

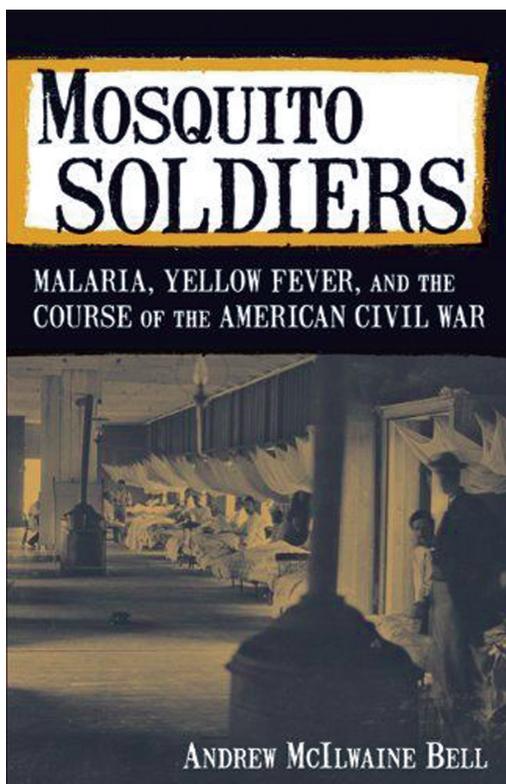
Book Review

MOSQUITO SOLDIERS: MALARIA, YELLOW FEVER, AND THE COURSE OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Andrew M. Bell

Louisiana State Univ Press, Baton Rouge, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8071-3561-7. Hardback, 192 pages.

Review by William J. Gephart



I found this book after touring the Museum of the Confederacy, a true gem, if you ever find yourself at the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), one of the clinical rotation sites for the Special Operations Combat Medic (SOCM) students. While this museum's bookstore carries several tomes which would likely be of interest to anyone reading *The Journal of Special Operations Medicine (JSOM)*, the most interesting-appearing (*i.e.*, it includes history, medicine, and the military) of all of their books for sale was *Mosquito Soldiers*.

Unfortunately, the dust cover and the book itself yield no information on the author whatsoever, other than a mug shot, his name (Andrew McIlwaine Bell), and the fact that he lives in Washington, DC. As I read this interesting book, I found myself wondering about the author's background, and thinking that perhaps he belongs to some "alphabet soup" organization, and therefore didn't want to tell much about himself. It became apparent to me, however, that his background was definitely history (or

more specifically, military history), and *not* medicine. The first suspicion that the author is not medical is that he completely skips the opportunity to tell us why willow bark was thought by some to be an effective treatment for malaria (as willow bark contains salicylate, which you likely already know lowers fever and reduces headache pain, two of the more common complaints of those suffering from malaria). Most physicians I know would not pass up this opportunity for expiation during a discussion on substitute treatments tried for malaria during the Civil War. In addition, the realm of medicine (not history) was the only area in which I noticed an error in this otherwise remarkable analysis of how diseases changed both tactics and strategy during the war. (The other error, and a major one to us medical folks who are expected to deal with malaria, is that the author states that quinine "... suppresses the symptoms of malaria, rather than prevents infection...." While quinine is certainly not the preferred prophylaxis, nor is it the preferred treatment nowadays, this doesn't change the fact that quinine kills malaria through several methods: stopping malaria parasite reproduction, inhibiting the parasite's use of glucose, and decreasing its production of proteins. The end result? The malaria *symptoms* do decrease, but contrary to the author's statements, this only because quinine both directly and indirectly *kills* the parasite.)

Aside from this error, and the fact that the author doesn't identify his background (I later garnered from the internet that he is a History Professor at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy), my only other complaint about this otherwise intriguing and highly readable book is that the author several times repeats the same facts. (*e.g.*, That African-Americans were quite commonly, and often incorrectly, believed to be immune to both malaria and yellow fever, and were therefore sent in to guard or work in hot, swampy areas that disabled or killed them.) While this information is important, for several reasons (primarily, it exemplifies organizations not analyzing results, nor learning from their mistakes.), we do not need to read about this tragedy eight times, with it being presented as new information, each time we read it.

In the end, this book is worth reading for students of either military history or wartime epidemiology. The author's descriptions of the two diseases, from both primary and secondary sources, highlights the horror of not only malaria and yellow fever, but also diarrhea, prior to the modern era of medicine. It's one of those books that will make you grateful for being in the military now rather than 150 years ago.