

MEDICINE

Fewer Die of Wounds

American medical officers are saving from five to nine times as many wounded soldiers as was possible in the first World War.

► AMERICAN DOCTORS are saving from five to nine times as many soldiers from dying of battle wounds in this war as was possible in World War I, it appears from casualty figures announced by Major Gen. Norman T. Kirk, new Surgeon General of the U. S. Army, at the meeting of the American Medical Association in Chicago.

The figures he gave covered the period during the phases of the North African campaign before the Army moved up into northern Tunisia. The death rate at that time in the evacuation hospitals was from 2½% to 3½%, compared to a death rate of 15% to 18% in evacuation hospitals in the last war.

This remarkably low mortality was achieved in spite of great difficulties in evacuation. In some places eight-mile litter carries were necessary to get the wounded from the field to the ambulances. The ambulances had to travel 20 to 30 miles over mountain roads to evacuation hospitals.

For the future, the Army Medical Department hopes to have exclusive airplanes and possibly even helicopters for the evacuation of the wounded. So far in Africa, 13,000 sick and wounded have been evacuated by plane, Gen. Kirk said. But these evacuations were in planes used to take supplies forward. Helicopters are being experimented with but so far none is in actual service for evacuation of wounded.

Plasma, surgery and sulfa drugs were credited by Gen. Kirk in that order for the great saving in lives. Sulfa drugs will always come second to surgery and third to plasma in saving the wounded, he said. This is because shock and hemorrhage and bomb or shell fragments are the biggest threats to the life of the wounded.

Plasma is given at the clearing stations and sometimes at the collecting stations. At the evacuation hospitals, the surgeons clean the wounds, remove shell or bomb fragments and institute drainage. From 80% to 85% of the casualties, he said, are due to shell and bomb fragments, which carry more clothing and infection in the body than rifle bullets. In some

places, because of evacuation difficulties, auxiliary groups of surgeons were sent into the forward area to perform operations.

An astoundingly small number of wounded have had the serious bone infection, osteomyelitis, which occurred in 75% of compound fractures in the last war. In all the base hospitals in Africa, up to April 30, there were only 70 cases of this condition. In one group of 373 compound fractures, there were only five or six cases of infection instead of the 279 which the last war's 75% rate would have given.

The percentage of survivals in cases of head wounds is much greater than in the last war, as is the survival in cases of abdominal wounds, with even those coming to operation late largely surviving. Of great help for these cases, Gen. Kirk said, is the Levine tube, which goes into the stomach through the nose

and by suction keeps the stomach empty and prevents distention.

Most fracture cases are transported to the rear in plaster casts, but the casts must be padded, Army surgeons have learned. For fractures of long bones, Gen. Kirk is opposed to the method widely used in the Spanish Civil War, of keeping the leg or arm in a plaster cast until the bone sets. Traction is essential in these cases, he said.

Only 12 cases of gas gangrene, with one death, occurred while the Army was still in the South.

The Army has medical installations in every country in the world not held by the Axis, and as soon as it moves into Axis territory, it expects to set up medical units to care for the civilian population. This will be done, Gen. Kirk explained, in order to protect the Army from infectious diseases prevalent among civilians.

The general health of the Army in Africa has been excellent, better than was expected and better even than at home. Venereal diseases are the biggest health problem.

"We are going to need more doctors," Gen. Kirk declared. "We must have enough to win this war, and we haven't started fighting yet. Tunisia and Guadalcanal were only side plays."



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