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The Cover

More than a century has passed since the first recorded use of aircraft to hurry the ill and injured to a medical facility. Sixty-six balloons were launched by the French army during a four-month period in 1870 to carry 160 sick and wounded soldiers to safety from the city of Paris, which then was under a Prussian siege.

Forty years later, in 1910, two American officers used their own money to construct the world's first ambulance airplane; they could not convince the US government to develop the concept further. However, by the close of World War I in 1918, the airplane was beginning to gain acceptance as a means of transporting the ill and injured. The military continued to explore aeromedical evacuation techniques, and put the knowledge to effective use in World War II, when the US forces alone sometimes moved more than a half million patients a year by air. By the end of the war in 1945, the death rate among patients transported by US aircraft was 1.5/100,000 despite the fact that usually it was the most seriously ill or wounded who were being flown.

This death rate declined by more than 25% in the Korean War, when 3,000 to 4,000 sick and wounded United Nations soldiers were airlifted each month, and
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