

The Broken Faces and Napoleon's Great Army

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Abstract

Intruduction : If we dwell upon Baron General Louis-François Lejeune's painting entitled "The Battle of Moskova" and painted in 1822, we can notice a man standing in the corner of the canvas. The man in uniform has brown hair and is putting a bandage around an injured man's face. If we look at it carefully, we can easily identify that this man who is practicing surgery is none other than Dominique Larrey, the chief surgeon of Napoleon's Great Army in 1812. On September 7th 1812, in the morning (around 10 or 11 o'clock), General Morand, who commanded the 1st infantry division of Davout's corps, had his jaw crushed by shrapnel. Larrey treated him and the General carried on commanding his troop with gestures all through the Russian retreat. Dominique Larrey's recommended guidelines would be applied to the Grande Armée's "broken faces" as much as possible. "I simplified this serious wound, I extracted all the bone splinters which had been removed from the jaw, and I sutured the wound which helped the face to get its normal shape again, and prevented diformity". Dominique Larrey's recommended guidelines would be applied to the Grande Armée's "broken faces" as much as possible. "I simplified this serious wound, I extracted all the bone splinters which had been removed from the jaw, and I sutured the wound which helped the face to get its normal shape again, and prevented diformity".

Dominique Larrey (1766-1842) Who was Larrey?

Head surgeon of Napoleon's Great Army in 1812, he played a part in all the Grande Armée's campaigns: that is to say 25 campaigns, 200 confrontations, 40 battles. He was wounded six times on the battlefield (Marchioni, 2003). He was the first to receive the qualification of doctor in surgery (Feret-Dussart, 2004). Officer of the Legion of Honour in 1804, Napoleon appointed him commander in Eylau in 1807 on the battlefield, member of the Royal Academy of Medicine in 1820, of the Academy of Sciences in 1829, he was appointed Baron of the Empire in 1809 (Marchioni, 2003). "I pay tribute to eternal honour and loyalty" (Wellington about Larrey, Waterloo, 1815). Napoleon – St Helena: "He was the most virtuous man I ever knew. I remembered him as a very good man." Wellington – Waterloo (1815): "I pay tribute to eternal honour and loyalty." He ordered his soldiers to stop shooting when he saw Larrey caring for his wounded soldiers on the battlefield. Dominique Larrey (1766-1842)b/ Useful developments on maxillofacial surgery

1794: Implementation of his system of ambulance volantes ("flying ambulances") which was unanimously hailed by the public welfare committee. 1806: Initiated the wounded's selection according to the severity of their condition. A classification which was still in effect during the XXth century, notably during the two world wars. In Wagram, in 1809, he used cold to anaesthetize the injured and undertook to evacuate as soon as possible to avoid wound infections. 1 200 operated injured soldiers, 300 amputations and only 45 deaths.

For all facial wounds, whatever their scope was, Larrey (1812) recommended "immediate stiches". "Immediate stiches allow to draw near the edges of the wound more easily, notably on the face and thus, to diminish diformities".

As for major facial disrepair with consequent loss of soft tissues,

Larrey always sutured the wound after wrapping the thread in the shape of an 8 around a needle and going through the two edges of the wound from end to end. This ensured a stronger stitch.

As for fractured facial wounds, Larrey patiently removed all the bone splinters. Then he narrowed the fracture. Finally, with dental ligations carried out thanks to gold or platinum threads, or by means of an intraoral gutter and a chinstrap, he immobilised the jawbone. Unfortunately, this method was unsuccessful as the aftereffects were recurrent. Dominique Larrey (1766-1842)d/ Testimony #1 During the Egyptian campaign, General Verdier's aide-de-camp was shot to the mouth by mean of a pistol shot. It completely removed his left cheek, from the corners of the mouth to the masseter, so that the two alveolar archs, the tongue and a part of its muscles were uncovered. The edges of the wound were upside down and blackish; the officer considerably suffered. (Larrey, 1812) Dominique Larrey (1766-1842)d/ Testimony #11 hurried to refresh the flaps, to regularise the wound by binding the lips perfectly to it and I fixed them with nine interspersed stiches and an appropriate retentive bandage. The wounded soldier was placed on a controlled reducing diet. He could use refreshments to avoid fever and other medical problems. The treatment only lasted seventeen days and there were very few diformities (Larrey, 1812)

Leading figures who had a facial wound General Desaix (1768-1800), Bonaparte's great friend.

Leading figures who had a facial wound In 1793, in Lauterbourg, General Desaix received a bullet which crossed his two cheeks. As he was unable to talk and as his men were panicking, he carried on his command with gestures. He did not leave the battlefield to get a bandage until his soldiers were all rallied under his command. His face was said to be "stitched with scars (...) hastily mended by makeshift surgeons".

Biography

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