

# Walter Reed

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*This article is about the U.S. army surgeon. For other people and things with the name Walter Reed, see [Walter Reed \(disambiguation\)](#).*

**Born** September 13, 1851, [Belroi, Virginia](#), United States

**Died** November 22, 1902 (aged 51), Washington, D.C.

**Occupation**[Military physician](#)


**Spouse(s)** Emilie Lawrence (m. 1876)

**Children** Walter Lawrence Reed was born at Ft. Apache on December 4, 1877 and daughter Emilie Reed, called Blossom, was born at Ft. Omaha on July 12, 1883, one adopted Native American daughter (name unknown)

**Parents** Lemuel Sutton Reed and Pharaba White

**Major Walter Reed, M.D.**, (September 13, 1851 – November 22, 1902) was a [U.S. Army](#) physician who in 1900 led the team that postulated and confirmed the theory that [yellow fever](#) is transmitted by a particular [mosquito](#) species, rather than by direct contact. This insight gave impetus to the new fields of [epidemiology](#) and [biomedicine](#), and most immediately allowed the resumption and completion of work on the [Panama Canal](#) (1904–1914) by the United States. Reed followed work started by [Carlos Finlay](#) and directed by [George Miller Sternberg](#) ("first U.S. bacteriologist").

Walter Reed was born in [Belroi, Virginia](#), to Lemuel Sutton Reed (a [Methodist](#) minister) and Pharaba White.

 After two year-long classes at the [University of Virginia](#), Reed completed the M.D. degree in 1869, five months before he turned 19 (he was the youngest then, and is still today the youngest student of the University of Virginia to receive an MD degree).<sup>[1]</sup> He then enrolled at the [New York University's Bellevue Hospital Medical College](#) in Manhattan, New York, where he obtained a second M.D. in 1870. After interning at several New York City hospitals, he worked for the New York Board of Health until 1875. He married Emilie (born Emily) Lawrence on April 26, 1876 and took her West with him. Later, Emilie would give birth to a son and a daughter and the couple would adopt a Native American girl while posted in frontier camps.<sup>[2]</sup>

With his youth apparently limiting his influence, Reed joined the U.S. Army Medical Corps, both for its professional opportunities and the modest financial security it could provide. He spent much of his Army career until 1893 at difficult postings in the American West, at one point looking after several hundred Apache Native Americans, including [Geronimo](#). During one of his last tours, he completed advanced coursework in pathology and bacteriology in the [Johns Hopkins University Hospital Pathology Laboratory](#).

Reed joined the faculty of the [George Washington University School of Medicine](#) and the newly-opened Army Medical School in Washington, D.C. in 1893, where he held the professorship of Bacteriology and

Clinical Microscopy. In addition to his teaching responsibilities, he actively pursued medical research projects and served as the curator of the Army Medical Museum, which later became the [National Museum of Health and Medicine](#) (NMHM).

Reed first traveled to [Cuba](#) in 1899 to study disease in U.S. Army encampments there. Yellow fever became a problem for the Army during the [Spanish-American War](#), felling thousands of soldiers in Cuba.

In May 1900, Reed, a major, returned to Cuba when he was appointed head of the Army board charged by [Surgeon General George Miller Sternberg](#) to examine tropical diseases including yellow fever.

Sternberg was one of the founders of [bacteriology](#) during this time of great advances in medicine due to widespread acceptance of [Louis Pasteur's germ theory of disease](#), as well as the methods of studying bacteria developed by [Robert Koch](#).

During Reed's tenure with the U.S. Army Yellow Fever Commission in Cuba, the board both confirmed the transmission by mosquitoes and disproved the common belief that yellow fever could be transmitted by clothing and bedding soiled by the body fluids and excrement of yellow fever sufferers – articles known as [fomites](#).

The board conducted many of its dramatic series of experiments at Camp Lazear, named in November 1900 for Reed's assistant and friend [Jesse William Lazear](#), who had died two months earlier of yellow fever while a member of the Commission.

The risky but fruitful research work was done with human volunteers, including some of the medical personnel such as Lazear and [Clara Maass](#) who allowed themselves to be deliberately infected. The research work with the disease under Reed's leadership was largely responsible for stemming the mortality rates from yellow fever during the building of the [Panama Canal](#), something that had confounded the French attempts to build in that region only 30 years earlier.

