BYRON STOOLEY
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On October 20, 1966, in his 80th year, death came suddenly to Doctor Byron Stookey, one of the most distinguished neurosurgeons of his time.

Byron Stookey was born on January 4, 1887, in Belleville, Illinois, the son of Dr. Lyman Polk and Louise Brumbaugh Stookey. After completing his schooling in Belleville and at the Morgan Park Academy in Chicago, he went to the University of Southern California where, in 1908, he received an A.B. degree; then to Harvard where he received an M.A. degree in Comparative Literature in 1909, and an M.D. degree in 1913. During his university years, he was a member of the Sigma Chi and Nu Sigma Nu fraternities. He later studied at the universities of Geneva, Vienna, and Berlin.

After interning at Boston City Hospital, Doctor Stookey, early in 1915, began the practice of surgery in Los Angeles, but he was troubled by the plight of the English people in their struggle with Germany. Before the war was out he applied for, and received, a commission as Captain in the British Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC); and he served with them, in Flanders, for nearly two years before the United States entered the war. While with the RAMC, he was attached to an orthopedic unit and, for a time, was an assistant to England’s great orthopedic surgeon—Sir Robert Jones. Here, he gained an experience unusual among neurosurgeons in the total rehabilitation of wounded extremities—where bones, joints, muscles, tendons and nerves had suffered injury. For at that time, as indeed today, the British orthopedic surgeons, as part of their care of wounds of the extremities, treated all the injuries to peripheral nerves; and here, Doctor Stookey was introduced to a field of neurological surgery which held his special interest throughout his entire career, and in which he became pre-eminent.

In April, 1917, on the very day that the United States entered World War I, Doctor Stookey requested an Honorable Discharge from the British Army so that he might serve with the American Armed Forces. This was granted and, immediately thereafter, he applied for and received a commission, as Major, in the U.S. Army Medical Corps.

Because of his expressed interest in the treatment of peripheral nerve injuries, Doctor Stookey was promptly sent by the Surgeon-General to study in the laboratory the anatomy and physiology of nerve regeneration with the great neuro-anatomist and physiologist, Professor Carl Huber, of the University of Michigan—an association which gave Doctor Stookey knowledge, exceptional among the surgeons of that time, of the fundamental principles involved in the repair and regeneration of injured nerves.

After spending approximately six months in Professor Huber’s anatomical laboratory, Doctor Stookey was assigned by the Surgeon-General to the U.S. Army School for Neurosurgeons which had been set up at the Neurological Institute in New York under the direction of Drs. Frederick Tilney, Charles A. Elsberg, and Benjamin Strong. After finishing that course of instruction, he was assigned to the U.S. Army General Hospital No. 2, located at Fort McHenry, Maryland, one of the largest Army hospitals in this country, as Chief of the Neurosurgical Service with 200 beds under his supervision. This was a great compliment to a young surgeon, carrying heavy responsibility, but providing Doctor Stookey with an exceptionally rich experience in the actual surgical treatment of peripheral nerve injuries and other neurosurgical problems.

During the two or three years immediately following conclusion of World War I and while still in his early thirties, Doctor Stookey devoted much time and energy to the writing of a book entitled Surgical and Mechanical Treatment of Peripheral Nerves which incorporated and correlated his broad and unique experiences in this field. His book was the first comprehensive textbook and reference book on the treatment of injuries of peripheral nerves to be published by an American author. Today it is a collector’s item.

In 1919, Doctor Stookey was appointed an Instructor in Neuro-Anatomy at the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia