

The Civil War and Gettysburg: The Correspondents' Perspective

The 500 correspondents who reported on the war for newspapers in the north, south and overseas were mostly men, but included a few women and at least one African-American. It was through their eyes that most of America – and the world – experienced the Civil War. Their perspective, along with those of the commanders – Lincoln and Davis, Meade and Lee – the common soldiers and the civilians, are used to tell the story of the Gettysburg Campaign, within the context of the Civil War, at the new Museum at Gettysburg National Military Park.

They were the first “embedded reporters,” covering the world’s first “instant news” war. Some generals despised them. General William T. Sherman called them “buzzards” and had one court marshaled as a spy. Meade sat a reporter – backwards – on a mule and had him driven out of camp. On the other hand, Lincoln was so grateful to Henry Wing for a message the 19-year-old delivered from Grant that he kissed the *New York Tribune* reporter on the forehead.

Visitors will find that some of the museum’s most compelling stories about the Battle of Gettysburg were those delivered by correspondents like Sam Wilkeson, who wrote his article for *The New York Times* after learning that his 19-year-old son had been killed during the first day of fighting.

Who can write the history of a battle whose eyes are immovably fastened upon a central figure of transcendently absorbing interest – the dead body of an oldest born, crushed by a shell in a position where a battery should never have been sent, in a building where surgeons dared not to stay.... My pen is heavy. Oh, you dead, who at Gettysburgh have baptized with your blood the second birth of freedom in America, how you are to be envied!

– New York Times Correspondent Sam Wilkeson, filing from Gettysburg, July 4, 1863

The museum’s exhibits are among the most extensive ever developed on the correspondent and the Civil War and examine:

- The war correspondent and the profession within the context of the Civil War
- The public’s demand for news about the war and how — in the competition to be first, fast and support their side — the accuracy of the reporting often suffered
- The technology – the telegraph, the locomotive and steam presses – that made it possible for accounts of battle to be in print in major cities within hours and feed the public’s insatiable appetite for news of the war
- The openly partisan nature of newspapers, the resulting biased coverage and Lincoln’s and David’s use of the press to stir up support for their causes
- Reporters’ accounts of the Battle of Gettysburg – some straightforward, others melodramatic, the best of them giving a sense of the chaos during those three days

- The 45 reporters who reported on the Battle of Gettysburg, including Thomas Morris Chester of the *Philadelphia Press* – the war’s only black correspondent, whose stories often focused on the contributions of black soldiers

In addition to park’s extensive collection of Civil War-era artifacts and archives found throughout the galleries, visitors can experience the Battle of Gettysburg as told by reporters during immersive films including:

- The **Campaign to Pennsylvania Voices Theater** featuring readings of newspaper articles about the Confederacy’s advance into Pennsylvania and glimpses into the mindsets of men and women, white and black, young and old, Confederate and Union
- The **Voices of the Aftermath Theater** presenting stirring accounts of the correspondents, as they survey the damage and describe their experiences

The correspondents who reported on the Civil War have been called “history’s couriers.” They referred to themselves the “Bohemian Brigade.” At ages that averaged in their twenties, correspondents found themselves doing a job that no one had ever done before, while trying to make sense of the most significant event in American history.