Although Dr. Reed received much of the credit in history books for "beating" yellow fever, Reed himself credited Dr. [Carlos Finlay](#) with the discovery of the yellow fever vector, and thus how it might be controlled. Dr. Reed often cited Finlay's papers in his own articles and gave him credit for the discovery, even in his personal correspondence <sup>[1]</sup>

Following Reed's return from Cuba in 1901, he continued to speak and publish on yellow fever. He received honorary degrees from Harvard and the University of Michigan in recognition of his seminal work.

In November 1902, Reed's [appendix](#) ruptured; he died on November 22, 1902, of the resulting [peritonitis](#), at age 51. He was buried in [Arlington National Cemetery](#).

## Legacy

Reed's breakthrough in yellow fever research is widely considered a milestone in biomedicine, opening new vistas of research and humanitarianism.

- [Walter Reed General Hospital](#) (WRGH), Washington, D.C. was opened on May 1, 1909, seven years after his death.
- [Walter Reed Army Medical Center](#) (WRAMC) opened in 1977 as the successor to WRGH; it is the worldwide [tertiary care](#) medical center for the U.S. Army and is utilized by congressmen and presidents.
- [Walter Reed Army Institute of Research](#) (WRAIR), near Washington, D.C., is the largest biomedical research facility administered by the [DoD](#).
- [Walter Reed National Military Medical Center](#), a new hospital complex to be constructed on the grounds of the [National Naval Medical Center](#), [Bethesda, Maryland](#) by 2011.
- Riverside Walter Reed Hospital in [Gloucester, Virginia](#) (near Reed's birthplace) opened on September 13, 1977.
- [Walter Reed Medal](#) (1912 to present) was awarded posthumously to Reed for his yellow fever work.
- [Walter Reed Middle School](#), [North Hollywood, California](#) is named in Reed's honor.
- Reed was portrayed by [Lewis Stone](#) in a 1938 Hollywood movie, [Yellow Jack](#) Also a few screenplays of his work were portrayed. (from a 1934 play). The same storyline was again presented in television episodes (both titled "Yellow Jack") of *Celanese Theatre* (1952) and of [Producers' Showcase](#)(1955), in the latter of which Reed was portrayed by [Broderick Crawford](#).
- [PBS's American Experience](#) series broadcast a 2006 episode, [The Great Fever](#), on the Reed yellow fever campaign.
- [Philip S. Hench Walter Reed Yellow Fever Collection](#) at the University of Virginia Health Sciences Library
- [Walter Reed Army Medical Center Firefighters Washington D.C. IAFF F151](#)
- [The Walter Reed Tropical Medicine Course](#)
- Reed appears in sculpture on the great stone [chancel screen](#) at [Riverside Church](#), NYC. (Section 4: "Humanitarians", rather than Section 1: "Physicians".)

May 1, 1909: Opens the Walter Reed Army general hospital in Washington, D.C. develops a mosquitoes vaccine.

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[\[edit\]](#) **References**

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[\[edit\]](#) **Citations**

1. <sup>^</sup> <sup>[a](#)</sup> <sup>[b](#)</sup> Pierce J.R., J, Writer. 2005. *Yellow Jack: How Yellow Fever Ravaged America and Walter Reed Discovered its Deadly Secrets*. John Wiley and Sons. [ISBN 0-471-47261-1](#)
2. <sup>^</sup> Crosby, Molly Caldwell (2006). *The American Plague: The Untold Story of Yellow Fever, the Epidemic that Shaped Our History*, p. 134. New York: Berkley Books. [ISBN 0-425-21202-5](#)

## [\[edit\]](#) Other sources

- [Bean, William B.](#), *Walter Reed: A Biography*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1982.
- Bean, William B., "Walter Reed and Yellow Fever", [JAMA](#) 250.5 (August 5, 1983): 659–62.
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## [\[edit\]](#) External links

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- [Video: Reed Medical Pioneers Biography on Health.mil](#) – The Military Health System provides a look at the life and work of Walter Reed.
- [WRAMC Website Reed History](#)
- [WRAIR Website Reed History](#)
- [University of Virginia, Philip S. Hench – Walter Reed Yellow Fever Collection: Walter Reed Biography](#)