

## History of The Office of Medical History

“A history becomes one of the most important duties of the medical department of the Army...”

- Assistant Surgeon Joseph J. Woodward

The US Army Medical Department has an extensive and illustrious history. Brief historical highlights include maintaining one of the oldest regiments within the Army, providing the antecedent organization for the Army Reserve system, and establishing some of the first methods to capture lessons learned. Preserving, interpreting, and publishing the history of the US Army Medical Department, is the mission of the Office of Medical History. Operating almost continuously since 1862, forms of the Office of Medical History have endured numerous organizational changes. Despite the different incarnations, the Office of Medical History continues to record the activities of the US Army Medical Department and provide Soldiers and the general public with a variety of historical products.

### Early Records

Although the activities of Army surgeons and Army medical care can be traced to the Revolutionary War, records of their history are sporadic. Personal journals and a few official documents provide much of the historical record. Most physicians in the Army operated independently within their regiment or region, and unfortunately their first-hand knowledge was not disseminated. Experience gained during the Revolutionary War remained largely cloistered from physicians during Northwestern Territory Campaigns and much of the War of 1812.

A notable improvement of record keeping and centralized organization occurred under the direction of Dr. Joseph Lovell. As the Army reorganized and established a permanent Army Medical Department, Lovell was appointed as the Surgeon General in May of 1818. Soon Lovell sought quarterly reports from Army physicians across the new nation. Early information collected included meteorological registers and vital statistics of the Army. Lovell's early efforts in book distribution for Army physicians also culminated into the creation of the Library of the Surgeon General in 1836.

Despite these early documentary activities, there was not an organization compiling an official history for the medical department, but publication did eventually advance from the record keeping. In 1856, the Office of The Surgeon General published a collection of statistical information on the health of the US Army. The data was gathered from medical officers throughout the Army, as well as reports from the Surgeon General's Office between January 1839 and January 1855. *The Statistical Report on the Sickness and Mortality in the Army of the United States*, included casualty information from the recent war with Mexico and other

tabulations, but it did not capture clinical data. The report's compilation and publication marked another milestone toward the formation of a medical history office. The information was officially gathered, documented, and analyzed. Although novel at the time, the collection was soon overshadowed by the publication of the British Army Medical Service's *Medical and surgical history of the British Army which served in Turkey and the Crimea during the war against Russia*, in 1858. Consisting of two volumes, it generated interest and was well received by a world-wide audience as well as the U.S. Army's Medical Department.

### The Medical and Surgical History of the Civil War

Interest in the Crimean War publications continued as the American Civil War began in 1861. Recognizing the importance of capturing the historical significance as well as technical expertise gained on the battlefield, Surgeon General William A. Hammond announced plans to publish a medical history of the war in 1862. A separate historical department did not exist; but early historical efforts were able to proceed under the direction of the Surgeon General's Office. Records and reports were collected from the field for the projected publication. Artifacts and a pathological collection were also gathered for educational and illustrative purposes at the newly established Army Medical Museum.

Assistant Surgeon Joseph J. Woodward, Surgeon J.H. Brinton, and Surgeon George A. Otis were consecutively placed in charge of medical records and related material from 1862 through 1864. In 1865 as the war came to a close the new Surgeon General, Joseph K. Barnes reviewed the compilation of items. According to the Surgeon General's report, "30,000 cases and 7,630 specimens were being arranged for the history".

Analysis and the publication of circulars for the massive collection of material continued as an editorial board consisting of Joseph J. Woodward and George A. Otis was formed. The proposed medical history consisted of six volumes divided into medical and surgical sections. Volume one of the *Medical and Surgical History of the War of Rebellion* was completed in November of 1870. Work on the books progressed with some editorial changes. George A. Otis passed away in February of 1881 and Joseph J. Woodward died in August of 1884. Editorial duties were then transferred respectively to Surgeon D. L. Huntington and Surgeon Charles Smart at the times of their predecessors' demise.

