

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
FROM THE ARMY MEDICAL REPORTS

SIR—On reading through Army Medical Reports 1861 I was interested to read the following on pages 528 and 529, namely:—

“ E.H.

General Order

No. 791

Horse Guards, S.W., 1st July 1861

Medical

1-1861

Much inconvenience having arisen from Medical Officers of Districts and Regiments making reports to the heads of their department, without placing the military officers in immediate possession of these reports, his Royal Highness the General Commanding-in-Chief, with the concurrence of the Secretary of State for War, is pleased to direct that, whenever Medical Officers conceive themselves called on to make reports upon, or to offer suggestions concerning matters affecting the health of the troops, and sanitary condition of the locality in which they are stationed, to the head of the medical Department in which they are stationed, they shall furnish duplicates to the officer in immediate command.

By order of his Royal Highness, The General Commanding-in-Chief.

James Yorke Scarlett, Adjutant General.”

In this connection history continues to repeat itself and one feels that as the responsibility for efficient supervision and for the remedying of sanitary defects rests on commanding officers and through them on subordinate commanders (para 95(c) Q.Rs 1961), as well as the fact that the responsibility for the health of the troops is that of the commanding officer at all levels, such reports by medical officers, should be addressed directly to the appropriate commander with copies to their immediate medical superior.

I am etc.,

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30 June 1969.

MEDICAL PREPARATION FOR OVERSEAS SERVICE

SIR—I am surprised there has been no discussion in these columns following General Levis’s warning (Journal R.A.M.C. 1969, 115 page 13), of the growing need of building up a body of medical officers with overseas experience, outside the European context. I can only hope that the silence does not mean the problem is being completely ignored.

We are admittedly short of doctors, and the few that are joining can be only too well employed in Europe, but unless the initiative is taken now to maintain our knowledge of exotic overseas conditions, we are inviting a medical disaster during any future conflict outside Europe.

The continent of Africa has a wealth of tropical pathology and is acutely short of doctors. Surely a scheme could be devised, perhaps with the Ministry of Overseas-Development, for secondment to areas crying out for medical help, for say, six to twelve months at a time.

For the junior officer this would be the perfect build up to his Diploma in Tropical Medicine and to the more senior individuals a very practical post-graduate course.

Such a scheme, if devised, could also pay a secondary dividend of improving recruiting. Who after all wants to join the Army to stay at home!

I am, etc.,

D. E. BRADFORD

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15 August 1969

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF D DAY

SIR—6 June 1969 was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the D day landings, and I had the honour of representing the R.A.M.C. in a small party of officers sponsored by the Ministry of Defence, which attended the special ceremonies and Memorial Services held in Normandy to mark the occasion. We left Gatwick by R.A.F. Comet at 9 a.m. and touched down at Deauville about an hour later, from where we were driven through the clean bright countryside to Benouville on the River Orne, arriving just in time for the simple informal ceremony being held at the Memorial by Pegasus bridge, which was made famous by its capture on D day by 6 Airborne Division, thereby securing the vital left flank of the whole invasion force.

A large Divisional signboard of the Flying horse Pegasus, rather weatherbeaten through the years, stands prominently beside the little Pegasus bridge cafe, which was crowded with old soldiers, both French and British, and bedecked with Tricolours and Union Jacks. It is sad to have to record that the proprietor, Georges Gondrée, the first officially liberated Frenchman, and known so well by the men of 6 Airborne Division, died suddenly on Good Friday of this year.

The Royal Hampshire Regiment, which had set up a tented camp on the foreshore not far from SWORD beach, gave us a splendid lunch. after which we went into Ouistreham to attend the French ceremony due to be held in the main square, where large crowds had already gathered.

The parade was made up of contingents from Great Britain, Belgium, Canada, the United States, Norway, the Netherlands and France; several ambassadors were present including Mr. Christopher Soames, whose speech, in most fluent French, was particularly well received.

The march past and Salute was taken by General St Hillier, Commander of No. 3 Military Region, and the British contingent which included troops from the Royal Marines, the Parachute Regiment and the Royal Air Force was second to none in its turnout and bearing.

Then followed a nostalgic fly past of Spitfires, and finally there was an all denomination service at which the Chaplain General to the Forces The Venerable Archdeacon Youens officiated.

Time did not permit us to attend the main British ceremony of beating of Retreat at Bayeux later in the evening, but through a fortunate chance meeting with a man in the

crowd wearing a 3 Division tie, I was able to visit, albeit very briefly, SWORD beach over which 3 Division had made its assault twenty-five years ago.

The man in the crowd turned out to be Trooper H. Pickersgill of the 3 Div Recce Regt. He had landed on D day, and even in the excitement of that day, had met a French girl who was for him, different from all the others. When the war was over he went back to Normandy and married her, and he has been living there ever since.

Pickersgill, who is now a successful shipping agent based on Ouistreham, very kindly took me in his Peugeot around the 3 Divisional area, and I was able to identify the very ordinary looking field a few hundreds yards off the beach, short of Hermanville in which the four field dressing stations from Nos 5 and 6 Beach Groups were concentrated along with their field surgical units.

