

Hospital Work on the Firing Line

UNITED STATES field hospitals, the least understood divisional units in the United States army, have been newly equipped in order that they may be more mobile during battle. The field hospital service of our army, as it is constituted today, is one of the best in the world.

Contrary to popular opinion, field hospital men are trained soldiers. They do their most important work under fire, and in war, their dead and wounded rank next to infantry in number. While the officers of field hospitals are surgeons and while the privates have been instructed thoroughly in first aid work, the real duty of the field hospital men during battle is to keep the front clear of savable wounded men. The field hospital problem is one of rapid transportation. During the past four years, since the system conceived by Tripler during the Civil War has been put into operation, every scheme to make it possible for field hospital officers and men to work swiftly has been resorted to.

Officers and men of the hospitals are walking dispensaries. The officers carry surgical instruments, extra hypodermic needles, needles, ligatures, medicines, first aid packets, large iodine bottles, large water bottles and cups, diagnosis tags. During battle the officers can spend little or no time in dressing wounds or in "cooling the fevered brows" of fallen soldiers. Their time is occupied in directing the bearer-men, or littermen, who carry wounded soldiers to the field hospitals just outside the line of fire. While doing this transportation work, the stretcher bearers are really more under fire than the fighting soldiers.

The new equipment furnished the field hospital men is as compact and as light as possible. Each man carries a meat can, a bacon bag, knife, fork and spoon, a water bottle, ten first aid packets, iodine swabs, five plain gauze bandages, safety pins and adhesive plaster, corrosive sublimate gauze, diagnosis tags and pencil, a large water bottle, instrument cases, forceps, scissors, and a hatchet. The enlisted men are

thoroughly trained in the uses of the instruments they carry. When they have time, they administer first aid treatment to wounded men, but if they are pressed for time in the heat of battle, they devote all their energy to getting savable wounded men to a point where they may be in comparative safety while awaiting surgical treatment.

The men are taught that their work is to protect Uncle Sam's fighting material. They are not permitted to spend any time at the front with fatally wounded men, but to strain every nerve in saving wounded men who can be patched up to fight again. No nurses are permitted at the front. They are at the base hospitals, usually out of range of the enemy's guns. It is possible to take down and pack up on mule-drawn ambulances the entire camp equipment of a field hospital in two hours.

Ordinarily, that is, in time of peace, the camp tentage of a field hospital is as follows: five small pyramidal tents for officers, nine large pyramidal tents for soldiers, five tropical hospital tents for kitchen, stores, mess, dispensary and operating room, six ward tents each containing thirty-six beds, and tents for officers', patients', and men's latrines, with one for the men's bath. In field service the large pyramidal tents are not carried, and one thousand four hundred and ninety-eight pounds of weight are saved. No tent furniture or cots are carried.

The field hospital equipment for service weighs eight tons and is transported on eight four-mule wagons, which are used for ambulances. The army is now experimenting with motor cars to supplant the mule-drawn ambulances, since a similar equipment serving with the American Ambulance on the French front has proved remarkably successful. Fifteen horses—seven for the officers, two for the major, and eight for enlisted men—go with the field hospital equipment. The organization carries three days' rations, three pounds to a man, or eight hundred and ten pounds, and one thousand three hundred and sixty-eight pounds of forage for the animals.



A Walking Dispensary

The hospital corps of the United States army is learning much from the developments of the war in Europe. It is likely that the old ambulance mule, among other things, will at last give way to the swift light automobile