

Dominique LARREY (1766-1842) Chirurgien en chef de la Grande Armée

Claude SAVORNIN

Résumé

Pyrénéen d'origine modeste, né sous Louis XV, il est décédé sous la Monarchie de Juillet. Dominique-Jean LARREY (dit Dominique), figure parmi les plus illustres chirurgiens militaires après Ambroise PARE (qui était dénommé « le Père du Soldat »).

Il est représenté par trois statues : à Paris, dans la Cour d'Honneur du Val-de-Grâce, à l'Académie de Médecine et à Tarbes, sa région d'origine. Membre de l'Institut, il acquit les plus hautes distinctions honorifiques et fit partie des plus grandes Sociétés Savantes, dont l'Académie Royale de Médecine.

Son nom est inscrit sur l'Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile

Ses qualités le rendirent très proche de Napoléon et il figure dans le Testament de Sainte-Hélène.

Il fut un innovateur, à l'origine des « Ambulances Volantes ». Il fut aussi un organisateur, un enseignant, un excellent opérateur et un grand humaniste doué d'un zèle, d'un dévouement et d'une humanité poussés à l'extrême qui le firent nommer « la Providence » par les soldats. Il fut enfin un hygiéniste.

Le 15 décembre 1992, son dernier rêve s'est réalisé : reposer aux Invalides, où il a exercé. Ce jour-là, ses restes ont été transférés depuis le Père Lachaise.

*Pr. Claude SAVORNIN : Ancien chef de Service de Chirurgie Orthopédique-Traumatologie et Consultant National pour la Chirurgie dans les Armées. Expert près la Cour de Cassation. Membre de la Société Française d'Histoire de la Médecine.

**Dr. Jean Jacques FERRANDIS : Conservateur Honoraire du Musée du Service de Santé des Armées-Président d'Honneur de la Société française d'histoire de la médecine.

Mots clés

- Epopée Napoléonienne
- Ambulances Volantes
- Organisateur de la Chirurgie Militaire
- Chirurgie de l'avant
- Lésions Balistiques

Abstract

A Pyrenean of modest origins, born under Louis XV, he died under the July Monarchy. Dominique-Jean LARREY (known as Dominique) is one of the most illustrious military surgeons after Ambroise PARE (who was called "the Soldier's Father"). He is represented by three statues: in the Cour d'Honneur of the Val de Grâce, at the Academy of Medicine and in Tarbes, his region of origin. As a member of the Institute, he acquired the highest honorary distinctions and was a member of the greatest learned societies, including the Royal Academy of Medicine.

His name inscribed on the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile testifies to his participation in almost all the Napoleonic Campaigns, with the exception of the second Italian Campaign (with the victory at Marengo). Dominique LARREY felt that his duty was to stay with the wounded soldiers of the Egyptian Expedition.

His qualities made him very close to Napoleon, especially since only three years of age difference separated them. This enabled him to know great secrets, including the purpose of the expedition to Egypt. He received his personal sword at Eylau and was elevated to the rank of Baron at Wagram. Finally, he is mentioned in the Testament of Saint Helena.

Dominique Larrey also admitted to being fascinated by the Emperor. He admired his genius as a strategist and his intelligence. He declared that he was "bound by indestructible chains to the chariot of this modern Alexander."

At that time, the Ordinance of Louis XVI of July 20, 1788, forced the Health Service to remain a league away from the battles and to intervene only after the end of them. Dominique Larrey succeeded in demonstrating the need to intervene with the wounded soldiers in emergency in order to have a saving and preventive role for the after-effects; and even to the point of risking being arrested, for example in the campaign against the first coalition with the Army of the Rhine in 1792. In this region, he had the revelation that made him famous very early on: the "Flying Ambulances".

This innovator was also gifted with such a zeal, a devotion and a humanity pushed to the extreme which caused him to be

called "providence" by the soldiers. He did not hesitate to demonstrate the innocence of conscripts when those were accused of voluntary mutilations. This earned him an eternal hatred from Soult, who refused to bury him at the Invalides. But he was congratulated by Napoleon.

His talents as an Organizer never ceased to make him fight against the negligence of the War Administration and their Commissioners. Unfortunately, he remained dependent on it all his life because of a subordinate relationship to the health service which lasted from Louis XIV until 16 March 1882.

His extraordinary surgical skills enabled him to amputate or disarticulate a limb (to avoid the risk of infection) in record time. The absence of anesthesia required it. He always knew how to organize priorities as per the severity of the injuries and not according to rank or distinction. He treated his patients without regard to nationality, whether they were French or they were enemies.

The quality of his teaching was emulated by many in the various places where he opened courses in surgery and anatomy from Toulon to Cairo and the Val de Grâce.

He worked until his last breath, on his way back from his Inspectorate of the Health Service in Algeria in 1842.

On December 15, 1992, his last dream came true: to rest at the Invalides, where he used to work. On that day, his remains were transferred from the Père Lachaise.

Keywords

- Napoleonic epic
- flying ambulances
- Organizer of Military Surgery
- Forward surgery
- Ballistic Injuries