

by the horrors Dean so lavishly catalogues, and overkill and compassion fatigue soon set in. The account of the psychological sequelae of the war and their clinical treatment is absorbing, but sheds little light on modern problems. It is unclear whether Dean commends or deplores the harshness with which so many of these cases were handled; unclear, too, as the book progresses, whether comparison between two disparate eras serves any real purpose. A full-length study of the American Civil War in its own psychological terms, rather than through the “lens of Vietnam”, might have been more valuable.

In a field as slippery as military psychiatry, comparisons across time have always been hazardous; yet something about Vietnam—the long tradition of rhetorical excess, perhaps—drives scholars to make them. Jonathan Shay’s much mocked invocation of the Trojan war in his *Achilles in Vietnam* (1992) did at least shed light on the importance of rites of absolution in re-integrating warriors into society; whereas Dean’s seemingly more sensible excursion back to the 1860s pays smaller dividends. Simpler comparisons—say, with Australian soldiers’ adjustment after Vietnam—are presumably too obvious to attract publishers.

Ben Shephard, Bristol

Ira M Rutkow, *American surgery: an illustrated history*, Philadelphia, Lippincott-Raven, 1998, pp. xvi, 638, illus., \$90.50 (0-316-76352-7).

By 1900 American surgeons regarded themselves as the greatest practitioners of their art (science, said some) in the world. A triumph that many of them put down to the individualism and courage that, they said, had made the frontier disappear into the Pacific Ocean. There is much truth in this story. By 1900 Europeans were beginning to make the transatlantic crossing to watch William Halsted operate (or more likely find the work being done by the young Harvey Cushing). Since then American pre-eminence has been widely

acknowledged. It is strange therefore that until now no one has undertaken the challenge of writing this tale (and of course 1900 could be taken as a starting point). Ira Rutkow has now picked up the gauntlet. Historians of surgery will be familiar with and grateful to Rutkow already for his valuable bibliographies of American surgery. The present volume is an impressive piece of work, the more so for being produced by a man whose regular occupation is surgery not history. This book is devoted to the United States, surgery in Canada is not included. It aims at comprehensiveness, starting with ‘Native American surgery’, it follows a chronological path with biographies of eminent practitioners at the end of the chapters. The final ten chapters are devoted to the world since 1946 and are arranged by speciality. This book may possibly be read from beginning to end by devotees of the linear view of the surgical past. It will certainly take its place as an invaluable work of reference. One of the outstanding features of this volume, in which, quite rightly, Rutkow takes pride, is the illustrations. The publishers have done justice to a remarkable range of material some of which has never, as far as I know, seen the light of day in modern print (spot the operating room on the train in 1890 on p. 159). There are many splendid quotes in here too, but, given the care with which Rutkow has identified his illustrations, quotation thieves will be disappointed by the absence of references (particularly surprising in an author interested in bibliography).

Arguably the title of this book is not truly exact, for it is not quite a history of *American* surgery, more one of surgery in America. Under the bonnet there is no engine. It is not enough of an argument that “[g]reat changes in American surgery were soon to *coincide* with the socio-political realities of the early twentieth century” (p. 211, my emphasis). How were those realities present in surgery? In fairness, Rutkow refers to “similar forces” driving both things but generalizations about science will not do. The point might best be made in detail. The word Rockefeller (“visionary businessman” p. 158) scarcely

appears in the index. Yet the transformation of American medicine in the Progressive era was, in part, the outcome of philanthropic funding. What, too, if the perceptions of late nineteenth-century American surgeons were in some sense correct? What built America, they said, was rugged masculine individualism and it was this same force, they claimed, that built American surgery. There is much to be said for this theory suitably shaped. Frontiersmen and late nineteenth-century American surgeons had much in common. Both were engaged in exploration, entering the unknown, colonizing, bringing back specimens. High profile, high technology, adventurous surgery is in many ways an embodiment of the American dream. *American surgery* is a creation of the American people, not surgeons in America. One of the most famous photographs of surgery this century is Edward Steichen's 'Death takes a holiday' (not reproduced or mentioned here) from a play of the same name. Surgery is the stuff of awesome drama in America. The origins of the M.A.S.H. units are carefully described here but the film and the television series of the same name get no mention. Yet, in a sense, these latter address the serious issues of the making of American surgery head on. What is the relation of war and surgery in a country able to engage in the two at a virtually unrivalled level? (For that matter "silicone implant" does not occur in the index either.)

Christopher Lawrence,
Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine

James M Edmonson, *American surgical instruments: an illustrated history of their manufacture and a directory of instrument makers to 1900*, San Francisco, Norman Publishing, 1997, pp. xi, 352, illus., \$150.00 (0-930405-70-6). Orders to Norman Publishing, 720 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94102-2502, USA. Tel: (415) 781-6402; Fax: (415) 781-5507; e-mail: orders@jnorman.com

There is an irony, James Edmonson observes at the start of this book, in the fact that

instruments of war, guns and swords, have long been objects of loving care in the hands of collectors, curators and historians while instruments of healing have languished in relative neglect. It is not irony without reason and Edmonson's book will go a long way to effecting its disappearance. This is a major study of American surgical instruments and their manufacturers and it is hard to see how it will not remain authoritative for a very long time. Edmonson starts with a lengthy introductory essay interweaving the history of surgery and the manufacture of its instruments in America (excluding Canada). He begins in the colonial period when most doctors were all-rounders, performing minor operations as well as prescribing.

The first generation of instruments were, of course, brought by their owners from their native lands. Later, apothecaries set themselves up as importers, in the main buying from England, and, in the eighteenth century, advertisements of instruments for sale jostled alongside those for drugs in the burgeoning press. Philadelphia in particular was prominent in the instrument trade. Edmonson illustrates these developments with a wealth of choice quotes. By mid-century a few cutlers were branching out and making the occasional surgical instrument, many advertising their connections with London, Sheffield and Birmingham. By the late eighteenth century, America had its own manufacturers specializing in surgical tools. The centres for manufacture, not surprisingly, were the great east coast cities. By the mid-nineteenth century, when so-called conservative surgery was becoming a treatment of choice, the number and diversity of instruments had multiplied. Anaesthesia in particular seems to have promoted proliferation, noticeably permitting lightness and delicacy of form. Antisepsis and asepsis perhaps did more than anything to change instrument design. Multiple materials and filigree became an anathema. With them, probably, went the instrument as status symbol, an intriguing subject about which virtually nothing is written and for the understanding of which Edmonson's book will