PARATROOP INJURIES

A Historical Note

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In the 2nd World War a paratroop training centre was established at Ringway, Cheshire (now Manchester International Airport) with the drops made into Tatton Park. During the period October 1943 to February 1944, 100 paratroop trainees were treated for injuries in the orthopaedic department of the Manchester Royal Infirmary, 56 as out-patients and 44 as in-patients. In 70% of the cases, the injuries were sustained in actual parachute descents. The majority of the remainder were injured in making short aperture jumps; a few were injured during ground training.

The types of injury treated were as follows:—

Fractures		52
Dislocations		4
Strains		25
Contusions		21
Internal derangement of the knee		6
Tendon injury (mallet finger)		1

A few jumpers sustained multiple injuries.

In the *fracture* Group, the predominant injuries were fractures of the lateral malleolus (15 cases); and compression fractures of the *spine* (12 cases—8 dorsal, 2 lumbar, 1 lumbo-dorsal, 1 fracture of the spinous processes). The majority of the *strains* involved the ankle and tarsal joints (16 cases); and there were 4 internal lateral ligament strains of the knee joint.

The 44 paratroopers admitted as in-patients were transferred as soon as possible to the E.M.S. orthopaedic centre at Winwick near Warrington, where definitive treatment and rehabilitation was carried out under the direction of Mr. Roland Barnes (now Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery in the University of Glasgow). The limb fractures were transferred the day after admission, the spinal fractures after a stay of a few days. In the latter group there were no instances of cord damage. All cases were adequately documented at the time, and the analysis presented here was prepared by my then chief assistant, Miss Eugenie Leeson Willis, F.R.C.S. (1910–1948) whose early death cut short a career of great promise in orthopaedic surgery.

From Winwick, the case records ultimately made their way to Headquarter Records of the Ministry of Pensions. It would be difficult if not impracticable now to trace the subsequent history of these 100 paratroop trainees. It is interesting to speculate on how many of the men returned to full duty in various parachute units, to be dropped later in Normandy or at Arnhem.