Casing Cunningham’s Apparatus

A future pioneer of hyperbaric medicine from the University of Kansas, Anesthetist-in-Chief Orval J. Cunningham, M.D., was initially hailed by academics in 1908 for designing what he later called his “O. J. Cunningham Nitrous Oxide and Oxygen-Ether Sequence Apparatus.” Unfortunately the Kansas City manufacturer that Cunningham chose to produce his namesake apparatus, George Key, used a metallic alloy that oxidized over the years, yielding a brittle device today whose legs and gas-cylinder yokes snap off under incredibly little duress. Perhaps this manufacturing flaw explains why this, the only example extant, has its one yoke cracked (above, circled in red) and its other one completely amputated. To curatorially hand-carry this fragile item aboard a jet, I fashioned a foam-padded case inside a suitcase as carry-on luggage. In spite of the Cunningham Apparatus’ having hollow chambers, metal pipes, ominous looking dials, etc., airport security never stopped me to examine this suspicious carry-on . . . . (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc.)

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