

Thach AB, ed. *Ophthalmic Care of the Combat Casualty*. In: Lounsbury DE, Bellamy RF, Eds. *Textbooks of Military Medicine*. Washington, DC: Department of the Army, Office of The Surgeon General, and Borden Institute; 2003. 495 pp., illus.

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Ocular injuries sustained by United States military forces in combat have traditionally comprised a large percentage of total war injuries. Although this book is written primarily for the military medical personnel who care for wartime ophthalmic casualties, the unfortunate realities of today's uncertain world—with the possibility of violence directed at civilian populations by an enemy seeking asymmetric advantage—make this a relevant text for all ophthalmologists.

This extraordinarily thorough 469-page ophthalmic trauma volume is written by 35 ophthalmologists, most with military backgrounds, and many with combat-related medical experience. In addition to being an excellent trauma reference, this book also provides a fascinating military ophthalmologic historical perspective extending from the Revolutionary War through the Persian Gulf War.

Prevention, diagnosis, and effects of the varied battlefield insults inflicted on all ocular systems are presented in detail by the authors. Techniques and processes given for effective ophthalmic injury triage and prompt patient evacuation are valuable, particularly since early intervention has been proven to save sight. Trauma treatments ranging from field "buddy care" to current state-of-the-art procedures and therapies available in the highest echelons of care are covered.

From an American military historical perspective, as weapon systems have changed and developed, so too have the frequency and types of eye injuries. From facial and eyelid burns caused by firing flintlock muskets in the Revolutionary War, to injuries sustained in hand-to-hand combat during the Civil War, to contemporary injuries resulting from fragmentation devices, lasers, and chemical weapons, the methods of inflicting visual harm in combat have been varied. Absent from this otherwise complete discussion is any mention of biological agents and the possible ocular effects of this type of potential weaponry. The numerous color photographs and original illustrations throughout the text are instructive, supportive, and at times, quite graphic.

While the types of wars fought and weapons utilized in these wars have changed substantially through the years, it remains true that "the soldier who cannot see, cannot fight." The modern approach is to use combat medical units that are smaller, more mobile, more medically sophisticated, and positioned further forward in theatre. This strategy, along with improved eye protective devices, is key to reducing vision loss and sustaining combat readiness.

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