American Red Cross base hospital no. 38 in the world war. United States army base hospital no. 38, organized under the auspices of the Jefferson Medical College and Hospital, stationed at Nantes, France, 1918-1919, by W. M. L. Coplin.

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A SHOCK TEAM AT THE FRONT

The World War was a colossal contest between highly trained, specialized experts brought together, unified, co-ordinated and directed by master minds of men who knew the particular qualifications, resources and adaptabilities of each group and who moved the component units on the crimson field of combat like, not only kings, queens and knights, but like bishops, rooks and pawns of chess. To varying degrees and with vastly dissimilar values each unit was essential to the play, each had its own particular move, all co-ordinated into a system, a game where the prizes were kingdoms, domain, glory; the result, destruction, suffering, mutilation, death.

One of the tragedies of injury, attending indescribable magnitude in battle, is that inadequately comprehended but surgical well-known captain of the men of death, called shock. Like a burning sirocco it sweeps every field of Mars; it was the one sickle that garnered the golden grain of heroic lives; it was death grim and victorious stalking combat groups, screeching with glee on bullet and shell-swept fields, springing with a thousand
darts from exploding projectiles, grinning in trenches and front lines of communication and, vulture-like, following ambulances and trains of wounded far back into hospitals in the S. O. S. Often, indeed among the wounded almost constantly, it was the touch of the silent angel who whispered "come." Shock was no new foe; no doubt it traveled with the armies of David, was known to Greek and Roman, stalked Lexington and Bunker Hill, followed Napoleon's legions and swung its sword at Appomattox and Gettysburg. It had baffled surgeons from Larrey to Senn and a study of its nature and treatment was now undertaken on a scale of thoroughness and with a magnitude of detail never before attempted. On field, in operating rooms, in hospitals and in laboratories, the problem was attacked with every resource known to experienced and alert clinicians and to trained men of pure science. Every country engaging in the conflict had some center where those going to succor the wounded could be specifically and individually trained in the recognition and treatment of shock.

The American institution where such knowledge was centered and promulgated was at Dijon, the laboratory center of the A. E. F. Shortly after the arrival of "38" Captain Mohler and Lieutenant Tyson were detailed to Dijon for the purpose of securing the last word on the subject. Here the problem was presented by lecture, illustrated by experiment on animals and every detail fully brought out by trained and experienced observers
and teachers of international repute; incoming medical officers from many services gathered at Dijon for one or two weeks of intensive training and left equipped with the fullest attainable knowledge applicable wherever shock might imperil the lives of American troops.

The Jefferson "Shock Team" detailed for front line duty was in charge of Lieutenant R. M. Tyson who had with him Nurse Mary C. Glover and as orderly, Private John G. Dunkerley. The little selected group, proceeding under orders from G. H. Q., left Nantes September 9, 1918, traveling by way of Tours, reached Chaumont. In what should have been less than a 24-hour run, the Atterbury Special was a bit over one day late. This also meant that rations were exhausted; foraging en route was extremely difficult and mostly impossible. As usual in France rain attended arrival; for the night they were fortunate in securing adequate and comfortable quarters in Base Hospital No. 15.

On September 12th the shock team received orders to proceed to Mobile Hospital No. 3, then supposed to be located at Souilly. Starting out according to schedule arranged for them, they reached Neuf Chateau where, because of lack of train service, they were forced to remain over night. Lieutenant Tyson spent the night in the attic of an old French Hospital, and despite a few discomforts was very much rested in the morning. On arrival at Neuf Chateau, word was received that the American Drive was on. There were many glowing
accounts brought in that night, attesting the valor of the troops and forcefulness of the Drive. No doubt some of the stories were greatly exaggerated, but in the main the truth was told and the thing that we were looking for, American activity on a large scale, was verified. On Friday, September 13th, the shock team started out again on its journey. This portion of the trip was rather round about and slow, requiring six hours to travel a distance of 25 miles. Reaching Bar le Duc the outfit was quartered for the night. The memory that stands out prominently as a part of that interesting night was the constant rumbling from a stream of motor trucks going by quarters and headed for the front with supplies for the army. The following day the organization was sent further to the front over a narrow gauge road that finally brought up at Souilly.

Upon arrival Lieutenant Tyson learned that Mobile Hospital No. 3 to which he had orders was not at Souilly, and no one had any information as to just where it could be found. The team was held temporarily at Evacuation Hospital No. 6 at Souilly until information could be gained concerning the location of Mobile Hospital No. 3. At this time it was learned that the St. Mihiel drive had been a tremendous success and the casualties few. Here at Souilly the first war injuries coming directly from the Front were observed and first impressions made. Another fact that struck one often "over there" was the frequency with which one met
friends and acquaintances; one rarely sought familiar faces but they turned up almost everywhere.

