

Army Medical Department returns to its roots at Carlisle Barracks

Army Medical Department returns to its roots at Carlisle Barracks



Members of the command teams from Army Medical Department Activity, Fort George G. Meade, Md., pose for a photo in front of the Army Medical Services Monument on Carlisle Barracks. In 1920 the Medical Field Service School was established under Colonel Percy M. Ashburn's command at Carlisle

Barracks.

Dunham Army Health Clinic recently played host to the command teams from the Army Medical Department Activity, Fort George G. Meade, Md., for a meeting. What many of the attendees didn't know was that Carlisle Barracks was the original home for Army Medicine, tracing its roots back to shortly after World War I.

Medical Field Service School at Carlisle Barracks

In the fall of 1920, the Medical Field Service School was established under Colonel Percy M. Ashburn's command. Drawing on the lessons of World War I, the school developed medical equipment and doctrine suitable for the battlefield. More than 30,000 officers and NCOs passed through the school during its 26-year tenure at Carlisle Barracks. They applied classroom instruction and field exercises to train in care of casualties and disease prevention, the latter a major problem for the military until improvements in sanitation and antibiotics.

World War I brought advanced weaponry, chemical warfare and the Influenza Pandemic of 1918. Forcing the U.S. Army to find effective and innovative solutions to the medical problems such

challenges presented to soldiers on the battlefield. The Army Medical Field Service School at Carlisle Barracks was the answer to those medical concerns.

The Medical Field Service School took over the military reservation on Carlisle Barracks on September 1, 1920. The initial organization included the Departments of Military Art, Enlisted Training, Hygiene, Equipment and Transportation, along with the Veterinary and Dental Corps.

The U.S. Army has been at the forefront in developing innovative battlefield medical treatments as far back as the American Revolution. Arguably the most famous of improvements developed at Carlisle was the "Carlisle Bandage". Originally called "First-aid Packet, U.S. Government Carlisle Model", the "Carlisle Bandage" was carried by every soldier in a web pouch on his equipment belt during World War II.

The ambulance was transformed from a horse-drawn carriage to the wheeled vehicles of today partly through research conducted at Carlisle. The helicopter, for the purposes of medical transportation, or medical evacuation, was also introduced there. The inventors of the helicopter brought two machines to Carlisle Barracks in 1935 for demonstrations before the Medical Department Board. At that time the pilots demonstrated by repeated landings and takeoffs the very small amount of level ground needed for the machines. The helicopter would later be used to great effect in Korea and Vietnam.

The advances in medicine that resulted from the research conducted at the Medical Field Service School saved many lives. Whether for transporting injured soldiers and medical supplies; or for teaching battlefield first aid and preventing disease, the Army has continually sought to improve health care delivery systems and programs for soldiers.

Lessons learned at the Medical Field Service School were applied on the beaches of Normandy, during the Inchon Invasion, in the rice paddies of Vietnam and in present day Iraq. These lessons were also adopted by civilian hospitals and medical practitioners.

In all, over 30,000 officers and NCOs passed through the school during its 26-year tenure at Carlisle Barracks. The school moved to Fort Sam Houston in 1946, and continues pursuing medical advances and improvements in health care. The telemedicine of today will spawn the next wave of new technologies that will help soldiers stay on the battlefield, and in time, improve the quality of life for everyone.

Editor's Note: The information on the school originally appeared in an article by John Kurash, of the U.S. Army Military History Institute.

U.S. Army War College Archives - News Article - 14 October 2014