



Bugs and Bullets: The True Story of an American Doctor on the Eastern Front during World War I by Joseph Breckinridge Bayne.

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“If there is any romance in war, unfortunately it does not fall to the lot of the nurse or surgeon to experience it,” wrote Joseph Breckinridge Bayne (1880–1964) in his memoir of his three years as a Red Cross volunteer physician in Romania during World War I. This theme pervades his recollections. Yet, while he fell out of love with the supposed adventure of war, he fell in love with Romania’s people, particularly the peasantry. He was one of a few Americans attracted to the Eastern Front during the Great War. His invaluable memoir, first published in 1944, blends war reportage, surgery, epidemiology, tourism, history, folklore, and ethnography. Even readers with little interest in the Eastern Front or military medicine will find *Bugs and Bullets* to be an informative and engaging account of a little-known theater of the war.

Historian Ernest H. Latham, who worked as a US Foreign Service officer at the American Embassy in Romania in the 1980s, rediscovered *Bugs and Bullets* and decided a reprint was merited for Romania’s World War I centennial commemoration. He has equipped the new edition with a helpful introduction sketching the biography of Bayne using family records, archives, newspapers, and other sources.

Latham suggests Bayne may have gone to Europe less from a desire for adventure than to flee a troubled marriage. He has also unearthed a long report written by the doctor in 1918 for the State Department after he returned from German-occupied Romania; it includes, among other things, an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory about Jewish traitors and German spies undermining Russia’s and Romania’s respective war efforts (a claim not made in his memoir). Latham’s footnotes add necessary context and correct errors.

Latham divides Bayne’s “adventures” in Romania into four periods: in the first, he performed trauma surgeries at a Romanian military hospital from November 1916 until German occupiers forced him to relocate in January 1917; in the second, he carried out plastic and reconstructive surgeries at a civilian hospital until August 1917; in the third, he ventured into remote villages for a rest period, but soon busied himself helping peasants fight epidemics sweeping the countryside until he was expelled from Romania along with other “political prisoners” in June 1918, after Romania was compelled to sign a peace treaty with the Central Powers; finally, after the war, he returned in December 1918 to distribute American aid and again fight epidemics in the countryside until departing Romania permanently in June 1919.

Bayne’s memoir comprises fifteen chapters. The first concerns his relocation from New York City to London, where he sensed the nervous wartime atmosphere; he arrived in time for the infamous Zeppelin raids of autumn 1916. He eventually joined a British Red Cross group headed to Romania.

Chapter 2 chronicles the group’s journey through Norway, Sweden, and Russia. Bayne’s impression of pre-revolutionary Petrograd is particularly striking. By the time they arrived in Romania (chap. 3) the country was already nearly overrun by advancing enemy forces. They went to work treating the masses of wounded soldiers at the Queen Elisabeth Military Hospital in Bucha-

rest. Bayne first met Queen Marie at this time. When the rest of the Red Cross volunteers evacuated from the city as German troops approached, he stayed behind to tend the injured or sick who could not be evacuated, hoping his status as a citizen of the United States (then still neutral) would afford him and his charges some protection.

Chapter 4 describes how Bayne led untrained Romanian volunteers in re-organizing the hospital and tending the injured, despite enemy Zeppelin and airplane raids. The reader is treated to vignettes featuring trauma surgeries, the training of untested medical staff, morphine-addicted patients, and a ghostly nun. Bayne, like his Romanian friends, blamed Russia for Romania's disastrous entry into the conflict.

In chapter 5, Bayne examines the "racial characteristics" of patients under his care. He found Russians to be phlegmatic and stoic but unpatriotic, while Romanians were hotheaded and extremely patriotic, and Germans evinced "a more complex psychology," with their individuality subsumed into their country's mechanical discipline. Bayne describes particularly interesting cases involving gas gangrene, fractures, head injuries, and amputations. He then explains how he had to establish a new hospital at a school for training female nurses after the enemy occupied the capital.

Chapter 6 relates the Central Powers' initial occupation of Bucharest, stressing the crimes committed by the occupiers, including Bulgarian troops' attempt to seize the remains of Saint Dimitrie.

