



# A History of Medicine in the Early U.S. Navy

*Harold D. Langley*

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## **A History of Medicine in the Early U.S. Navy** Harold D. Langley

In this first detailed history of the development of medical treatment and professionalization in the early U.S. Navy, Harold Langley traces the evolution of medical practice in the Navy from the time Congress authorized the building of the first frigates in 1794, to the establishment of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery in the Navy Department in 1842. Langley reveals that the earliest federal efforts to deal with sailors' health care problems were seriously flawed. The early hospital system was poorly funded, sailors' contributions were misappropriated, and the hospitals themselves were often administered in a shameful fashion. At the same time, medical officers commanded little respect from their naval colleagues, who rarely considered medical men to be "real officers."

In the first half of the nineteenth century, legal and administrative changes significantly improved the lot of medical officers and of the men under their care. Langley shows how these changes helped to shape health care in the later U.S. Navy. He also offers detailed descriptions of just what the naval doctor did, and examines the influence of health on readiness, morale, promotions, and retention.



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