The massive history task closed in 1888 as the final volume was completed. Each volume includes approximately one thousand pages containing statistics, case studies, and other technical information. Subject matter found in the volumes vary from gunshot wounds to the transportation of the wounded by railway. One of the best records from the American Civil War, the series would lead to reprinting and future interest in recording Army medical history.

Other Army medical historical efforts progressed during this time. *Physicians and Surgeons of the U. S.* by W. H. Atkinson and *The Medical Department of the United States Army from 1775 to 1873* by Harvey E. Brown were both published in 1873. These books were also compiled under the direction of Surgeon General Barnes.

Historical work during the Spanish-American War Era is largely unknown. Records and discoveries were fortuitously maintained but as far as can be ascertained, an organized history office did not exist. Later, during the tenure of Surgeon General William C. Gorgas (16 Jan 1914 - 3 Oct 1918), an appointed Historical Board was created. The board consisted of the Librarian of the Army Medical Library, library director, assistant librarian, redactor, and a statistician. These librarians served in similar capacities as current historians. During World War I LTC Fielding Garrison and COL C.C. McCulloch, librarians at the Army Medical Library, collected and interpreted gathered material.

### World War I and the Historical Division

As the United States became involved in World War I and the Surgeon General's Office reorganized in 1917-1918, the historical department also changed. The Historical Board was re-named as the Historical Section of the Library Division and then later, the Historical Division. Looking toward future publication and study, the collection of historical material began as America built its Army. Under the direction of the Historical Division, subordinate to the Surgeon General, medical officers in the field were informed to maintain records of their observations and experiences. Questionnaires were sent to various camp and general hospitals, war journals were sought, and personnel were sent to Army camps to interview soldiers in the United States as well as to confer with the Chief Surgeon of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe. Similarly, the curator of the Army Medical Museum coordinated activities with the Historical Board in order to collect pathological specimens.

At the conclusion of the hostilities in 1918, plans were formed to create several volumes of the history of Army Medicine during World War I. In January of 1919 an editorial board was formed, but its submissions were subject to approval by the Historical Section of the War Plans Division of the Army General Staff. Later in December of 1919 the Historical Section was reorganized becoming a separate entity, the Historical Division of the Surgeon General's Office. Medical officers were assigned as authors and editors of various sections of the proposed history and were able to greatly contribute to the compilation. The final product *The Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War* had 15 volumes (17 books), and was published from 1922 through 1929. At the conclusion of this major effort, the historical division's activities were concentrated on the review and publication of annual reports.

### World War II

Recognizing the need to capture America's involvement during World War II, Surgeon General James C. Magee formalized the functions of the History Division in August of 1941. Previously, the section had been serving under the Administrative Division of the Office of the Surgeon General, and would now serve under the direction of Brigadier General Albert G. Love, a retired Medical Corps Officer recalled to service. Due to the immense size and scope of the task, capturing military and medical history during World War II, there were several levels of authority. The History Division of the Office of the Surgeon General also fell under the history

offices for the Services of Supply, and the Historical Section of the US Army War College. A Chief Historian was also appointed to supervise and manage Army-wide historical activities.

Similar to efforts by other historical offices, the Medical Historical Division sent representatives to the European, Pacific, and Mediterranean Theaters of Operation in order to gather pertinent information. Although daunting, the vast collection mission continued. It eventually provided countless records for publication and study. General Love had the foresight to have the gathered data indexed and appropriately filed as soon as possible for their pending interpretation and publication.

The number of books evolving from the assembled material is staggering. Over forty volumes were published. Subjects range from technical knowledge to theater and unit affiliation, with additional concentrations in special studies and organization. These volumes began publication during the later stages of World War II and continued through 1970.

### Korea, Vietnam, and the Historical Unit

After the war, the Historical Division was renamed as the Historical Unit of the US Army Medical Service. Finding new permanence and continuing its work on the monumental World War II project, the Historical Unit also began work on the preparation and publication of history for the Korean War in 1950. At this time the unit had approximately fifty personnel, military and civilian, dedicated to the research and review of both the World War II and Korean War history projects. Editors from various specialties continued to provide expertise for technical information as found in volumes featuring dental, surgical, psychiatric, or veterinary care.

