

Like other Civil War photographers, Alexander Gardner sometimes tried to communicate both pathos and patriotism with his photographs, reminding his audience of the tragedy of war without forgetting the superiority of his side's cause. Sometimes, the most effective means of elevating one's cause while demeaning the other was to create a scene -- by posing bodies -- and then draft a dramatic narrative to accompany the picture.

Compare the photographer's 1865 narratives with a contemporary analysis:

[Sharpshooter's Last Sleep](#) | [Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter](#) | [Analysis](#)

Sharpshooter's Last Sleep



Copied from glass, wet collodion negative, alternate exposure, substantially identical to the one from which Gardner made Plate 40.

[Full Image](#) | [Bibliographic Record](#)

LC Caption: Gettysburg, Pa., Dead Confederate soldiers in "the devil's den" Photographed by Alexander Gardner, July 1863. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Reproduction number: LC-B8171-0277

By Alexander Gardner

Text for Plate 40 in *Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the War*, published, 1865-66.

A burial party, searching for dead on the borders of the Gettysburg battle-field, found, in a secluded spot, a sharpshooter lying as he fell when struck by the bullet. His cap and gun were evidently thrown behind him by the violence of the shock, and the blanket, partly shown, indicates that he had selected this as a permanent position from which to annoy the enemy. How many skeletons of such men are bleaching to-day in out of the way places no one can tell. Now and then the visitor to a battle-field finds the bones of some man shot as this one was, but there are hundreds that will never be known of, and will moulder into nothingness among the rocks. There were several regiments of Sharpshooters employed on both sides during the war, and many distinguished officers lost their lives at the hands of the riflemen. The first regiment was composed of men selected from each of the Loyal States, who brought their own rifles, and could snuff a candle at a hundred yards. Some of the regiments tried almost every variety of arms, but generally found the Western rifle most effective. The men were seldom used in line, but were taken to the front and allowed to choose their own positions. Some climbed into bushy trees, and lashed themselves to the branches to avoid falling if wounded. Others secreted themselves behind logs and rocks, and not a few dug little pits, into which they crept, lying close to the ground and rendering it almost impossible for an enemy to hit them. Occasionally a Federal and Confederate Sharpshooter would be brought face to face, when each would resort to every artifice to kill the other. Hats would be elevated upon sticks, and powder flashed on a piece of paper, to draw the opponent's fire, not always with success, however, and sometimes many hours would elapse before either party could get a favorable shot. When the armies were entrenched, as at Vicksburg and Richmond, the sharpshooters frequently secreted themselves so as to defy discovery, and picked off officers without the Confederate

rifleman being able to return the fire.

Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter



Copied from glass, wet collodion negative from which Gardner made Plate 41.

[Full Image](#) | [Bibliographic Record](#)

LC Caption: Gettysburg, Pa., Dead Confederate soldier in the devil's den. Photographed by Alexander Gardner, July 1863. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Reproduction number: LC-B8171-7942

By Alexander Gardner

Text for Plate 41 in *Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the War*, published, 1865-66.

On the Fourth of July, 1863, Lee's shattered army withdrew from Gettysburg, and started on its retreat from Pennsylvania to the Potomac. From Culp's Hill, on our right, to the forests that stretched away from Round Top, on the left, the fields were thickly strewn with Confederate dead and wounded, dismounted guns, wrecked caissons, and the debris of a broken army. The artist, in passing over the scene of the previous days' engagements, found in a lonely place the covert of a rebel sharpshooter, and photographed the scene presented here. The Confederate soldier had built up between two huge rocks, a stone wall, from the crevices of which he had directed his shots, and, in comparative security, picked off our officers. The side of the rock on the left shows, by the little white spots, how our sharpshooters and infantry had endeavored to dislodge him. The trees in the vicinity were splintered, and their branches cut off, while the front of the wall looked as if just recovering from an attack of geological small-pox. The sharpshooter had evidently been wounded in the head by a fragment of shell which had exploded over him, and had laid down upon his blanket to await death. There was no means of judging how long he had lived after receiving his wound, but the disordered clothing shows that his sufferings must have been intense. Was he delirious with agony, or did death come slowly to his relief, while memories of home grew dearer as the field of carnage faded before him? What visions, of loved ones far away, may have hovered above his stony pillow! What familiar voices may he not have heard, like whispers beneath the roar of battle, as his eyes grew heavy in their long, last sleep!

On the nineteenth of November, the artist attended the consecration of the Gettysburg Cemetery, and again visited the "Sharpshooter's Home." The musket, rusted by many storms, still leaned against the rock, and the skeleton of the soldier lay undisturbed within the mouldering uniform, as did the cold form of the dead four months before. None of those who went up and down the fields to bury the fallen, had found him. "Missing," was all that could have been known of him at home, and some mother may yet be patiently watching for the return of her boy, whose bones lie bleaching, unrecognized and alone, between the rocks at Gettysburg.

Analysis



Alternate Exposure for Plate 40. A Sharpshooter's Last Sleep. [Full Image](#)

Copied from glass, wet collodion negative, alternate exposure, substantially identical to the one from which Gardner made Plate 40. (Differences between exposures include: the location of the small objects near the body, the age markings on the negatives, and the distance of the camera lens from the body.) LC Caption: [Gettysburg, Pa., Dead Confederate soldiers in "the devil's den"](#) Photographed by Alexander Gardner, July 1863. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Reproduction number: LC-B8171-0277)

Frassanito studied six photographs of this dead soldier made by the photographers Alexander Gardner and Timothy O'Sullivan at the Gettysburg battlefield in July 1863. Geographic features place four of the six photographs at the southern slope of Devil's Den (top) and two at what Gardner called the "sharpshooter's den" (bottom). Frassanito argues that the original location of the body was the southern slope of Devil's Den, suggesting that the soldier was probably an infantryman, killed while advancing up the hillside. After taking pictures of the dead soldier from several angles, the two photographers noticed the picturesque sharpshooter's den -- forty yards away -- and moved the corpse to this rocky niche and photographed him again. A blanket, visible under the soldier in another version of the sharpshooter's den image (not shown here), may have been used to carry the body.

The type of weapon seen in these photographs was not used by sharpshooters. This particular firearm is seen in a number of Gardner's scenes at Gettysburg and probably was the photographer's prop. The amount of time expended photographing this one body indicates that this may have been one of the last bodies to be buried and Gardner may have felt that he was running out of subjects.



Plate 41. The Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter. [Full Image](#)

Copied from glass, wet collodion negative from which Gardner made Plate 41. LC Caption: [Gettysburg, Pa., Dead Confederate soldier in the devil's den](#) Photographed by Alexander Gardner, July 1863. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Reproduction number: LC-B8171-7942)

In his text in the [Sketch Book](#), Gardner recalls seeing the body again about four months after the battle, when the Gettysburg cemetery was dedicated in November 1863. Frassanito points out that the body would not have been left unburied that long, nor would the rifle have survived the hordes of relic hunters who swarmed over battlefields. But Gardner's story succeeded in transforming this soldier into a particular character in the drama, a man who suffered a painful, lonely, unrecognized death.