



# BIVOUAC

KENT CIVIL WAR SOCIETY \* P.O. Box 3671 KENT, OH 44240

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Meeting Hotline (330) 474-9362

**“DR. GEORGE B. TODD: MEDICAL OFFICER ON LAND, RIVER, SEA”  
A TALK BY MARK LAUBACHER OF GALENA, OHIO  
SHELTER HOUSE, FRED FULLER PARK, KENT  
TUESDAY, MAY 13, 2024, AT 7:30 P.M.**

In April 1861, with the Civil War imminent, Doctor George Brainard Todd answered the call for surgeons and mustered in the 12th New York Regiment. He was with the 12th in Virginia from July 1861 through August 1862 and resigned October 1862 in Maryland. He immediately volunteered as a naval surgeon and served on seven vessels for the Federal Navy. His longest tenure was on USS Montauk in 1864-65, it became his most memorable. He was the only person to have met President Abraham Lincoln the day of his assassination, attended Ford's Theatre that fateful night, was the only naval surgeon to join the other surgeons with Lincoln at Peterson House, and witnessed the autopsy of Lincoln's assassin. Honorably discharged in 1868, he reenlisted during the Virginius Affair, then ordered to Pensacola, Florida, to treat yellow fever victims only to become infected and succumb to the disease.

Mark Laubacher, RN, Paramedic, is a former Certified Specialist in Poison Information having worked at the Central Ohio Poison Center for 28 years. Prior to that, he was a full time staff nurse at Children's Hospital Emergency Department for 4 years. He received his Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Capital University in 1989. He is also currently a faculty member for Grant Medical Center Paramedic Program in Columbus, Ohio.

A student of US Civil War history, Mark presented a paper on snake bites at the National Museum of Civil War Medicine Conference in 2013. He did the same at the Society of Civil War Surgeons Conference in May 2014. A review of unconventional weapons that were considered during the Civil War was given in New Orleans in September 2014 to the North American Congress of Clinical Toxicology. He is active member of the following: 1st Ohio Light Artillery Battery A, Central Ohio Civil War Roundtable, Society of Civil War Surgeons, National Museum of Civil War Medicine, and Society of Civil War Historians.

His publications include: "Snake Bit--Perpetuated Error: No Snake Bites to Civil War Soldiers." Blue & Gray Magazine 30, no. 5 (July 2014): 45-52 and "The First Medical Man aboard USS Monitor," Journal of Civil War Medicine 19, no. 2 (April/May/June 2015): 60-71.

Our optional pre-meeting dinner will be at Eddy's Deli & Restaurant, 4581 Kent Road in Stow, beginning at 5:30 p.m.

# Yellow Fever Timeline: A Long Misunderstood Disease

By Susan Brink

No one knows for sure, but scientists believe that yellow fever has plagued the world for at least 3,000 years. In all likelihood, the disease started in the rain forests of Africa. It rode barges and sailing ships to tropical ports around the world, followed the slave trade to the Americas, interrupted the building of the Panama Canal and left a trail of graves around the world.

The fearsome disease starts like a common flu with symptoms of headache, fever, muscle pain, nausea and vomiting. But roughly 15 percent of patients progress to a severe form of the disease: high fever, jaundice, internal bleeding, seizures, shock, organ failure and death. Up to half of those who develop severe disease will die.

The virus almost certainly originated in Africa, passing back and forth between the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito and monkeys. "Almost without a doubt, for thousands of years the virus circulated in monkeys and mosquitoes in the rain forests of Africa," says Dr. Duane Gubler, founding director of the Signature Research Program in Emerging Infectious Disease at Duke-NUS Medical School in Singapore. "It probably infected people as well but not in large populations because people lived in small villages."

Over thousands of years, the mosquitoes carrying the virus adapted to village life, then city life. They got used to feeding off human beings and made their way to larger cities and coastal towns.

## The 1800s

Throughout this century public health experts continued to believe yellow fever was transmitted by contact with infected patients. With that misconception, most efforts to control outbreaks were futile. But in 1881 a Cuban physician, Carlos Finlay, acting on a theory that mosquitoes carried the virus, conducted an experiment with mosquitoes that harbored the disease after biting yellow fever patients. He let the mosquitoes bite an experimental subject, who then came down with yellow fever. Still, much of the scientific community remained unconvinced.

Meanwhile, thousands of people were dying every year in New Orleans — a major port for the slave trade and a city with a climate hospitable to the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. Between 1839 and 1860, some 26,000 people in New Orleans contracted yellow fever.

By the end of the 19th century, during the brief Spanish-American War, fewer than 1,000 soldiers died in battle, but more than 5,000 died of disease in Cuba, and most of those deaths were due to yellow fever, according to records of the U.S. Army Yellow Fever Commission.

