

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GENERAL PRACTICE

From: Lieutenant-General Sir TREFFRY OWEN THOMPSON,
K.C.S.I., C.B., C.B.E., D.M., D.P.H.(Oxon).

SIR—Reference General Officer's excellent letter on page 260 of the Corps Journal received today. I would like to endorse this letter and the comments therein. From what I have seen of civil medical practice including doing civil locums, our medical and surgical standards in the Corps are quite as good as, if not better than, much civil practice. Our average officers have a wider knowledge and less restricted type of work than the average G.P. and our methods well up to civil modern methods.

When, some years back, the Ministry recommended Group Practice and central group consulting rooms for a given area my first thought was:—“ Well now, at last, civil practice is going to copy the method which we have used for many years at Aldershot ”.

We do not sufficiently publicise or perhaps advertise our methods and standards.

Savourys,
Chulmleigh, N. Devon.
21st October, 1965.

I am, etc.,
TREFFRY O. THOMPSON.

GENERAL PRACTICE

From: Lieutenant-Colonel J. G. P. POWER,
M.B., B.Ch., B.A.O., D.P.H., D.I.H., D.T.M.&H., R.A.M.C.

SIR—While I fully agree with Major-General Officer that the opportunities for doing good general practice in the Army now may excel those in the United Kingdom, I hasten to add that I do not agree that this has always been the case. I cannot speak of pre-war days but when I joined the R.A.M.C. in 1947 I had completed 3½ years as an assistant in general practice in some of the most heavily industrialised areas in England. This involved experience of domiciliary midwifery, general medicine, minor surgery and almost every other speciality which could be mentioned. While I might agree that the conditions of work did not compare with those which the Army now provides I would insist that the training I received in civilian general practice as a doctor dealing with large numbers of patients of both sexes and all age groups was second to none at that time.

On joining the Army I was posted to West Africa for 18 months where there were so few British or African families under my care that general practice was virtually non-existent. It is a well known statistical fact that only in recent years have the numbers of families increased to the extent that general practice on the lines of that provided in U.K. has been necessary.

It must also be said that most of the troubles of general practice in U.K. relate to the system under which N.H.S. doctors have to work and not to the quality of their work. The Army is indeed fortunate in having now such excellent conditions of work and also so many excellent general practitioners both civilian and military. It is also necessary to say that most Army families have to alternate between civilian general practice in U.K. and Army general practice in an overseas Command. It is surely essential that there should be the utmost co-operation between doctors in civilian general practice in U.K. and those in the Army. Therefore, in this context I would suggest that Major-General Officer's contention that “ further emulation of civilian ideas and customs could well jeopardise the Corps' existence and military integrity ” is unacceptable.

Medical Branch,
Headquarters Rhine Area,
British Forces Post Office, 34.
25th October, 1965.

I am, etc.,
J. G. P. POWER.

SOVEREIGN BASE AREAS IN CYPRUS

From: Colonel T. B. HARRISON, M.B., D.P.H., late R.A.M.C.

SIR—My main reason for writing about food in Cyprus was to focus attention on the constant vigilance needed there by Health Inspectors and Hygiene Assistants to safeguard the health of soldiers and their families. I am, therefore, pleased to note from Major W. J. Lawrence's letter that this is being done and satisfactory standards of production, processing and sale are attained.

There is a food hygiene problem in Cyprus. Comments in H. Foster's¹ paper and A. R. T. Lundie's² mention in his M.D. thesis on the wide range of Shigella in Cyprus, confirm this. B. C. McDermott's article³ in the same issue of the Journal as Major Lawrence's letter quotes five cases of hydatid cyst seen during the four months in the Turkish Temporary Hospital in Nicosia.

Even after four years I still vividly remember the slaughter of sheep and goats on the roadside, with the teeming hordes of flies in the Summer. Whether this meat found its way into the better butchers shops I doubt, but some may have been used in restaurants, cafes, etc., or as contents of 'sheftalia'.

