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Neurological stamp

Dominique Jean Larrey (1766–1842)

Larrey, chief surgeon of Napoleon’s grand army, added new dimension to military medicine, in particular, sanitation, epidemiology, procurement of food and supplies for the sick and wounded, training of medical personnel, transport of the injured, and provision for definitive care at the front. He took part in 60 battles and 400 engagements. Larrey instituted immediate care on the battlefield and “flying ambulances” for the rapid evacuation of the wounded from the field of action. Incredible numbers of wounded passed through his hands, affording him enormous clinical experience. An ardent advocate of early amputation he performed as many as 200 in a single day. Large numbers of disarticulations at the shoulder joint and even at the hip joint, with a high incidence of recovery were performed at the front or on the battlefield without anaesthesia. Other major operative procedures included trephining, thoracotomy, and the treatment of penetrating wounds to the abdomen.

In his Memoir on traumatic tetanus, amputation of the limb at the first appearance of the symptoms was advised. He cites numerous reports of patients salvaged by this operation. This French postage stamp (Stanley Gibbons 1666, Scott B386) was issued in 1964. His memoirs, modelled after those of Ambrose Pare, provide a fascinating record of the campaigns, medical problems encountered, and the scenes and customs of the many lands traversed by the grand army.

L F HAAS
Dominique Jean Larrey (1766-1842).

L F Haas

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