Chapter 7 concerns Bayne's efforts at the new hospital, as cases shifted from trauma to plastic and reconstructive surgeries. Here we read about electro-therapy, frostbite, skin grafts, repairing nerve damage, and locating foreign bodies without X-rays. Bayne noted that terrible wounds caused by a normal round's velocity often convinced soldiers that the enemy was using "dumdum" bullets. He taught recovering Romanian patients to fake paralysis to avoid being sent to POW camps by German doctors.

We learn in chapter 8 that Bayne, after most of his patients had healed, took a vacation at an acquaintance's remote estate in the mountains of western Wallachia. After some hiking and spelunking, he turned to fighting a cholera outbreak in a nearby village, nearly dying of the disease before returning to Bucharest, where he contracted still another disease .

In chapter 9, Bayne, still feeling too weak to set up a new hospital, again relocates to the countryside to rest and recover. He describes the system of German agricultural exploitation (including the forced relocation of peasants) to squeeze food and other resources out of Romania. Instead of bucolic calm, Bayne found starvation and disease. This long chapter also details village life and Bayne's efforts to contain the spread of typhus and treat the sick despite shortages of medicine and food. Then came his repatriation to the United States via Austria-Hungary, Switzerland, France, and Britain.

Chapter 10 recounts Bayne's post-Armistice stint with an American Red Cross unit on a mission to aid in reconstructing Romania. Sent ahead to prepare the way for the unit, Bayne and a compatriot traveled like hobos across war-ravaged Greece, Macedonia, Turkey, and Bulgaria to reach their destination. After another audience with Queen Marie (chap. 11), he made the necessary preparations for the rest of the Red Cross personnel and determined by a survey just where help was most needed in Romania. With access to mountains of medicine and food, he implemented a new anti-typhus campaign in the region north of Bucharest (chap. 12). He also relates his experiences with nomadic Gypsies (Roma).

Chapter 13 concentrates on Bayne's clinical and surgical work, including some dentistry, after the typhus epidemic was brought under control. He even helped local midwives deliver babies. As

the miseries of disease and starvation were banished, gaiety slowly returned and weekly dances reappeared in the villages (chap. 14).

Chapter 15 recounts Bayne's work organizing a mobile field hospital to be used in the Romanian-Hungarian War (13 Nov. 1918–3 Aug. 1919). But, by the time he finished, the conflict was already over. Finally, Bayne toured the recently annexed province of Bessarabia to report on conditions there to the American Red Cross. He observed skirmishing between Romanian and Bolshevik forces on Romania's new eastern border. After returning to the capital, Bayne made one last visit into the countryside.

The book brims with facts, stories, events, and observations, but one thing seems missing—Bayne himself. The dearth of self-reflection or personal musing makes for a rather clinical narrative, perhaps not surprising given his profession. An exception occurs when Bayne tells of hearing a “Voice” promising he would not fall sick if he treated typhus patients. But Bayne's humanity comes through most forcefully in his obvious concern for the poor, suffering peasants of Romania.

The memoir is weakest when its author tries to be an armchair general or amateur historian and strongest when he acts as an ethnographer. Throughout his writings, he describes Romanian folk stories, superstitions, songs, poems, dances, and other customs. Unlike recent Romanian-language accounts of German-occupied Wallachia¹ written from an urban perspective, *Bugs and Bullets* provides a unique rural perspective. Finding it difficult to reconstruct events in the countryside due to peasants' illiteracy, other historians² have concentrated on German military and civilian policymakers who shaped the occupation of Wallachia. This makes Bayne's writings on the effects of occupation on Romanian peasants a rare and valuable contribution to the historiography on German-occupied Europe during the First World War.

Bayne was correct in saying that nurses and doctors find little romance in war. His memoir confronts its readers with terrible wounds inflicted in battle but also with the still worse effects of disease and malnutrition spread by advancing armies. Strangely, he mentions the deadly influenza pandemic of 1918 only twice. Perhaps this was because, unlike cases of cholera or typhus, he could do little to check its spread or treat its victims. Students and scholars alike will find in Joseph Breckinridge Bayne's memoir a salutary reminder that civilians in the rear often suffered as much as men at the front during World War I, a harbinger of even worse misery in occupied Europe during World War II.

1. E.g., Vasile T. Căncicov, *Jurnal din vremea ocupației*, 2 vols. (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1915–16).

2. E.g., David Hamlin, *Germany's Empire in the East: Germans and Romania in an Era of Globalization and Total War* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 2017).