

JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

EDITORIAL

FEW diseases have had greater impact upon military campaigns than the rickettsial fevers. Not only soldiers but the civilian victims of war have suffered severely. Professional men—doctors caring for the sick, judges, lawyers and priests coming into contact with prisoners, and laboratory workers studying the diseases—have in the past perished from typhus fevers.

Even in modern times typhus has proved a relentless enemy. During the Second World War it was estimated that British and Allied forces in the Far East had about 25,000 victims of scrub typhus, with a mortality of about 10% and in the period July to October, 1944 there were over 3,000 cases in the Fourteenth Army alone with a mortality of 5-20% (1). The United States forces had 6,000 casualties from this disease, during the campaigns in the South West Pacific area following the outbreak of war with Japan, whereas in all other areas the United States Army suffered just under 1,000 casualties from epidemic and endemic typhus. (2). Curiously during the campaign in Malaya prior to the fall of Singapore in 1941-42 scrub typhus was not a recorded problem since there is no mention of it in the lists of principal diseases affecting the troops (3). Was this due to lack of recognition or had these unfortunate soldiers some luck in escaping infection? In the past decade scrub typhus has struck repeatedly at our forces in Malaya and Borneo, in spite of careful precautionary measures, when troops on active operations or in training have entered areas of high infectivity.

Although the rickettsial diseases have defeated the best efforts of military medicine so often, yet we have scored several spectacular victories. The first was probably the rapid termination of the 1943 Naples epidemic of louse-borne typhus when body lice were cleared from the civilian population by dusting with anti-lice powder. The second was the demonstration that troops, whose clothing had been prepared with anti-mite agents, could operate safely, free from attack by trombiculid mite larvae, in heavily infested areas. The third was the introduction of chloramphenicol in the treatment of scrub typhus in 1948 by Smadel and Lewthwaite (4). This has reduced the mortality to nil in properly recognised and treated cases.

In this number there appears a scholarly article entitled "The Challenge of the Rickettsial Diseases" by Major-General W. R. M. Drew, at the time of writing designate Director General, Army Medical Services, who takes over his new appointment in April, 1965. This paper is of great interest to all officers of our service and should be studied most carefully by all, but particularly by the younger men, unfamiliar with these important diseases. The lessons contained therein should be learned and relearned by every service doctor.

REFERENCES

1. *History of the Second World War (Medical Research)*. (1953.) 168.
2. Medical Department, United States Army. (1963.) *Internal Medicine in World War II*, 11, 112.
3. *History of the Second World War*. (1957.), 11, 41.
4. SMADEL, J. E. AND LEWTHWAITE, R. (1948). *Lancet*, 1, 842.

ERRATUM

Porton Note No. 258

The Use of Cr-51 in the Determination
of Red Cell Volumes in Experimental Animals

Vol. 111, Issue No. 1, 1965

The following amendment should be made in the text of the above quoted article, page 53, under heading "Technique for investigations in sheep," line 5:—

For 40C Read 40 μ C.

REPRINTS

It is brought to the notice of Authors that reprints of articles ordered in accordance with "Important Notice" on inside front cover of the Journal, necessitate a certain amount of resetting of type by the printers. A delay of up to 6 to 8 weeks will therefore occur before receipt of the reprints by the Author.

AN HISTORIC OCCASION

Presentation to Major-General R. E. BARNESLEY, C.B., M.C., M.A., M.B.

A unique event in the history of the Corps took place at the Headquarter Mess at Millbank on 10th February, 1965, when General Eric Barnesley's great service to the Corps was recognised by the presentation of a cheque for £800 for use in the Corps Museum which owed so much to his enthusiasm and effort.

Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Knott in making the presentation referred to General Barnesley's part not only in making the Museum but as an historian of the Corps. Over five hundred officers and warrant officers of the Regular, Territorial and Reserve Armies serving and retired had contributed and many within reach of London were present that evening or sent regrets at their absence.

Lieutenant-General Sir Neil Cantlie also spoke of General Barnesley's work in the early days of the Museum and later.

General Barnesley has requested the Journal to express his deep felt thanks to all who subscribed to the presentation and for the honour done to him.

A full report of this historical occasion will be given in a later number of the Journal.