The comparison of local meats, favourable or not, with the product of other tropical countries is not a reliable criterion of either quality or acceptable standards of hygiene. I prefer to abide with the standards with which I am more familiar, those of the United Kingdom or Canada, especially as owners of good food businesses were most anxious to practice and if possible improve on U.K. standards and regulations.

I agree with Major Lawrence, the close supervision of the quality and hygienic conditions is only possible with the availability of good laboratory facilities, to confirm field work with tests and research in the laboratory. This service was first class when I was in Cyprus. I wonder if the sampling for the various agricultural insecticides, pesticides and other chemicals in fruit juices and local tinned products continues.

I fully understand Major Lawrence's anxiety to maintain the morale of soldiers posted to Cyprus, but there are problems of food hygiene there, and an article in a professional journal is less likely to cause dismay than if published elsewhere.

Headquarters,
Aldershot District,
Steele's Road, Aldershot.
1st October, 1965.

I am, etc.,
T. B. HARRISON

REFERENCES

- ¹ FOSTER, H. (1962). *J. roy. Army med. Cps.* **108**, 77.
- ² LUNDIE, A. R. T. (1963). *M.D. Thesis, University of St. Andrews.*
- ³ MCDERMOTT, B. C. (1965). *J. roy. Army med. Cps.* **111**, 194.

Editorial Note. The writer has reduced this letter to one third of its original length for space economy.

RICKETTSIAL DISEASES

From: Major-General M. H. P. SAYERS, O.B.E.,
Q.H.P., M.D., F.C.Path., late R.A.M.C.

SIR—It is a pleasure to see the famous initials "T.O.T." featuring again in our Journal (Vol 111 No. 4). I am sure Sir Treffry will, however, forgive me if I offer a few comments in amplification of his stimulating recollections of the investigation of the outbreaks of scrub typhus which proved so serious in the early days of the war in Burma.

It was in December, 1943 that Major Barker, based in Calcutta, (with the help of Dr. S. R. Savor) demonstrated *rickettsiae* in material from guinea pigs which had been inoculated with ground blood clot taken from patients in hospital at Imphal, on the Indo-Burma border. The young pathologist who helped me there was Major T. E. Parry and it was with the aid of Professor C. R. van Rooyen, when serving as a pathologist in the R.A.M.C. in Cairo, that the strains subsequently arrived safely in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

These early endeavours led to the establishment later of the Medical Research Council's Scrub Typhus Research Unit, with Dr. R. Lewthwaite as its Field Director and Lieutenant-Colonel J. R. Audy in Command of the Field Research Laboratory at Imphal.

Lieutenant-Colonel H. J. Bensted was then at the War Office as A.D.P. to Major-General L. T. Poole, the Director of Pathology. They were responsible for directing the tremendous efforts which led to the production at Frant by the Wellcome Research Laboratories of a rickettsial vaccine prepared in the lungs of cotton rats following the work of Dr. Forrest Fulton. The unexpected collapse of Japan however precluded its proper assessment.

The sequel was the combined operation at the Institute for Medical Research, Kuala Lumpur, where, early in 1948 American and British workers showed in a large series of military and civilian cases that chloramphenicol was a specific curative antibiotic for scrub typhus.

The inspiration behind us all was Sir Treffry Thompson himself who we knew would back us in any honest venture right or wrong "till hell freezes." As we wrote feelingly at the time "his breadth of vision in the early days of the Burma Campaign stimulated researches at home and abroad, the results of which have done much to further our control of scrub typhus".

May General Thompson long live to enjoy his days at Chulmleigh. He may rest assured of the affection and respect of all who were privileged to serve under him in those stirring times.

Ministry of Defence,
Lansdowne House,
Berkeley Square,
London, W.1.
23rd November, 1965.

I am, etc.,
M. H. P. SAYERS

REFERENCE

- ¹ SAYERS, M. H. P. and HILL, I. G. W. (1948). *J. roy. Army. med. Cps.* **108**, 77.