In addition to these undertakings the Historical Unit maintained the annual reports from the Office of the Surgeon General. As US Army involvement increased in Vietnam, historical collection followed previous patterns. Storing archival material from the three conflicts and additional events, the History Unit maintained its holdings at facilities in Fort Detrick, Maryland. Photographic collections for the unit during the mid-1960s filled thirty drawers. Having these reference materials available proved to be beneficial as the Historical Unit's mission expanded from publication and collection to providing research and answers for official inquiries. Despite the increased workload, personnel numbers for the Historical Unit dwindled.

### 1974-1998, The Center of Military History

In the early 1970s, during the Army's Post-Vietnam reorganization, plans were formulated to convert the Medical History Unit from a separate field operating agency to a field operating activity combined with the Center of Military History (CMH). Courses of action were discussed, and at first it appeared that the Historical Unit might be assimilated into the Academy of Health Sciences at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Later it was determined that the Center of Military History was the better choice because it provided improved supervision of the unit and allowed for greater centralization of the Army's history program. These arrangements were also hoped to quell poor morale and low productivity within the medical history unit that had been

documented through Inspector General Reports. Plans for the change were formulated in 1974 and the transfer occurred on 30 June 1975.

While under the Center of Military History, personnel positions in the Medical History Unit decreased significantly from its peak of twenty-eight people in 1974. After the transfer and subsequent allotments within CMH, the Medical History Unit attempted to maintain its missions. Publication of US Army Medical History continued, and the production of *The Army Medical Department 1775-1818* and *The Army Medical Department 1818-1865* are notable examples of products during the CMH term.

#### 1998-2009 Office of the Surgeon General

After an absence of twenty-three years the AMEDD re-established a history office located in the Office of the Surgeon General, Falls Church, Virginia. The new Office of Medical History was greatly supported by Surgeon General Blanck, LTG, MC, and Colonel Fred Gerber, Chief of Healthcare Operations. When the office came back into existence, it was in the Division of Healthcare Operations and under the direction of Dr. John Greenwood who had moved from the Center of Military History for this new directorship. Due to the fact that the new office was re-establishing itself, Dr. Greenwood needed to establish a reference library and reference collection, etc. The task of collecting, archiving, researching and outreach of history functions was beyond the capability of one person to accomplish and Dr. Greenwood addressed this need through a contract for historical services with a Northern Virginia contract firm. The contract historians, archivists, web support and administrative provided needed services to the Office of Medical History. During the time period from 1998 to 2009 the Office of Medical History was moved for reporting purposes between Healthcare Operations, Special Staff, to Directorate of Strategic Communications, then back to the Special Staff this time reporting to the MEDCOM Chief of Staff. The Office of Medical History, like its predecessors, began an aggressive campaign to document the AMEDD history with a series of AMEDD historical books, some of the titles *A History of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps, 1972-2001*, by COL (Ret) Mary Sarnecky, *Call Sign DUSTOFF*, by Col (Ret) Darrel Whitcomb. Today there are several more books in various stages of publications waiting to be printed as well as books in the concept stage of development.

#### 2010- Present

In March 2010 the Office of Medical History moved to Fort Sam Houston and the contract for historical services ended. AMEDD leadership made a decision that the Office of Medical History will be staffed with government employees, and so the hiring process began. Today the Office of Medical History is a component of the AMEDD Center of History and Heritage. The office still continues its mission to support the men and women of the U.S. Army Medical Department and Army Medical Command through the assembly and publication of reference materials, original works, previously unpublished works, reprints, special studies, web publications, AMEDD newspaper/professional publications, and print series. The program

includes the administration of a field history program as well as an oral history program for the conduct of regular interviews with key OTSG/MEDCOM active and retired personnel and provides coverage of current operations and issues with participants and decision makers.