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Media Advisory

Future military physicians learn from past battlefield lessons

Bethesda, Md. – America’s bloodiest one day battle continues to provide military physicians with wartime healthcare basics more than 140 years after it was fought.

One hundred sixty-five medical students from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) in Bethesda, Md., will participate in a six-mile road march on April 27 through the Antietam National Battlefield in Sharpsburg, Md., as part of their first-year curriculum.

USU is the nation’s federal school of medicine and graduate school of nursing. The medical students are all active-duty uniformed officers in the Army, Navy, Air Force and U.S. Public Health Service who are being educated to deal with wartime casualties, national disasters, emerging infectious diseases and other public health emergencies. The university’s motto is “Learning to Care for Those in Harm’s Way.”

Originally meant to serve as a means for the students to break in their new combat boots, the field exercise moved from Rock Creek Park near the campus to Antietam and now serves as a means of teaching the students, from a historical perspective, the basic tenets of battlefield healthcare. Maj. Jonathan Letterman, then Surgeon General for the Army of the Potomac, recognized that care on the front lines, medical logistics and evacuation assets under the direction of a physician were key to delivering battlefield care.

Students march in small groups, stopping at stations along the route to hear local Civil War re-enactors discuss conditions and battlefield strategies and to hear USU faculty members highlight the medical aspects of the battle.

The Battle of Antietam, which took place on Sept. 17, 1862, is considered the bloodiest single-day battle in American history, claiming more than 23,000 men killed or wounded.

For more information on USU, please visit our website at www.usuhs.mil.