

1. How might the film’s opening scenes and commentary be considered unconventional?
2. Why do you think director John Huston chose to use a cast primarily consisting of World War II veterans?
3. Medal of Honor recipient-turned-actor Audie Murphy played the main character of Henry. Does his on-screen persona match that of his real exploits?
4. Identify three scenes where fear is apparent. Why is the inclusion of this emotion significant?
5. Describe some of the unique camera angles used in the cinematography. How do these scenes add depth to the characters and settings?
6. Does the narration of the Stephen Crane’s novel throughout add or detract to the film? Why?
7. How does redemption come to play a major role in the plot?
8. How are Confederates depicted in various scenes? Are they villainous or sympathetic?
9. How do you think audiences of 1951 reacted to this picture? What is your appraisal of the movie?
10. What do you think was the primary goal of director John Huston in making this movie? What themes were he attempting to explore?


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Accompanying primary source:

***The following excerpt is from the memoir of Pvt. Rice Bull, a Union casualty of the Battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863:***

"I had just fired my gun and was lowering it from my shoulder when I felt a sharp sting in my face as though I had been struck with something that caused no pain. Blood began to flow down my face and neck and I knew that I had been wounded. Ransom Fisher standing next to me saw the blood streaming down my face, and said, 'You are hit. Can't I help you off?' I said. 'No, Ransom, I think I can get to the Surgeon without help.' I took my knapsack that lay on the works in front of me and started to go to the left of our Regiment where our Surgeons were located. I passed in the rear of several Companies, all were firing rapidly, and when back of Company K felt another stinging pain, this time in my left side just above the hip. Everything went black. My knapsack and gun dropped from my hands and I went down in a heap on the ground.

I do not know how long it was before I became conscious but the battle was raging furiously; two dead men who were not there when I fell were lying close to me, one across my feet. . . .

The bullet that entered my right cheek had glanced along the jaw bone and came out of my neck near the jugular vein. My second wound was in my left side above the hip; the bullet came out near the back bone making a ragged wound. It was difficult to turn either way to seek a comfortable position as I had been hit on both sides. As yet there was little pain but by night my jaw was stiff and swollen, my side was commencing to give me trouble and I was hot and feverish. The clotted blood had hardened so my clothing was chafing and irritating my wounds every time I moved. . . .

The afternoon slowly passed, a long and sorrowful one for us; then the night came, the last night on earth for many who died for the lack of the care they needed. For those not so severely wounded nature was kind, the night was beautiful, it was comfortably warm, and a full moon shone down on us, making it almost as light as day. We were so far away from the enemy's camps that we were not annoyed by them. We could faintly hear in the distance the rumble of wagons passing along the turnpike and the subdued faraway sound of fife and drum reached us. But these sounds we did not heed, for around us were suffering men and the air was filled with their cries and moans. At last it was quiet for all were so exhausted that even in the pain they slept. Before morning many died; we heard their cries no more. . . .

The morning of May 5th was bright and warm but our wounds had become so sore and we were so stiff that those of us who were able did not feel much like moving about. Many had died during the night. They were gathered up and laid side by side in the rear of a lunette that had been built by our soldiers before the battle to protect our artillery. This collection of the dead continued every day while we were in the camp and when we left scores lay there unburied. As time went on we faced a terrible condition arising from the awful odor arising from the dead horses and men that were lying all about the camp. As time went on the stench became unberable. . . .

The morning of May 5th, Surgeons, under a flag of truce, reported at the camp. . . . They found many that required amputation; the only treatment they had for others was to give them a cerate with which to rub their wounds. The Surgeons began their bloody work at once in the immediate view of the wounded, some of whom were not more than ten feet from the table. As each amputation was completed the wounded man was carried to the old house and laid on the floor; the arm or leg was thrown on the ground near the table, only a few feet from the wounded who were laying near by. . . .

About noon thunder heads began to form in the west and south and before one in the afternoon we heard the sound of thunder. . . . It was about two in the afternoon when the storm started; it lasted about two hours. . . .

The condition of most of the wounded was deplorable. More than half had no tent covering, so had to take the full force of the storm. Many could not move without help; they lay in the gutters between the rows, and were half submerged. A few had the strength to sit up in the muddy pool but the greater part lay sprawled in the mud and filth with nothing between them and the ground but their soaked woolen blankets. Many did not even have a blanket. I saw many men lying in from three to five inches of water. We were told, though I did not see this, that on the east side of the cabin two men were drowned. They were lying close under the eaves and were unable to move when they were covered by the water that fell from the roof. . . .

The night came and the rain increased. Those who were fortunate enough to have a tent sat up, back to back to brace each other, either shivering with chills or burning with fever from their wounds. There were no lights about the camp, the darkness was impenetrable, and the groans and shrieks of the wounded could be heard on every side. . . . Not a thing had been done officially [by the Confederate army] either for or against us who lay wounded. We were entirely ignored and were to all appearance of no more consequence than the dead horses that lay around us.

Starvation that had threatened for several days became acute. The badly wounded were getting weaker every hour and even the stronger were breaking down. Wounds were feverish and festering and hunger was now adding to our troubles; food was as necessary as nursing. Great numbers were still laying in the mud, helpless. There were no privy vaults, but had there been the majority were too weak to go to them. There still remained nearly five hundred men in the camp. I must leave it to your imagination for I cannot describe these awful conditions, which were made worse by the stench from the dead men and horses. None of the men or horses had been buried, The horses lay where they had died, the men lay in a row side by side south of the cabin in sight of all the wounded. . . .

By May 8th our wounds had all festered and were hot with fever; our clothing which came in contact with them was so filthy and stiff from the dried blood that it gravely aggravated our condition. Many wounds developed gangrene and blood poisoning; lockjaw caused suffering and death. While the stench from nearby dead horses and men was sickening it was not worse than that from the living who lay in their own filth. Finally, not the least of our troubles were the millions of flies that filled the air and covered blood-saturated clothing when they could not reach and sting the unbandaged wounds. As days went by none of these conditions improved, except the cries of the mortally wounded gradually lessened as they, one by one, were carried away and laid by the side of those who had gone before them."