



National Museum of Health and Medicine

Otis Historical Archives

OHA 388 U.S. Army Ambulance Material

Date of Records: 1859-1960

Size: 3 boxes, 4 linear feet

Processed by: Laura Cutter, 2014

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Historical Note: Prior to the Civil War, the US Army did not have means of transport especially designed for the sick and wounded. No such vehicles existed during the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, or other conflicts, though requests were made for “a suitable number of covered and other wagons, litters, and other necessaries for removing the sick and wounded.” In 1858, Dr. Israel Moses of New York designed a new ambulance wagon and Army surgeons Richard S. Satterlee, O. H. Laub, and C. H. Crane were appointed to evaluate his proposal. They found that Moses’ design was “well adapted for field and frontier service, and for the comfortable transportation of sick and wounded men on long marches; that the tent arrangement forms a valuable, useful, and comfortable shelter for hospital patients” and recommended that the Medical Department employ them. However, there is no record of the ambulances being built.

The next year, a Board of Medical Officers, consisting of surgeons C. A. Finley, Satterlee, C. S. Tripler, J. M. Cuyler, and R. H. Coolidge, had defined specifications for an ambulance wagon. From the proposals made to them, they selected two options, both two-wheeled carts designed by Finley and Coolidge, respectively. The Finley and Coolidge ambulance wagons were field-tested in the Indian conflicts of the west and soon proved intolerably uncomfortable to the wounded and often exacerbated their injuries.

A variety of four-wheeled ambulance wagons followed, the first being the Tripler ambulance wagon recommended by the Medical Board in 1859. The Tripler design carried medical supplies as well as patients and was heavily used at the beginning of the Civil War, though it was heavy and cumbersome, requiring four horses to pull it. The lighter Wheeling or Rosecrans ambulance wagon, designed by General W. S. Rosecrans, required only two horses and was built in the government workshops. Throughout the Civil War, plans were submitted to the Surgeon General’s Office that were meant to improve the Wheeling model, but none proved successful until the last years of the war.



A new model, designated the “Rucker” was designed by Brigadier General D. H. Rucker, and built in Washington, proved popular and its use was widespread. Two wagons designed by Assistant Surgeon B. Howard and Dr. I Langer in the last years of the war were evaluated with high hopes, but did not replace the Rucker model. The final, notable ambulance wagon from this era was the Terre Haute Ambulance, which was adopted by the U.S. Army in 1900. The use of ambulance wagons continued after the war and was very effective in hospital-based services, such as the one provided by Bellevue Hospital in New York. The development of the automobile lessened dependence on horse-drawn ambulances, but they were not eclipsed entirely. World War I saw the use of animal-drawn ambulances, chiefly because of their superiority in navigating cross country, road obstacles, or impassable terrain. However, motorized ambulances were superior on the battlefield and as technology improved automobiles and air travel became possible, ambulance wagons were phased out of service.

Series/Scope and Content Note : This collection documents the development of U.S. Army ambulance wagons from the Civil War to World War I. The bulk of the collection focuses on the 1870s and 1880s when the Army was developing specifications and regulations for ambulances. It includes correspondence, administrative material, and drawings. The collection also includes eight patents for ambulance wagons, including specifications and drawings, submitted to the Office of the Surgeon General between 1861 and 1866. The photographic material consists mostly of modern photographic reproductions of original photographs, which in content range from 1847 through World War I. There is a small amount of material on non-wagon based transport, most notably drawings of the Civil War hospital ship the *DA January*.

SERIES 001: CORRESPONDENCE and ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS

Box 001:

00001: Correspondence regarding the development of the Army ambulance wagon, 1859-1877

00002: Correspondence regarding the development of the Army ambulance wagon, 1879-1880

00003: Annotated copies of “Specifications for an Ambulance Wagon,” 16 March 1875

00004: Notes on various designs considered for the Army ambulance wagon, 1858-1866

00005: “List of appliances for the transportation of the sick and wounded on exhibition at the Army Medical Museum,” 1870s(?)

00006: Memorandum regarding the weights of various parts of the Army ambulance wagons, 1879

00007: Specifications for improved Army ambulance, 1900 pattern, adopted August 18, 1899

00008: Circular no. 9, Report to the Surgeon General on the Transport of Sick and Wounded by Pack Animals, 1877 [loose]



00009: Circular no. 9, Report to the Surgeon General on the Transport of Sick and Wounded by Pack Animals, 1877 [bound]

00010: "On the medical staff and the material chirurgica," War Department, Surgeon General's Office Circular No. 6, November 1, 1865

SERIES 002: PATENTS

00011: Ambulance patent, J. Ruth, 1861

00012: Ambulance patent, M. Pinner, 1863

00013: Ambulance patent, G.W. Arnold, 1864

00014: Ambulance patent, T. Wilkins, 1864

00015: Ambulance patent, J.M. Hayward, 1865

00016: Ambulance patent, B. Howard, 1865

00017: Ambulance patent, W. Slatter, 1865

00018: Ambulance patent, C.H. Tompkins, 1866

SERIES 003: PHOTOGRAPHIC MATERIAL

Box 002:

00001: Photostat copies of Capt. Thistle's Ambulance, drawn from specifications, c. 1847

00002: Two drawings of Dr. Moses' light ambulance tender, c. 1858

00003: Silkscreens of Finley ambulance wagon, c. 1859

00004: Photostat of a drawing of rear view of Tripler's Ambulance wagon, 1859 [used in MSHWR, print of Reeve 043738]

00005: Photostat of Confederate field ambulance wagon (from Chisholm's Manual of Military Surgery), c. 1861

00006: Photostat drawing of Wheeling of Rosecrans ambulance wagon, 1861-1862 [includes negative, used in MSHWR, print of Reeve 043740]

00007: Photostat of Dr. Langer's Army wagon taking out forage and bringing back twelve wounded men, 1861-1863 [print of CP 2650, includes negative]

00008: Photographs of model of a Civil War-era ambulance, 1861-1865



- 00009: Photograph of Langer's Ambulance wagon in use, 1862 [reverse print of CP 2656]
- 00010: Photograph of Langer's Forage wagon in use as ambulance, 1862 [reverse print of CP 2655 and MIS 57-15182, includes negative]
- 00011: Photograph of a general hospital flag, 1862-1865
- 00012: Photographic negative of the model of the hospital ship, the DA January, 1862-1865
- 00013: Photographs of models of the Rucker ambulance wagon, 1875 [includes negatives, print of Reeve 043181]
- 00014: Photograph of ambulance train in rear of military hospital, Ponce, Puerto Rico, 1898 [enlarged print of AMM 00164 (OHA 74)]
- 00015: Photographs of a model of Terre Haute ambulance wagon, c. 1900 [negatives included, print of Reeve 43180]
- 00016: Photostat of an ambulance wagon, 1909 model
- 00017: Photographs of ambulance assembly, c. 1900 [similar to Reeve 001045-001059]
- 00018: Photostats of drawings of World War I-era ambulances in use.

SERIES 004: DRAWINGS

Box 003:

- 00001: Fragment of a drawing of an ambulance wagon, side and rear views, c. 1863
- 00002: Two prints of ambulance wagons (G. Autenrieth, Finley, and Duncan's), by Augustus Pohlers, 1860s
- 00003: Drawings of hand stretcher used as part of the U.S. Army ambulance wagon (from plate 10), 1880-1881
- 00004: Plates of U.S. Army ambulance wagon, 1877
- 00005: Four drawings of the U.S. Army hospital ship, the *D.A. January*
- 00006: Plates 1 – 10 of U.S. Army ambulance wagon, 1881 (two iterations from 1880)