While at Evacuation Hospital No. 6, there were numerous aeroplane alarms in the early evening. Lights were immediately extinguished and instructions issued concerning the care of the sick and the personal safety of everyone. Here also was located a German Prison Camp. Naturally it was rather interesting to those who had not come in contact with them before, but later prisoners became so numerous that they ceased to attract attention even when in large numbers. The Germans were a stocky, husky looking group of men, well clothed and apparently well fed; Austrians seemed to be slightly smaller in stature, their faces were haggard and clothes disheveled; one did not gather that they were enthusiastic about the war.

On September 24th the shock team received orders to join American Red Cross Hospital No. 110 located at Villers Daucourt. This hospital was functioning as an Evacuation Hospital Unit. Upon our arrival things were very much in a turmoil. Several hospital organizations had recently come in and there was considerable controversy as to which one was to assume charge. It was finally decided that the American Red Cross Hospital had priority. The Commanding Officer of this organization was Dr. J. J. Moorehead of New York City. Dr. Moorehead was a very diplomatic officer and during the team’s stay with this outfit, he handled the
situation very skilfully. The Commanding Officer assigned our shock team to a ward consisting of 42 beds; everything was topsy-turvy. After much strenuous work the ward was placed in shape, and was ready for business by the evening of September 28th. It was indeed fortunate that the preparations were so early completed, for at 11 o'clock that night the Argonne offensive was started. This drive extended from Verdun to Rheims about 90 kilometers. Villers Daucourt is located about 5 kilometers south of San Menehould. The hospital was situated sufficiently close to the line to act as a Field Hospital during the first weeks of the drive. After a terrific artillery barrage the infantry advanced in the morning. Patients were brought to the hospital during the night and by 7 o'clock next morning the rush was on. During the first days of service as a shock team at this hospital, many interesting, sad and discouraging things occurred. It was not long before it was realized that the much heralded "gum-saline" solution for intravenous injections was not giving the expected results. Of the many patients upon whom it was used, only one appeared to receive any benefit. Attempts were made to use normal saline solution but the relief afforded was temporary only.

It was not long before it became obvious that, in the severe cases of shock, only whole blood was of any permanent value. It was rather difficult to secure donors for transfusion. A number of the personnel connected
with the hospital volunteered to give blood, but owing to the strenuous work each was called upon to perform, it was deemed unwise to subject them to the added danger of blood loss. However, in a number of instances, they were accepted as donors, and it was through this means, no doubt, that several lives were saved. Before long, a hospital for gassed patients was established a short distance from our outfit. A canvass was made of the patients who were slightly gassed and volunteers called for; six men were found always ready to serve as donors.

Among the seriously injured in the shock ward many interesting things developed. One man, an Italian, asked for a cigarette; the seriousness of his injury was realized but, as he appeared most anxious to smoke, a cigarette was allowed. He lay there, smoked the cigarette, laid the stump carefully on the table, rolled on his back and died without a word. One recalls others, some boys in their teens, who spoke of home, of Mother, of loved ones, but never a word of regret that they were in the "big show" or that they were wounded in the cause. A few asked that messages be transmitted to their families. Some were stoics, others hysterical; the general impression was that these men were brave, that they were of the stuff of which heroes are made. Witnessing such distressing scenes—and they were frequent in this ward—and seeing all efforts often prove unavailing, made the work very discouraging. To lose 17 patients
in one day from one ward was quite a severe blow to the confidence of those in charge of the work.

As soon as patients were able to be moved, they were transferred to a Base Hospital in the rear. The stream of patients was more or less constant, though there were intervals when there was very little to do. The last and heaviest rush occurred after November 1st.

Great credit should be given the nurses who were connected with the hospital, especially those who worked in the shock ward. They were tireless and unceasing in their ministrations. The enlisted men were pressed into all kinds of duties, and answered nobly every call.

November 11th was an eventful day to everyone, but especially to those who were witnessing the horrors of war at close range. Among personnel and patients throughout the hospital there was much rejoicing. The country around was scoured for food by the Red Cross representatives, and a special dinner was served to everybody. It is possible that chicken-coops were robbed for all patients were served with fresh chicken.

The period of waiting for orders to station at Nantes was very irksome. Finally on November 22nd they arrived, all were glad, and an uneventful journey brought the team back to the parent organization.

The experience gained was of great value from the medical standpoint; it was intensely interesting at all times, it afforded an opportunity to see a great deal more of the tremendous medical problems that confront
armies, and it brought the observers closer to the horrors of war, the torn bodies, the wrecked nerves, the blinded, the helpless and the hopeless, fresh from the cruelty, the barbarism, the dreadful inhumanity of it all. Inhuman, unchristian, God knows un-Christlike; soulless demons fighting like beasts, each striving for the other’s destruction; wounding, killing, mutilating—savage, with tomahawk, a merciful creature compared with the combatants of modern war. Where is the glory, Why must the brave suffer? Why, all this twenty centuries after the glory and the tragedy of Calvary, Why? Men have failed; can God’s best product, woman, mother, also fail?
Disarmament is the only means of preserving the world from bankruptcy and civilization from ruin.—Gen. Bliss.

If we do not destroy war, war will destroy us.—Lord Bryce.