of the men can not taste either of these things. I believe that many a man dies for want of proper nourishment. “While visiting the men one afternoon, I found four who had not eaten anything for some time. I

sent a nurse to one of the citizens—Mrs. Moore; told him to tell her to send us some milk, for charity’s sake, which she did, and the poor fellows drank it as if it really did them good.

“Patients from Bragg’s army are coming in daily; the hospital is full of them. I never saw such exhausted and worn out men; they are in rags, and many of them barefooted. It is said the whole army suffered much; that many a time they had nothing to eat but parched corn.” “A battle was fought at Murfreesboro on the 31st. We have come out of it victorious... but I can scarcely rejoice, for our wounded are coming in by the hundreds... The weather is very cold, and I shudder to think what our men have had to suffer on the battle-field... Every corner of the hospital is filled with patients, and the attendants had to give up their beds for them... All that I or Mrs. Williamson have been able to do for them is to see that they get enough to eat. Bread, beef, and coffee are all we have to give them; they are thankful for that... I am told that the ladies of the place go down to the train every night with hot coffee and all kinds of refreshments for the wounded.” “We have a new ward near the river. It holds about 50 patients, and is set apart for cases of erysipelas. I visited it today, and found it nearly full. Mr. Kelly is there, with erysipelas all over his face and head; and Captain De Graffenreid, who also has it in his arm.” “The erysipelas, which is infectious, is spreading. Two of the girls in the washhouse had their ears bored, and have it very badly, taken from washing the clothes, though they never touch them until they are put into a large boiler and well boiled.” “I have known nurses to take it from a scratch.”

In modern terms, the disease is a severe streptococcal cellulitis accompanied by a high fever. If they had antibiotics, they could have stopped it in a week.

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