This arrangement was not the original plan, but was forced upon us by the stubborn defence of a German concrete gun emplacement which had an arc of fire covering the whole of the 6 Beach Group area. The gun crews obstinately resisted the combined efforts of the R.A.F. bombers and the guns of the Royal Navy as well as the close attention of the Army's tanks and guns ashore, and refused to surrender although totally cut off on all sides.

As 6 Beach Group area was therefore quite untenable, all the supplies, equipment, petrol and ammunition earmarked for it on the first key plan had to be landed over No. 5 Beach and dumped there in addition to its own. The resulting congestion had to be seen to be believed, and it was due entirely to the unseen R.A.F. fighter cover overhead, and the earlier bombing of the adjacent airfields that we enjoyed almost complete freedom from attack by the German Air Force.

In the event, the concentration of beach group medical units worked very well, and all the early casualties from 6 Airborne Division and 3 Division passed through our hands and thence by amphibious DUKWS via our section on the beach itself, to the LCTs lying offshore.

I also visited Cazelle, now renamed Mathieu. This small village with its cross roads was a place which received regular attention from the German artillery sited beyond the ridge on the road to Caen. With ground at a premium, there was no room for a text book layout, and both 8 and 9 Field Ambulances were uncomfortably located in and around farmhouses in the village.

Donal Ahern Commanding 8 Fd Amb, whose untimely death two years ago was such a loss to the Corps, was his usual imperturbable self despite these conditions. I, on the other hand, fresh from the comparative quiet of the beach dressing stations, having just taken over command of 9 Field Ambulance found the situation most disconcerting.

After a particularly accurate bout of shelling in which the unit sustained some 25 casualties, I cast around for an alternative site, and to my delight soon found an open green field quite untouched by the scars of war only a couple of hundred yards away on the right flank.

We did a strategic sideways withdrawal from dusty shell-torn Cazelle, and set up again under the hedges of this green field, from where from time to time we could see the shell bursts as the village received yet another strafing from the German guns.

In due course I remembered that I really ought to let the A.D.M.S. know what

had happened to one of his field ambulances, and so, feeling rather pleased with myself I set off for Div H.Q. at Colleville and there found Col. R. D. Cameron. I told him what I had done, and proudly pointed out our quiet new spot on the map.

Roddy Cameron took one quick hard look at it, then said in a voice of horrified disbelief ' You know what you have done, don't you? You've not only moved yourself out of 9 Brigade area, but you've gone right out of the Division; you're in the Canadian Division now. What do you propose to do if a Canadian unit comes along and wants to set up in that field?'

Feeling completely deflated, I took myself off, but happily I didn't have to answer that awkward question, as no Canadian unit put in an appearance, or questioned our right to be there. But in such ways are lessons learnt, that are never forgotten.

The third field Ambulance of 3 Division was 223 Fd Amb commanded by Johnnie Johnston, now D.M.S., B.A.O.R., and on my tour around the area I was also able to spot the field in Périers le dans where his unit was located at that time, working, as I remember, under extreme pressure in very difficult circumstances.

We took off again from Deauville at 8.30 p.m. having spent an unforgettable day.

In addition to the purely personal recollections of places and incidents of twenty-five years ago, the very deepest impression was made on me by the sense of unity and purpose of the people of Normandy, and the continuing complete identification of them all, young as well as old, with those events which led to the final defeat of Hitlerite Germany and the liberation of Europe.

I am, etc.,

E. H. P. LASSEN

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10 July 1969.

BOOK REVIEWS

Infectious Diseases: Epidemiology and Clinical Practice. A. B. CHRISTIE. Edinburgh. E. & S. Livingstone, Ltd., 1969. Pp. viii + 1047. Illustrated. 120s.

This is an interesting book. It is individual in character and does not follow any of the usual patterns to be expected in texts on Infectious Diseases. It covers a wide selection of subjects though as the author warns in the preface the treatment accorded to each tends to be somewhat uneven. In spite of this one is impressed with the detailed treatment of the more important subjects and the long lists of references given. If one may make one criticism one would have wished rather more emphasis and space to be given to the prevention and control of infectious disease. In view of its size this is a reference book for the Army Medical Officer; though unfortunately its price is likely to limit its purchase to libraries.

T. C. R. ARCHER

A Handbook for Research in General Practice. Second Edition. Ed. by T. S. EIMERL and A. J. LAIDLAW. Edinburgh. E. & S. Livingstone Ltd. 1969. Pp. xi + 155. Illustrated. 30s.

This is a useful primer for those interested in research in general practice. Written by a group from the Royal College of General Practitioners it deals with the subject in a very general fashion, describing how to set about starting a research project, on using a library and on writing up the results for publication. It also gives information on the ways in which the College may help in research.

Missing are any statistical techniques or details on research methods, but these can be obtained from other sources.

What this book sets out to do, and achieves with some success, is to whet the general practitioner's appetite and to lead those with no previous experience in research to the point where he can set about thinking on the many opportunities for research work in this field of practice.

JOHN FRY.